



Cumann Staire Chontae Thiobraid Árann

Co. Tipperary Historical Society, The Source Library, Cathedral Street, Thurles, Co. Tipperary, Ireland
353 (0) 52 616 6123 society@tipperarycoco.ie www.tipperarystudies.ie/this

**Tipperary Historical Journal
2004**

'Such a Treacherous Country': a land agent in Cappawhite, 1847–52

By Denis G. Marnane

Introduction

In the early 1890s, in his final decade, the life and times of William Holmes were recorded. Born in 1814, Holmes left Ireland in 1852 and with his family made the long voyage to Australia, settling in Melbourne. Some ten years later, he emigrated again, this time to New Zealand. In 1865, as a result of a life-threatening experience (a shipwreck while on business for a brewery), William Holmes had his faith in God renewed. It was likely that this profound experience influenced his 'autobiography' – a document in which he looked back over his life seeking to examine and understand the workings of Divine Providence. The style of the document suggests that it may have been transcribed from oral evidence. Survived by two of his seven children, William Holmes died on 27 October 1897 and is buried in Dunedin, New Zealand.¹

John Holmes the father of William, was born c. 1787 on the Beau Parc estate in County Meath, where presumably the family was employed on the estate by the Lambart family.² Aged about seventeen, John Holmes joined the British navy and within a few months saw action under Admiral Nelson at Trafalgar. He married c. 1812 and, while based at Plymouth, his second son William was born on 11 March 1814. In November 1815, after Waterloo (June 1815), John Holmes was discharged without pension and returned from Plymouth with his family to Ireland. He obtained a position at Slane Castle (a short distance from Beau Parc) as 'general ranger and planting superintendent'. Both Slane and Beau Parc were noted for their woodlands.³ John Holmes died of TB in the early 1830s and his eldest son took over his position for a few years before emigrating to the United States.

William Holmes grew up on the Slane Castle estate. When he was about fifteen years of age he was apprenticed to a nurseryman, learning his trade for the next five years. While working briefly at Skreen in Meath, he met and married Margaret Ross. Holmes worked on various properties, gaining experience, not just as a nurseryman but in general estate management, a line of work for which there was no specific training or qualification.⁴ Prior to coming to Tipperary, Holmes worked for about three years on the property of Richard Whately, archbishop of Dublin (1831–63).

William Holmes was employed on the estate of Edward Bagwell-Purefoy at Greenfield, Cappawhite (north of Tipperary town) between 1847 and 1852 when he and his family



*William Wilson Homes
(Photo taken about 1880 by
Clifford and Sons, Dunedin)*

emigrated to Australia. It was unlikely that forty odd years later, when Holmes came to record his period in Cappawhite, that he had much by way of written records. However, his account of people and events was very accurate. Land agents in Ireland have not had a very good press but then the story of landlord-tenant relations has been told very much from the tenant's point of view.⁵ The account by Holmes therefore is of great interest not just for the local colour. The fact that Holmes worked in Cappawhite during the Famine and its aftermath, makes his account invaluable.

The full text is given below. It has been broken up into five parts for convenience of discussion and has been indented to separate it from that discussion.

Employment

Went off to the College Green warehouse and told him my story. Never mind said he, it is for good. I have a better and more valuable situation with great responsibility and high salary. Two gentlemen called here yesterday and asked me did I know of a trustworthy person to take charge of an estate who they could entrust to instruct tenantry in draining and raising green crops and get them on in improvement farming, and also manage 1000 acres on the home part of the estate that wanted improvements very much.

Mr Higgins knew the elder of those gentlemen well; the other, the younger being his brother, was Captain in the 3rd Dragoon Guards then lying in Hamilton barracks, Scotland, had just come heir of this estate, and as he will be absent, the man he requires, on him will devolve the whole management. They promised to call next day at 3 o'clock, you be there at that hour and I shall introduce you to them.

Accordingly the next day they came to the warehouse. I was in waiting, they had a good talk with Mr Higgins, then called on me, asked if I ever had been in the south of Ireland. Yes, as far as Kilkenny. You are not afraid to go among the Tipperary people? No, I said. I think if they are acted fairly by, they can be managed, as most of the crimes we read about are agrarian through absentee landlords. They seemed to coincide with that, as the eldest gentleman was the Hon. John Bagwell, Lord Lieutenant of the County, highly connected, married to Lord Dunally's daughter and nephew of Lord Gough's.

They had not much parley about engaging. Mr Higgins told me to ask good wages, so I did. I pulled out my pocket book to show them my testimonials – Mr. H. has told us, they said, sufficient. Well, said they, I shall allow you the wages etc. you ask. They kept talking on with Mr. H.; he said in my presence, to them, I am ready to go £1000 security for Holmes if required. They laughed and turned round to see me, asked when I would be able to go up and take possession. I shall be up there, said the Captain, on Monday; so I told him I would be there at Greenfield to meet him at the date he appointed.

The place I was to live in was the Mansion. It was a very large house with large rooms barricaded with great iron bars across the lower windows, for the former proprietor, whose character was a very refractory one, and whose life had been repeatedly threatened for forcing out tenants by sheriffs and police. His name was Purefoy. And he sent for John Bagwell to Marlfield his seat near Clonmel in order to leave him his estate when dying, having no heirs. Mr Bagwell objected, as he (Purefoy) wanted him to take his name, Purefoy. A thing he would not do, so he sent for his younger brother the Captain – in the 3rd. Dragoon Guards – who had no objection.

Perhaps the most startling aspect of this colloquial and almost intimate narrative is the very informal way in which Holmes obtained his position. What was involved was the

administration of several thousand acres, decisions affecting the lives of hundreds of people and the handling of large amounts of money. The key to Holmes getting the job was his relationship with 'Mr. H.' or Joseph Higgins whose business at College Green (Church Lane to be precise) was listed in *Thoms* (1847) as 'Joseph Higgins & Sons, seed merchants, nurserymen and florists'. From the evidence of the narrative, it may be surmised that knowing Higgins by virtue of his training and work and more to the point, having made an excellent impression, Higgins acting as a kind of information exchange – who was looking for estate work and which owners were in need of reliable employees – was happy to recommend Holmes to the Tipperary gentlemen. The degree of Higgin's trust is indicated by his offer of £1000 security. It is unclear why Holmes was between jobs but there can have been nothing to his discredit.

The two Tipperary gentlemen are well known. While there was not much difference in the ages of the three men (John Bagwell was about thirty-six, his brother twenty-eight and William Holmes thirty-three), their social status was another matter. John Bagwell of Marlfield near Clonmel, while in his teens inherited Marlfield from William Bagwell an unmarried uncle. This was an estate in Tipperary and Waterford with a valuation double its acreage. His father, a younger son, was a clergyman in the Church of Ireland. John Bagwell's mother was Margaret Croker of Ballynagarde in Limerick. Holmes was incorrect with respect to the connection with Lord Gough, a soldier who achieved great military success and honours in India. It was Gough's older brother who was married to Margaret Croker's sister. Holmes was also incorrect in his statement that Bagwell was Lord Lieutenant of the county, a position of considerable prestige and some authority. Bagwell was one of a number of deputy lieutenants. (Viscount Lismore of Shanbally – Clogheen – held that position.) While Holmes seemed intent on emphasising the 'highly connected' nature of the Bagwells, in truth they had made the move from mercantile to landed status the previous century.⁶

In the way of younger sons, Edward Bagwell joined the army. While his older brother was educated at Winchester, Edward went to Harrow and later joined the army. When Holmes met him, he was a captain in the 3rd Dragoon Guards, not the cheapest of commissions (at the time rank in the army was a matter of purchase rather than a reflection of merit). According to a much later newspaper account (his obit.) Bagwell was in the 4th Hussars prior to this.⁷ During the late 1840s and early '50s, the 3rd Dragoons were stationed in India, which presumably explains the statement later by Holmes that he did not see 'the Captain' for 'nearly four years'.⁸ The claim by Holmes that agrarian crimes were connected with absentee landlords appears not to have been made ironically. Holmes was prepared to manage an estate, the owner of which was going to be an absentee.

'The county of Tipperary has long possessed the notoriety of being a focus of outrage and disorder – of embodying in itself, in an aggravated form, all the strange anomaly of evils which mark this country generally.' So wrote Thomas Campbell Foster in a dispatch from Thurles dated 27 October 1845.⁹ He was a special correspondent for *The Times* newspaper and reflected the one thing everybody, including Holmes, knew about Tipperary. This reputation was well deserved. The name by which the people of the county were known, 'stone-throwers', told its own story. In 1844 for example, the number of outrages reported to the constabulary with respect to Tipperary were as follows: 253 agrarian and 654 non-agrarian. No other county in Munster came close. Regarding outrages connected with land, the next highest figure was 74, the figure for Limerick.¹⁰ In 1845, Cork with around double Tipperary's population (1841 figures), had a similar number of committals to jail. By 1847, Cork began to take its place at the head of this unenviable league table.¹¹ The point is that Holmes was taking a risk, especially in coming to an estate whose recently deceased owner was Colonel William Purefoy. During his time in

Cappawhite, Holmes was the recipient of threatening letters, something not unrelated to the title of this article.

Lt-Col William Purefoy of Greenfield died in Dun Laoghaire 'after a tedious illness' on 17 December 1846. He was forty-six years of age and unmarried. The statement in one newspaper that he was 'a gentleman universally esteemed by all who knew him' must have produced some wry smiles in Tipperary drawing rooms.¹² His military title arose from his role in the Tipperary militia regiment, from which he resigned in 1836.¹³ The Purefoy family was Cromwellian. In order to repay debts owed to adventurers and soldiers, Tipperary was divided between them, some baronies to adventurers and others, including Kilnamanagh, to soldiers. Under the Act of Settlement, a substantial estate in that barony was granted to Captain Arthur Purefoy in 1668. He had no legitimate children and in his will of 1673-4 he made provision for the education of his son James, but left his estate to his nephew William, whose 1737 will gave an address in Dawson Street Dublin. William left no issue and his widow Martha benefitted from the estate. She continued to live in Dublin.¹⁴ In 1714 William Purefoy leased for lives part of his Kilnamanagh estate to Moses Dawson who died in 1756 at the age of eighty-three. Dawson's son (also Moses) renewed this relationship with the estate and in the 1760s was described as 'of Greenfield'.¹⁵

Through the second half of the eighteenth century, William Purefoy of Cork City was proprietor of the Kilnamanagh estate. His will was dated 1797. In the early nineteenth century, Colonel Thomas Purefoy was lessor. In a deed of 1805, he was described as 'late of the Aberdeenshire Regiment of Fencibles, now of Cashel'.¹⁶ Three years earlier he had received a commission of the peace for the county.¹⁷ William Purefoy, whose death in 1846 led to Holmes obtaining his position in Cappawhite, was probably a brother of this Thomas. As discussed below, William Holmes was shocked by what he discovered about this last member of the Kilnamanagh Purefoy family.

Arrival

When I arrived at Greenfield I found six police stationed in the stable yard. Not very nice, thought I. The same day of my arrival (January 1847) Mr Wayland the pay clerk over the public works, to save the people from starving, when eight millions of money was spent, was on his way with two police and drivers to pay the men, was waylaid by a number of men for the purpose of robbing him. No doubt some of these were friends of those who were employed, which they proved to be. The place where they attacked them was the boundary Mountain Road, boundary of Greenfield and Lord Hawarden's. They shot one of the police, the other rolled off him (sic) and the driver hid in the ditch.

Wayland, the clerk or paymaster, grappled the reins in one hand and stood up on the steps of the car galloping along the furze close fence with a large horse, pistol in his hand. He seen (sic) one of the robbers running inside coming against him and he fired. The ball struck the robber in the shoulder and Wayland, the pay clerk, swore in his information that he saw the frieze-coat rise up with the force of the ball. This pay clerk was a protestant and native of Tipperary, a courageous young man who got great praise for his action.

He galloped along until he came to Tom Ryan's house, one of the Captain's tenants (this Ryan was steward over the workpeople). He deposited his bag of money with him in a strong chest, locked it, took out the horse from the cart, threw on a saddle and galloped to Dundrum four miles, Lord Hawarden's where there was a police station who all turned out in search of the robbers. These accompanied by many civilians searched but could get no trace of the robbers. However though Wayland was scarcely believed that he shot one man, before three months it turned out to be true.

There being a large reward offered, the wounded man's shoulder began to mortify, he turned informer. Four of them were hung and the rest escaped to America. This cleared the place of a gang of noted bad characters and all was peace for years after.

This was the day after my arrival. It left me something to ruminate over. Then these police in the yard, thought I. If I cannot live here without them, what good will my life do me?

Looked about a little, found nearly all the females about were all concubines of old Purefoy's. He was an Englishman who got this property by a friend. He began badly at nineteen and ended badly. He left his mark after him in shepherd's daughters, caretaker's daughters and even wives. Even the guardians of the peace in the yard I found had their favourites. Sodom, I said to myself. But get rid of them, that's the task to perform peaceably. In two days more, Mr John Bagwell & the Captain drove over from Marlfield, Clonmel. We walked, we talked, and rode over the boundary. Almost the first thing the Captain asked me, did I think the police would be required. I said no, for I think they are more nuisance than good. They thus concluded at once I was right. But the greater difficulty was to get shut of a number of old hands unable to work – all they done (sic) or would do was to steal. This had to be done quietly by giving each of them a sum of money and superannuating them, and employing their sons and daughters in their stead and paying them in hard cash every Saturday night and raising their wages, as Purefoy payed them as he liked. He gave them turnips and potatoes and a very little money once in three months after much anger and squabble.

The shock and outrage on the part of William Holmes when he arrived at Greenfield, still resonates in the unpolished prose of his narrative, and is summed up in that one word 'Sodom'. Two matters are dealt with, the attempted robbery and the character of William Purefoy. A few years after Purefoy's death in 1846, Archibald Stark travelling through the south of Ireland, picked up on Purefoy's reputation, describing him 'of fire-eating and twenty-bottle memory, who was the head of a school of hard-drinking country gentlemen, that boasted of such "first form fellows" as Lord Landaff (Mathew of Thomastown), and who – that is, Colonel Purefoy – received, during the last ten years of his life, so many missives from the once ubiquitous Captain Starlight, illuminated with a sketch of a coffin, for the original of which he was urgently requested to prepare himself, that, at last, he thought it prudent to convert one of the out-offices of his mansion into the police-barrack for the district, and to make a point of cultivating very zealously the society of two Peelers, who always accompanied him, one on each side of the car, whenever he drove into town.'¹⁸

When Holmes first met the Bagwell brothers, he made light of Tipperary's bad reputation. The attack on Wayland and the police protection afforded to Greenfield brought home to him what he was taking on. In case what Stark wrote a few years after Purefoy's death and Holmes's account, decades later, seem far-fetched, there is some contemporary evidence with respect to the threats under which Purefoy lived. In the Spring assizes of 1846, a man called James O'Donnell was charged with perjury. The circumstances of the case are not relevant but of interest are the incidental details with respect to Purefoy. His movements the previous 21 May were examined and verified, the point being that he was not in Tipperary town on that date.

Purefoy gave evidence: 'I got cold and breakfasted in bed and did not get up before one o'clock and was not a quarter of a mile away from my hall door all that day'. This was confirmed by Richard Wall, Purefoy's butler. Constable Britt also gave evidence. He was stationed at the barracks some twenty-five yards from Purefoy's hall door. On 21 May, Britt was on duty until around midday when he went into Cappawhite. On returning, around four o'clock, he saw Purefoy sitting on a chair at the hall door in the 'dress' (meaning clothing) he always wore at home. Part of Britt's usual duties was to accompany Purefoy when he left Greenfield. Michael

Tracy 'outdoor servant to Colonel Purefoy' went to Tipperary in the Colonel's car on that day. Purefoy did not go with him.¹⁹

The circumstances of Purefoy's life-style were not unrelated to his need for protection. Fr Thomas O'Carroll (1810–65), a native of Templemore, was curate in Anacarty 1842–46 and curate in Clonoulty 1846–52. With his brother, also a priest in the diocese, they are remembered today for the very interesting diaries which they individually kept. Fr Thomas O'Carroll in his entry for 28 December 1846, reacted to news of Purefoy's death – '... the grave never closed over a greater brute in human form. I had lived in his neighbourhood for four years. I had many opportunities of noticing his conduct and I must declare here that it has never fallen to my lot to witness such wanton oppression as he occasionally exercised towards his wretched tenants, nor have I ever heard or read of such brutal voluptuousness as he invariably practised on these wretched creatures whom he enticed to his house under a false promise of giving them large sums of money. His mode of life was in this wise. He went to bed at 3 o'clock every morning after gorging himself with an excess of food, two or three bottles of wine and nine or ten tumblers of punch in his stomach. He got up about 2, inflated ab hesternio Iaccho (essentially under the influence of the previous days' drinking, the reference is to Bacchus)²⁰ and then took his seat on the bottom of an empty barrel in company with six or eight unfortunate females, whom he kept employed every day "picking feathers" in his drawing room.'

At this point in his narrative, Fr O'Carroll cannot bear to continue and so he dismisses Purefoy – 'I will not soil my pages with the grossness of that man'.²¹

This picture of Purefoy, drawn from several sources, suggests that the depiction of a certain kind of rakehell Irish landlord in the works of Edgeworth, Lever or Le Fanu for example, is less exaggerated than generally thought. There is another source with respect to Purefoy that tells an even stranger story. While Holmes is generally correct, his narrative is (understandably) in error about some matters. 'He was an Englishman who got this property by a friend'. This reference to Purefoy is wrong on two counts but is a version of how Bagwell Purefoy, rather than Purefoy, inherited the Greenfield property. Purefoy was not married, in which circumstances, his heir would normally be a blood relative. However, there does not appear to be any marriages connecting the Purefoys with the Bagwell/Harper/Hare/Croker/ Pennefather/Maylor network of families. All Holmes says is that Purefoy first offered the property to John Bagwell, who refused. Bagwell's younger brother Edward however, accepted. The reason for favouring the Bagwells is not given.²²

The only available explanation is found in an early 20th century Bagwell source and is part of the folklore of that family.²³ It is a story as strange as everything else associated with the Purefoys. Headed: 'How a member of the Bagwell Family came to take the name of Purefoy'. The story is as follows: 'A certain Lieutenant Purefoy, quartered at Malta, had a quarrel with his C.O. He challenged him to a duel, which of course the Colonel declined. Purefoy sent in his papers and returned to Greenfield Tipperary and spent his time practising with a pistol. When the Colonel retired from the army in a couple of years time, Purefoy challenged him again and shot him dead. He was tried for murder at Clonmel and would have been hanged as it was proved that he had been preparing for the event for two years. However the Bagwell of that time used his influence and got him off scot-free. To show his gratitude, he swore that the first of his line who had no direct heir, should leave his property to the Bagwells. The last Colonel Purefoy took a great fancy to Edward Bagwell a subaltern in the 3rd Dragoons. The liking was not reciprocated. In spite of this however, Colonel Purefoy left him the Greenfield estate on condition that he took the name Purefoy.'

In spite of some effort being made, evidence has not yet been found to support this

extraordinary story. The least unlikely aspect is the obsession with duelling. As Jonah Barrington observed: 'Tipperary and Galway were the ablest schools of the duelling science . . . Tipperary most practical and prized at the Pistol.'²⁴ John Bagwell (1751–1816) grandfather of the Bagwell brothers, fought duels.²⁵ The two key players in this story, Lieutenant Purefoy and Bagwell the jury member, need to be identified. The most likely candidates are Thomas Purefoy, the Colonel's immediate predecessor and William Bagwell, uncle of the two brothers. The Colonel's will does not help. Dated 27 November 1846, weeks before his death, the estate was left in trust to George Bradshaw of Pegsborough (between Tipperary and Greenfield) and a Dublin lawyer George Fleetwood. Edward Bagwell's inheritance was dependent on his taking the name Purefoy 'so that the name of Purefoy shall be the last and principal name'.²⁶

When William Holmes took over the running of the Greenfield estate, according to his own evidence, he found it a mess. There is little information with respect to Purefoy's role. Up to 1841, his legal representative and receiver of rents was Nicholas Sadleir (1790–1855) of Tipperary town. The relationship was terminated by Purefoy, much to Sadleir's distress. The account was closed with a settlement of £1361, followed by Sadleir's admission of a mistake of £5, which was paid. With no little irony, Sadleir proposed that John Sadleir (1814–56) his cousin, act as honest broker. This was the same John Sadleir of banking infamy, then at the start of his career. If Purefoy accepted this proposal, Sadleir declared 'you will be convinced how cruel and confounded the insinuation has been' with respect to any 'sharp practice' in the management of Purefoy's affairs. In order to demonstrate his probity, Sadleir reminded Purefoy that he (Sadleir) had refused to prepare a lease for Greenfield of benefit to his brother William (of Scalaheen) 'lest you may afterwards be sorry for parting (with) your place'.²⁷ It may well be that Purefoy's instincts were sound. Nicholas Sadleir's brother-in-law William O'Brien Butler, accused Sadleir of taking advantage while looking after his property and bitterly blamed himself for not ignoring family ties and taking Mrs O'Brien Butler's advice 'to drag (Sadleir) before the world'.²⁸

When William Holmes met the Bagwell brothers in Dublin, he made light of Tipperary's reputation for violence. As if to mock him, the very day of his arrival and in his neighbourhood, occurred the attempted robbery with violence, foiled by Edward Wayland of Ballywalter the pay clerk. It was a discouraging introduction to Cappawhite on Thursday 21 January 1847: attempted robbery by an armed gang, 'six police stationed in the stable yard' and the final touch 'old Purefoy's concubines'. The account by Holmes is fairly accurate. The murdered policeman was William Crowley. The location was Ballybrack. Tom Ryan's house to which Wayland hurried and deposited his bag of money was in Moheragh. The amount was £149 (£130 in silver and nineteen £1 notes). The police station was in Anacarty. The robber wounded by Wayland and who turned informer was Patrick Ryan (Waller). Two of the accused, Thomas Ryan (Rody) and Michael Ryan (Gosthee) were tried at the 1847 summer assizes. Wayland's driver gave evidence of having identified them in the Bridewell yard in Tipperary. These two men had been arrested the previous month June, in London. It took the jury one hour to find them guilty. They were hanged on 24 September 1847. In the 1849 spring assizes, two more men were tried: John Hayden and John Ryan (Goatha). The former was arrested in his father's house, in a 'cave under the bed', described as a 'hollow in the floor, the length and breadth of a man, covered over by sticks which supported the earth'. Hayden was accused of firing the fatal shot. Both men were executed. As a reward for saving their money, Wayland was awarded £50 by the Board of Works.³⁰

Management

The Captain said to me, I have no money. What will you do with the land in Greenfield? Will you let it for grazing? Yes, that may do very well. That may do for the first or second year, but I should be looking forward to some improvements. You see all this 500 acres called Greenfield has never been reclaimed, simply taken in from tenants, with old dykes and drainage badly wanting. The land is good if improvements were effected. I should be afraid to put good cattle or sheep on it, they would die. To let from May to November for grazing cattle would pay.

The woods and plantations has (sic) never been thinned. There is 600 acres in Annacarty. The thinnings bring in some money. There is the tenants. I would like you go round and visit them. All that comes (sic) in and acknowledge themselves I shall only ask a quarter rent this year and forgive all old arrears. I told Paddy Ryan, meaning the old rent warner, to try and get them to improve their farms and get what seeds you want from Higgins and give them some this year free so as to bring them on in sowing mangle and turnip etc.

They Bagwells stopped one night and away they went, sending written orders to the Superintendent of Police to remove his men as they would not be required. These police left next day. The people about and labourers were glad and all rejoiced at their going away, saying: 'This man is not afraid'. I got the credit of the first action.

I called on the woodrangers and caretakers next morning to my office to make known what I was to do. A number of them men are past working a day's work. What the Captain has directed to be done is to pension them off and any of them having sons, to employ them in their place, also boys and girls I shall want for picking stones and filling drains. And in place of paying poor men their wages who are only supposed to be getting 8d. per day and getting that or greater portion of it in turnips, their wages will be paid in hard cash every Saturday night, not at the rate of 8d. but one shilling per day, that is one-third more.

Also, in this famine time I purpose getting a few tons of Indian meal and letting those men having families get small quantities weekly, which after a while you can pay for by instalments as next year the potatoes may be a good crop. I want you John Hickey – ranger – to inform the men I shall desire to see them. Meet me tomorrow morning in order that I may state my rules and hours of labour. I also want you to go round and pick from the tenants' sons two smart young men. I shall want them as auxiliary stewards, one over the drainers and one over the men at timber felling, thinning woods and plantations.

These directions were all carried out. The men went away cheering and blessing me, saying it was God that sent me among them. The whole country sounded with praises of the Captain and myself. The Captain went off to Hamilton Barracks, Glasgow. Did not see him for nearly four years. Always had from me a statement and recapitulation of accounts and business every month. Wrote me constantly in reply. When he got leave of absence at the end of four years, the Captain came home. The whole place was so improved, he declared nothing was like the same as when he went away. Walked over all improvements. I kept a regular set of books: ledger, cash, daybook, labour book, with small books showing expense of woods and plantations, also draining and quarrying. He just looked at them as (sic) a glance, saying: 'I do not want to go into them as I see proof before my eyes. I have perfect confidence in you'.

One of the attractive features of this account is that, as in a drama, we hear the dialogue but there is no doubt but that William Holmes is the hero. Having established the dangerous nature of the setting, the hero discounts the difficulties facing him and determines to save the world – well the Greenfield estate. From his description, Holmes found himself having to deal with an estate, the management of which under Purefoy, had been different from the norms of good practice. The standard guide to estate management in Ireland, while first published in 1860, laid

down guidelines for a newly appointed agent, not very different from what Holmes set about doing in Greenfield in the late 1840s.³¹ Of course, the fact that Holmes arrived in 1847, created exceptional circumstances.

This standard guide stated that the agent's first duty was to familiarize himself with the tenancies and interview each tenant. (This source offered no guidance with regard to the previous landlord's 'concubines'.) Each farm should be visited, to 'ascertain their state of culture, note particularly the improvements, buildings, stock, crops etc. on them and check the list of arrears furnished, by requiring from the tenants the production of their last receipts, of which they are usually very careful.' This farm inspection was deemed very important. 'An intelligent agent will, almost at a glance, discern the character of the tenant by the state of his farm; and there are few farmers whose condition may not be improved either by the judicious stimulus or by the control of an agent.' From a tenant's point of view, terms like 'stimulus' and 'control' might well mean unwelcome interference adding to a perennial sense of insecurity where there was no lease.

Just prior to the arrival of Holmes in Greenfield, and during what must have been Edward Bagwell's first visit to his new property, an application was made to him for a farm of 28 acres 'near the chapel of Anacarty' for which an expenditure of £500 on a house and offices and a 'high rent' were promised, provided a lease was forthcoming. However, 'no encouragement was held out to him, not even for the future'.³² After warning about the reluctance of tenants to pay their rent, de Moleyns declared that 'the subject of improvements will henceforth demand the agent's unremitting attention' and from the account by Holmes, his new employer was willing to trust his judgement, with respect to the 500 acres home farm, the 600 acres of woodland and the tenanted part of the estate. The offer to seek only a quarter rent and forgive arrears was both sensible and generous. The situation facing Holmes was such that the administration of the estate was undoubtedly a mess and the police presence was a reminder of what might happen if too rapid a change was made, especially changes that upset the status quo too much.

Because the year was 1847, extraordinary conditions prevailed. A newspaper account of July that year noted with approval what was being done on the estate. Fifty persons were given constant employment, presumably doing the work described by Holmes. Also, this account referred to Bagwell Purefoy's 'steward' (Holmes) successfully growing potatoes under glass in the estate garden, from diseased seed.³³ However, the longer-term outcome of this is unclear. What is certain is that under Holmes, and presumably with Bagwell Purefoy's approval, nothing took place comparable to the rationalization carried out by Vincent Scully in Gortnacoolagh, a townland a short distance south of Greenfield. A local newspaper with the headline 'Extermination in Cappawhite' described the destruction of seven family homes occupied by thirty seven people and 'expelled' by Scully because their holdings, previously held under a middleman, were considered too small for them to be considered 'respectable' tenants. Inability to pay rent was not a factor.³⁴ By 1851, this townland had lost two-thirds of its houses.³⁵

On the Bagwell Purefoy estate, between 1841 and 1851, the reduction in the number of houses was 31% and when individual townlands are examined there is no clear pattern. In Foilmacduff for example, the number of houses increased by nearly fifty percent (12 to 17) because of the mining operations there. In Ballysheeda on the other hand there was a loss of nineteen houses (45 to 26). In Bonerea the loss was just three houses (16 to 13). In Glenpaudeen, a townland with a very low valuation (thirty five pence an acre), the loss was five houses (18 to 13). Moheragh at 1,340 acres the largest townland in the estate had an even lower valuation (twenty six pence an acre) and had a loss of just six houses (37 to 31) and by 1850 had a substantial number of small tenancies. The closest the estate came to a clearance of tenants was with respect to two

townlands, Scarrough and Tinnahinchy (not contiguous), where house numbers were reduced to one (from eight) and two (from twelve) respectively.³⁶

The Bagwell Purefoy estate was in two civil parishes: Aghacrew and Donohill, both in the barony of Kilnamanagh Lower and comprised nineteen townlands or around 7,600 statute acres. Subsequent to Holmes being in charge of the estate, Bagwell Purefoy purchased in the Incumbered Estates Court in 1855 the small townland of Knockantibrien, a denomination surrounded by his estate.³⁷ In addition, during the Holmes' period, a small portion of the estate was still in lease to the Bradshaw family.³⁸ Below is a summary of the extent of the estate.

The Bagwell Purefoy Estate, c.1850

| Townland | Acres | Griffith Valuation (£) |
|-----------------|--------|------------------------|
| <i>Aghacrew</i> | | |
| Ballyshèeda | 10.5 | 6.25 |
| Bonerea | 462.75 | 204.50 |
| Drumminacunna | 168.25 | 83.50 |
| Rossacrow | 193 | 139.25 |
| Shanaknock | 193.5 | 123 |
| <i>Donohill</i> | | |
| Ballybrack | 238 | 110.65 |
| Ballysheeda | 581 | 297.05 |
| Foilmacduff | 591.75 | 136 |
| Glassdrum | 593.75 | 353.55 |
| Glencarbry | 233 | 43.65 |
| Glenpaudeen | 845.5 | 312.90 |
| Greenfield | 382.5 | 338 |
| Lackenacreena | 301 | 67.60 |
| Moheragh | 1340 | 379.25 |
| Rahyvira | 88.25 | 43.35 |
| Rossacrow | 91.5 | 99.20 |
| Scarrough | 332.5 | 138.10 |
| Shanaknock | 51.25 | 40 |
| Tinnahinchy | 118.5 | 40.65 |

Threats

(Bagwell Purefoy) stopped for about two months with some shooting parties, as the place abounded with game of all kinds. The Captain on this occasion stopped a couple of months, giving me instruction to call for tenders for building new farmyards, barns & stallfeeding plans, piggeries etc. This proved a great increase in labour, as I let the mechanical part to a local man while I furnished all materials. The job took a couple of years to complete. There were sheds of various sorts as well. After three years more he sold out of the Army and came home as I thought to settle down. But in this I was mistaken. We then had good run (sic) over the books. A good quantity of materials was owing

for. Get, said he to me, all your bills together, that is for timber slates etc. and I will give you (a) cheque for the lot. Soon that was done.

Next thing was about some refractory tenants, two families who never paid no rent. And his agreement was, any of them in debt when he came heir, and paid two quarters rent, were to be forgiven all arrears. During all this time these Dwyers never paid anything. The Captain behaved very generous to all his tenants, for two years only one quarter's rent and for four years half rent.

So speaking of these he said to me, I cannot allow these to remain in possession of their farms any longer. I have told Paddy Ryan – bailiff to give them warning forthwith & if they don't go off at once, I shall have to send the sheriff to turn them out and you take possession of all crops and land. I said to him: Would it not be wiser to do as when you began here six years ago, to give them as you done for other tenants then, their bit of crop and some money to pay their passage to America and let them go peaceably as the others did? No, for this reason, it would be a bad precedent, the others came and gave up at once.

I spoke on the state of the country – the Smith O'Brien rebellion of '48 had just calmed down. He did not seem to mind. I said, it will look bad after all the good you have done. He seemed positive, so I concluded that perhaps his brother had been advising him. So in the course of a few days Dwyer came to me. I told him, I spoke to the Captain about giving you and your cousin the crops and a little money and send you to America. He says he will give you what will pay your passage but no crops. But said I, the Captain is here, go round to the Hall door and I shall tell him you want to speak to him. He seen the Captain – all no use. He started that night for his brother's place, Marlfield, Clonmel, about 20 miles. Two days after, I had a letter from him directing me to write Dwyer and tell him I shall give him no crops, but I shall send you £40 – keep until you see them clear off the land, and then hand to him. I sent for Dwyer telling him the terms.

He resolved not to leave. Well, I said, the sheriff will be here on such a date. I expected no good would come of it. Being the first of this kind of thing I ever had to do with, I felt rather put out about it. He (Bagwell Purefoy) was then in Cork with his mother, who lived at the Cove or Queenstown; and he was arranging for a yachting party to go out to the Mediterranean for twelve months. This annoyed me more as he never told me he was going away. So for a long time I thought when he would come home, it would relieve me of a great deal of responsibility.

Two more days expired. When I opened the postbag at 9 a.m. what I suspected when I opened it, was a letter threatening my life and the life of the Captain if I did not get for Dwyers what they wanted, which they said was only reasonable and just; and if I did not get it for them, all Her Majesty's forces would not ensure my life unless I go under the ground.

In this instance I took the precautions of keeping copies of my letters to the Captain and also his to me. I immediately sent one of the woodrangers to Dwyer to come over to Greenfield to my office. He came as soon as my messenger arrived. I met him calmly and dispassionately, and spoke on the subject of the threatening letter. I said, I have been doing all I could for you, you must know I have been altogether against this affair, acting on your behalf, and all I can say is this, here is your gratitude – reading the threat.

Dwyer fell down on his knees & prayed that God might strike him dead if he ever wrote the letter or do I know who did. Well, I said, it must be written on your authority, and what I have to say is this, you may try to shoot me but you cannot take my life unless God gives it you. And you may be sure I shall be prepared to defend myself as far as powder and ball goes, but I hope it won't come to that.

No, no, said he. It is an enemy has done me that wrong. Now, I said, to let you see. I have kept copies of my letters to the Captain, interceding for you to get the crops; those letters I will read you, and the answers from him. Read the letters over carefully. You have been thinking, I suppose, that I am my own master. On this I have entirely opposed and expressly wished you to have the crops.

Things remained so until the sheriff came. I wanted the Captain to send Paddy Ryan the rent warner when the police and the sheriff came to take possession. No, said he could not trust him, you must go. So I took one of the keepers with me in the trap, well armed, the day the sheriff came. All passed over peaceably. Doors taken away and chimney knocked down. By this time the Captain had got the threatening letter from me. He made light of it, but he was going out of reach (his Mediterranean cruise). He said it was only to frighten, but I had seen some of these threats carried out.

The next letter I got from the Captain ran thus. Tell Dwyer I am going away, and shall pay £40 into the shipping office in Cork for him and his family for America. If he goes on such a date when the ship shall sail, all he has to do is to call at such an office and he gets the tickets passage paid. If he does not do that he loses his passage and I lose my money. So Dwyer went in time and that finished that affair.

Holmes arrived in Tipperary in January 1847 and according to family records, left Liverpool for Australia in August 1852. From his references to the 'Captain's' visits to Greenfield, it is difficult to follow the chronology. From other evidence, Bagwell Purefoy was in Tipperary in the spring of 1848. Perhaps therefore the 'nearly four years' that he was away was subsequent to this and the campaign against the Dwyers came to a head in 1852. Before looking in detail at this struggle with the Dwyers, there is a glimpse of Bagwell Purefoy's relations with his tenants dating from March 1848

An anonymous correspondent wrote to the *Tipperary Vindicator* pointing out that coverage in that newspaper only seemed to be given to bad landlords, but that there were good landlords such as the gentleman encountered on 23 March 1848 while the correspondent was travelling from Tipperary to Nenagh. At Ironmills (a crossroads and bridge east of Cappawhite, on the Anglesey Road and passing through the Bagwell Purefoy estate), the correspondent described how he 'fell in with a large group of men, out of which as I approached I saw a fine dashing young gentleman emerge and go off in another direction'. The correspondent got talking to some of the men who identified the gentleman going towards Cappawhite as Captain Bagwell Purefoy and that 'he was out today valuing the lands'. To raise rents? Because there was a landlord in that quarter who used to raise rents in proportion to tenants' improvements? Oh no, came the reply, it was for the purpose of lowering the rents where they were too high. 'Some of us have it after today for half what we were paying'.

After informing the correspondent about the Captain 'coming in for' the property the previous year, it was explained that a half year's rent was forgiven and that some 'distressed' tenants had a year's rent wiped out. Also all arrears were wiped out. Some tenants received a 25% reduction and others a 50% reduction in rents. That day (23 March), Bagwell Purefoy had come with his Steward (Holmes) and 'an honest farmer' in order to examine the lands and 'to hear and redress the grievances of his tenants'. At this point the local parish priest arrived on the scene hoping to meet the Captain in order to influence his decisions. This presumably was Fr John Noonan, a native of Gortnahoe, appointed to Cappawhite at the beginning of 1846. He told the correspondent that he had been treated kindly by Bagwell Purefoy, having obtained a site for a house and some land on reasonable terms and with a lease. The article concluded by remarking that the Captain only paid occasional visits when his duties with the 3rd Dragoons allowed.³⁹

What is clear from the description by Holmes is, that having got used to being his own boss, he found it difficult to adjust to the presence, or perhaps interference, of Bagwell Purefoy. Contradictory to, but not incompatible with, this attitude was resentment that when Bagwell Purefoy was finally home, he was in fact away a good deal of the time. Much of the final section of Holmes's account deals with 'some refractory tenants, two families who never paid no rent',

the Dwyers. Clearly Holmes and Bagwell Purefoy differed as how best to deal with this problem. Not surprisingly, having sown their crops, tenants reacted badly to the prospect of being deprived of the benefit. With the Captain enjoying himself in the Mediterranean, Holmes was left to cope with the fallout, which came in the predictable form of a threatening letter. While Holmes does not mention it in his account, it not being in keeping with his description of the positive reaction to his role in Greenfield, he had been the recipient of threatening letters in 1847 with respect to employing more men on the estate and paying them better wages. These threats did not appear to reflect widespread discontent with Holmes's management but in the context of the region's reputation, must have caused concern.⁴⁰

Holmes does not clearly identify these Dwyers but from Griffith's Valuation possible candidates are Thomas and Thady Dwyer in Ballysheeda. The description of Holmes sending for Dwyer in order to explain that the hard line being taken with regard to the crops was Bagwell Purefoy's doing, is an extraordinary episode and in spite of Holmes protesting fatalism about being shot, indicates an acute sense of self-preservation. In the end the Captain's opinion prevailed but for Holmes, this episode marked the finish of his time in Greenfield and indeed Ireland. This very clear split in the ranks between landlord and agent, would surely have made his position untenable. Just as Mr Higgins of College Green was involved in getting him the position and was used to look after Holmes's savings, he was also employed in looking about for a replacement.

No doubt William Holmes decided to leave Greenfield for a number of reasons. His account says nothing about his wife and family but while at Greenfield, three of his children were born (two survived). His decision to emigrate to Australia may have been stronger than any desire to leave Greenfield. His ambitions, especially if he wanted to be his own boss, would find better scope in a place like Australia. His attitude to Greenfield and remaining there must have been influenced by the circumstances of being left more or less in charge while the Captain was abroad. It may be assumed that the Captain's brother kept a watching brief. The return of the Captain posed difficulties and the Dwyer episode illustrated marked differences between Bagwell Purefoy and Holmes. The final words are left to Holmes.

Departure

However it – the Dwyer episode – gave me a caution not to be caught in such an affair again. I there and then resolved to clear of (sic) such a treacherous country as soon as the Captain returned or perhaps before. It being then a very busy time, harvest and haymaking, the Resident Magistrate wanted me to have a policeman to guard me. I said no. I do not think there is any danger now. I had three places to attend to, one 3 and 5 and 6 miles. I took the precaution of having one of the keepers for a while as I drove the trap, until the matter died out. The tenants knew from the good I had done for them it was not my fault.

I had good wages, the place being worth £150 per annum. I had a young family getting up. I tried to economise and saving what I could spare, I gave to Mr Higgins in Dublin, who bought funded stock for it. As soon as I had harvest all in and fixed, I wrote to Mr John Bagwell to tell the Captain that I had made up mind (sic) for leaving for Australia and not to divert his mind from home much longer. So he wrote and he was home in about a month.

The Captain was surprised that I had taken such a notion, asked me what was the cause, and if he could remedy it. And where will I get a person to fill your place? You may get plenty to fill my place, but to take the interest I have done it will be difficult. Old Mr Higgins wrote me there has been a man of Lord Clancarty's applying to him, so your (sic) likely to see him shortly. Soon the brother and

him came over from Clonmel, they done (sic) all they could to advise me from going. Nothing had any effect.

I found out that this positive toil with a slanderous world hindered me from offering up prayers to God, as I thought then, acceptably, and that men of influence by their evil example obstructs the course of godliness in others.

Notes

1. My thanks to Mrs Sue O'Dwyer of Victoria Australia, great great granddaughter of William Holmes. These memories, recorded in 1892, were kept by a member of the family and fortunately copied because the original was lost in a fire. My thanks also to Liam Schofield and Tom Stapleton.
2. Today Beau Parc and Slane are under the same ownership.
3. James Fraser, *Handbook for Ireland* (1843 ed.), p. 540; E. Malins & The Knight of Glin, *Lost Demesnes* (London, 1976), p. 89. Background information on various generations of the Holmes family comes from genealogical information kindly supplied by Sue O'Dwyer.
4. See W.E. Vaughan, *Landlords & Tenants in Mid-Victorian Ireland* (Oxford, 1994) pp 103–37. His comment 'the landlord's personality was crucial in the management of an estate; variety, therefore, was inevitable' seems apposite. (p. 107).
5. A notable exception is William Steuart Trench, *Realities of Irish Life* (London, 1868). From the Preface: '... to give the English public some idea of the difficulties which occasionally beset the path of an Irish landlord or agent who is desirous to improve the district in which he is interested'.
6. For the Bagwell family see Burke, *Clonmel*, pp 174–80; S. O'Donnell, *Clonmel 1840–1900* (Dublin, 1999), passim.
7. *Clonmel Chronicle*, 4 July 1883. Nearly forty years on, Bagwell Purefoy's generous treatment of his tenants when he inherited the estate, was still remembered.
8. No author, *A brief historical sketch of the 3rd or King's Own Hussars* (London, 1894).
9. T.C. Foster, *Letters on the condition of the people of Ireland* (London, 1846), p. 330.
10. See D.G. Marnane, 'South Tipperary on the eve of the Famine' in *THJ* (1995), p. 41.
11. Marnane, 'Famine in South Tipperary' – Part Four in *THJ* (1999), pp 4–5.
12. *Tipperary Constitution*, 19 Dec 1846; *Tipperary Vindicator*, 23 Dec 1846.
13. Major C.A. Ryan, *Records of the Tipperary Artillery with a list of officers 1793–1889* (Clonmel, 1890).
14. See St. John D. Seymour, Notes on a Tipperary Parish in *Jn Cork Hist. & Arch. Soc.* xxii, 112 (1916), pp 145–56 and xxiii, 113 (1917), pp. 36–42; D 17562–12 April 1695; D 17563–1714; D 17564–1715; D 17567–1717; D 17568–1717; D 17569–1717; D 17570–1717; D 17571–1738; D 17572–1738; D 17574–1748 (National Archive Dublin). These deeds record leasing agreements on the estate and provide some genealogical information.; Genealogical Office MS 573 (NLI).
15. D 17563–1714 Wm. Purefoy to Moses Dawson and D 17581–1764 Wm. Purefoy to Moses Dawson. (National Archives Dublin.)
16. D 17583–1805 (National Archives Dublin)
17. Commission of the peace to Purefoy, 22 May 1802, M 2087 (National Archives Dublin).
18. A.G. Stark, *The South of Ireland in 1850, being the journal of a tour in Leinster and Munster* (Dublin, 1850), pp 40–41. For reference to this pre-Famine world of hard-drinking gentlemen and some local connections, see (A O'Reilly), *Reminiscences of an Emigrant Milesian* (London, 1853), vol iii, pp 276–82.
19. *Tipperary Free Press*, 18 March 1846.
20. My thanks to Kevin Noonan, Aherlow.
21. Diary of Rev. Thomas O'Carroll, 28 Dec 1846 (Feehan Typescript, 1997. originals in Cashel & Emly Diocesan Archives, Thurles).
22. There does not appear to be a local (Cappawhite) folk record of a Purefoy/Bagwell link.
23. *History of the Bagwell Family* by Harriette Bagwell (widow of Richard the historian). She died in 1937. (MS 32617, NLI).

24. Barrington, *Recollections* (Phoenix Dublin ed.), p. 282
25. J. Kelly, 'That Damn'd Thing Called Honour' *Duelling in Ireland 1570–1860* (Cork, 1995), p. 146.
26. Genealogical Office MS 152, pp. 38–41 (NLI).
27. D 17587–13 Sept 1841, includes letter N. Sadleir to W. Purefoy 15 July 1841 (National Archives Dublin).
28. Lord Dunboyne, 'The Family of O'Brien Butler' in *The Irish Genealogist* 8, i (1990), pp 74–78.
29. *Tipperary Free Press*, 13, 17 March, 28 July, 25 Sept 1847, 11 March 1849.
30. *Correspondence Board of Works Jan.–March 1847, 1847 (797)*, Iii, pp 20–21.
31. T. de Moleyns, *The Landowner's and Agent's Practical Guide* (Dublin, 1877, 7th ed.), pp 416–19.
32. *O'Carroll Diary*, 28 Dec 1846.
33. *Tipperary Vindicator*, 21 July 1847.
34. *Limerick Reporter*, 16 May 1848.
35. *Pobal Ailbe*, p.40; Marnane, *Famine, THJ* (1999), p. 20.
36. *Pobal Ailbe*, p.38; Marnane, *Famine, THJ* (2000), p. 86.
37. Sold as part of the Portarlinton estate in 1855. Also D 17586–1828 (National Archives Dublin).
38. For the origins of the Bradshaw connection see D 17576–1748 and D 17577–1748 (National Archives Dublin).
39. *Tipperary Vindicator*, 29 March 1848. This correspondent called himself 'A Faithful Witness'.
40. *Tipperary Vindicator*, 28 Aug 1847.

Addendum

With reference to the mystery of the Bagwell and Purefoy link, further research indicates that there was a duel and that Thomas Purefoy was one of the parties. In 1787 while serving with the 66th Regiment of Foot in St Vincents in the West Indies, Purefoy fell out with his C.O., a Major Roper who enforced army discipline on him. During the following two years or so, Purefoy made clear his determination to get even. The duel was fought in England in December 1788 and Roper was killed. Purefoy spent several years in exile and several months in prison before being tried (in England) in 1794 and found not guilty. The Bagwell link remains unclear.