

Viscount Lismore's Tipperary Tenants

By Anna Maria Hajba

Introduction

Among the Looney Papers in the Special Collections and Archives Department, Glucksman Library, University of Limerick is an interesting pair of rent books from the 1890s kept by William Rochfort, agent to the 2nd viscount Lismore and later to Lady Beatrice and Lady Constance Butler of Shanbally Castle, Clogheen, County Tipperary. The first relates to Viscount Lismore's tenants in Banteer, County Cork, and Feohanagh, County Limerick, the second to those in Clonmel, Cahir, and Fethard in County Tipperary. What makes the rent books remarkable is the large quantity of correspondence with tenant farmers that accompanies them – some 370 items for Counties Cork and Limerick and almost 500 items for County Tipperary. Combined, these documents offer an unusually vivid glimpse into the lives of tenant farmers in rural communities in Munster at the dawn of the twentieth century. This article describes the material in some detail and explores the information it contains. While the main emphasis is on the Tipperary tenants, some comparative observations to those in County Cork are also made.¹

Background

The O'Callaghans of Shanbally Castle were a junior branch of the O'Callaghans of Dromaneen, County Cork. They had made their way to County Tipperary by the early eighteenth century, when Cornelius O'Callaghan sat as MP for Fethard in 1713-1714. Through a series of land purchases and strategic marriages over the next one hundred years, the family became one of the county's leading landowners.² They were also among the few native families to be raised to the Irish peerage – as Barons Lismore in 1785, and, in 1806, as Viscounts Lismore. The titles became extinct in 1898 with the death of George, 2nd Viscount (b. 1815), whose two sons had both predeceased him. The family estate passed to the 2nd Viscount's distant cousins Ladies Beatrice and Constance Butler, daughters of the 3rd Marquis of Ormonde. Following the death of Lady Beatrice, her younger son Major Patrick Pole-Carew sold the estate to the Irish Land Commission in 1954. The family seat, Shanbally Castle, was demolished six years later.

By the 1870s, the Shanbally estate extended to nearly 35,000 acres in County Tipperary and was located in the parishes of Shanrahan, Ballybacon, Tubbrid, Tullaghorton, and Whitechurch in the Barony of Iffa and Offa West; Lisronagh and Temple-etney in the Barony of Iffa and Offa East; Kiltinan in the Barony of Middlethird; Killardry in the Barony of Clanwilliam; Doon and Toem in the Barony of Kilnamanagh Upper; and Terryglass in the Barony of Lower Ormond. In addition, the family held six thousand acres in County Cork, mainly in the parishes of Clonmeen, Kilshannig, and Castlemagner in the Barony of

Duhallow; and some 1,200 acres in County Limerick in the parish of Mahoonagh, Barony of Glenquin.³ The entire landholding at the time amounted to 42,200 acres.

Managing an estate of such magnitude required the services of an agent. Land agents in Ireland enjoyed a much greater measure of autonomy in the management of landed property than those in England,⁴ and their duties were myriad. In addition to collecting rents, eliminating arrears, and keeping estate accounts, they vetted prospective new tenants, drew up leases, valued holdings, supervised improvements and other estate expenditure, responded to petitions from tenants, negotiated abatements, and carried out evictions. Previous agents on the Shanbally estate included Edwin Taylor, who had held the position for several decades and appears to have been well liked by tenants, and Llewellyn Fennell, who managed the estate in the 1880s. In about 1890, the 2nd Viscount Lismore appointed William Robert Hood Rochfort (1847-1940) to the role. The fifth son of Horace Rochfort of Clogrennane Castle, County Carlow, he had begun his career in 1868 as a military officer in the Royal Artillery in Clonmel. Four years later, he returned to civilian life qualified as a land surveyor, and became a land agent. By the end of the century, Rochfort was managing estates across Ireland for a number of prominent clients, some of whom included the marquis of Lansdowne, the earl of Howth, and Lady Margaret Charteris, who had inherited from her father the extensive Butler estate in Cahir. He was highly respected for his 'absolute and unquestioned integrity, a remarkably well-balanced and ordered brain, personal courage, a capacity for hard work, a hatred of self-advertisement and display, a way of taking any troubles that came his way completely unmoved and with apparent indifference, and a general kind-heartedness



Fig. 1: Early 20th-century postcard of the square at Cahir, Co. Tipperary
(The Norton Collection, UL).

and hospitality.¹⁵ As an agent, he was regarded as strict but just, and as a man whose word was his bond.

Assisting Rochfort in his duties were William Gallagher, Arthur Edward Newton (who also enjoyed a reputation as a brilliant cricketer), and William Sutcliffe, who in later years took over the role as agent to the Shanbally estate. The estate offices were located in Clogheen and in Cahir (fig. 1), where Rochfort resided at Cahir Abbey House with his wife Helen. In addition to his staff, Rochfort relied on rent warners for information on local affairs. These were commonly good tenants whom the agent trusted and who for a small fee kept him up to date with local activities and informed the local farmers when to prepare for the next gale day. It was not the easiest of roles to maintain in a rural community since rent warners were sometimes considered by their neighbours as little more than spies. However rent warners did not act for the agent alone. They corresponded on behalf of tenants unable to read or write, and put in a word of support for those suffering genuine hardship. They also made representations to the agent on issues that affected the entire community, for example when adverse weather conditions destroyed crops across the parish, or when the market price of corn or livestock fell to such a low level that it affected the tenants' ability to meet the rent charges. Among the Tipperary tenants in the 1890s, two rent warners worked for Rochfort: Richard Ryan of Lisnatubbrid, and Pat Ryan of Killusty North.

The Tipperary Rent Book

The rent book William Rochfort kept of viscount Lismore's holdings in County Tipperary covers the years 1891 to 1902, and provides details of tenants on the townlands of Ballydrehid, Ballydrehid Mountain, and Poulaculleare near Cahir; Coolanure and Fethard near Fethard (including a small number of town houses); and Ballyboe, Cooloran, Killusty North, Killusty South, Knockanclash, Lisnatubbrid, Mullenaranky, and Tempe-etney in the vicinity of Clonmel. Each holding is allocated its own page, of which there are 119 in total, and the holdings are arranged in rough alphabetical order by townland. An index of names at the start of the book facilitates navigation to a specific tenant.⁶

The layout of each page is the same. The top section bears the name of the townland on which the holding is located; the name of the tenant and any changes in tenancy; the size of the holding in statute acres, roods, and perches; and the amount of rent paid in pounds, shillings, and pence. Any reductions made to rent have also been noted, whether by private agreement between Rochfort and the tenant, by judicial agreement negotiated through a Land Court in 1882/1883, or by judicial court order. Beneath this top section is a table which records every yearly or half-yearly rent payment made by the tenant, including the date of the gale day; any arrears brought forward; half-year's rent due; total amount due with arrears; date of actual payment; amount of poor rate, income tax, county cess, and abatements allowed; amount received; and arrears remaining due. The rent book for Banteer is identical in its layout and dates covered.

The rent book shows that the size of holdings in County Tipperary varied from 2 to 362 acres, averaging at 55 acres. Some 48% of the tenants held 30 acres or less, and almost 14% had 100 acres or more. The situation in Banteer, County Cork was quite different.

Here, almost 60% of the holdings were under 31 acres in size and just 8% were 100 acres or larger, with the largest farm standing at 194 acres. Most of the holdings in County Tipperary were working farms with a mixture of tillage, dairy, and dry stock. By way of example, Martin Power, who farmed 61 acres at Lisnatubbrid, had seven milking cows, five two-year-olds, three one-year-olds, four calves, one horse, three or four acres of oats, and two acres of green crops (fig. 2),⁷ while Thomas Shea and his sister Mary of Mullenaranky had five cows, six yearlings, five calves, four horses, a large amount of meadow, and crops of wheat, oats, potatoes, turnips, and mangles on their 72-acre farm.⁸ At Knocknacklash, Bridget Cummins ran a large dairy farm and milked between 30 and 40 cows.⁹

The amount of rent paid by tenants varied considerably depending not only on the size of the holding but its location, the quality of soil, nature of farming activities, and any improvements the tenant may have carried out. As a very general rule of thumb, about two thirds of the Tipperary tenants paid less than £20 rent per annum, while 12% paid £100 or more. In Banteer by comparison, three quarters of tenants paid less than £20, and just three farmers or little over 1% paid more than £100 per annum. These figures lend further credence to the suggestion that farms in Tipperary were on average slightly larger than those in Cork, and may also indicate that they stood on better quality land, or were managed more efficiently, or both.

The rent book also reveals a gradual reduction in rental income over the twelve years it covers. Advances in ship building and the invention of refrigerated vessels resulted in increasingly large consignments of cheap and high quality grain from America and meat from New Zealand and South America. This led to a steady lowering of agricultural prices in Britain and Ireland between 1873 and 1896. Another contributing factor was the passing of land acts in Ireland between 1868 and 1887 to improve the status of tenant farmers. The Second Irish Land Act of 1881 was particularly significant, as it led to the establishment of the Land Court and gave tenants the right to seek a reduction in rents under the Fair Rent Clause. In most cases, the Land Court awarded a reduction of 15 to 20 per cent in rent. In Tipperary as well as Banteer, a reduction of 15 per cent appears to have been the norm.

In addition to the official entries relating to gale day payments and changes in tenure or valuation, the rent books contain informal notes made by William Rochfort in its margins.

042/289 (a) October 3 1880

Dear Sir

I received your note
 Martin Power has
 no under tenants his
 stock is 7 milch cows
 5 two year old 3 one year
 old 4 calves 1 horse
 3 or 4 acres of Oats two
 acres of green crops

yours faithfully
 Richard Ryan
 Lisnatubbrid

Fig. 2: Letter from Richard Ryan to William Rochfort relating to Martin Power's farm.

These are mostly concerned with tenants' financial or physical circumstances, for example marital status and number and ages of children, and their ability or inclination to make regular payments. Rochfort uses terms such as 'industrious'; 'respectable'; 'good pay'; 'hard working and honest'; 'a sober man and hard worker'; 'excellent farmer', and 'well affected' to describe Tipperary tenants of good character, while at the other end of the scale a difficult tenant 'grumbles about rent'; 'refuses to do anything'; 'makes a poor mouth'; is 'well able to pay [but won't]'; or has a 'bad record as rent payer'. The term 'struggling' Rochfort most commonly applied to tenants who worked hard but had difficulty meeting rent payments owing to poor-quality land or some personal hardship. The 'schemers', 'bog idle fellows', and 'drinker scoundrels', who feature prominently in the Banteer rent book, are noticeably absent from Tipperary – for example, only once does Rochfort note that a tenant 'looks thirsty'. This is not necessarily a reflection on the character of Banteer tenants but suggests that the smaller farms and poorer quality land in North Cork made it more difficult to eke out a living and pay the rent on time. In Banteer, Rochfort also made a note if a tenant had under-tenants, or if the tenant or a family member had an occupation besides farming, which improved their capacity to pay rent. Such observations are rare in the Tipperary rent book, further strengthening the impression of a more settled and financially comfortable community.

Not all observations in the margins of the rent book relate to the circumstances of individual tenants or their ability to pay rent. To aid his memory on gale days, Rochfort was in the habit of jotting down observations about people's appearances and any unusual features in the margins of his book that would better enable him to identify tenants when he met them. Thus we learn that Thomas Delany of Ballyboe was a stout man with a bald head, while William Gorman on the same townland was a tall respectable young man with a sandy moustache. Pat Carew of Temple-etney and Richard Daly of Knockanclash were both oldish men. The former was noted for his grey beard, and the latter for being high shouldered. John Ahearne of Lisnatubbrid was a short dark man with blue eyes, and James Keating of Ballydrehid a little old man with grey whiskers. Mary Nugent of Ballydrehid was old and white-haired, as was her neighbour John O'Donnell, who was also noted for being quite tall. Daniel Houlahan of Lisnatubbrid was middle aged and good tempered. Bridget Cummins of Knockanclash was considered by Rochfort to be a decent woman but pretty cross. Such rich details add unexpected depth to an otherwise formal estate record.

The Tipperary Letters

The rent book for County Tipperary is accompanied by a substantial quantity of correspondence, some 500 items in total. They cover the dates from 1891 to 1902, with a small number of letters from later years up to 1910. Most of these communications are nothing more than brief notes from tenants enclosing postal orders to cover a half or full year's rent. Others however provide revealing insights into life in a rural Irish community at the turn of the twentieth century. They illuminate some of the problems farmers faced and the ways in which agents dealt with such matters.

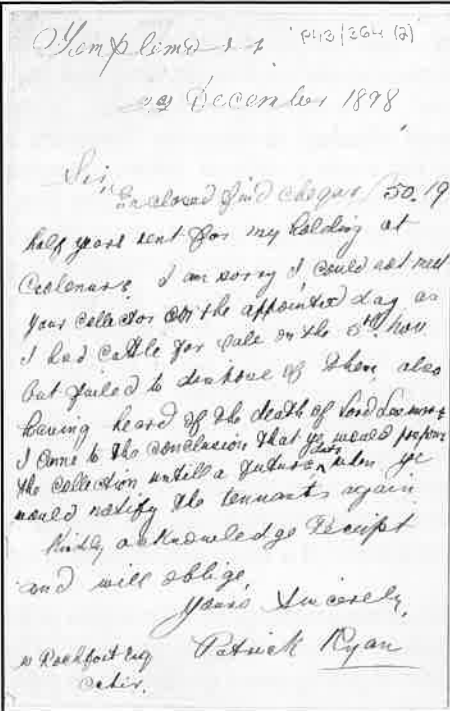
By far the most common reason for tenants to put pen to paper arose from difficulties they were experiencing in meeting rent payments owing to illness, bad harvests, poor

agricultural prices, or other hardship. In most cases, farmers looking for extra time to find the rent money were met with leniency, although the extra time allowed was generally limited to two weeks, or, in rare cases, to a month. If a tenant was considered 'a good pay', Rochfort was more inclined to show tolerance. However, regular rent payments were no guarantee of latitude. In 1898, Patrick Ryan of Coolanure failed to dispose of cattle he had for sale, and fell behind in his rent (fig. 3). When he forwarded the money in mid-December, he was still three pounds short of the required amount. Rochfort returned the cheque and threatened Ryan with a solicitor if the correct sum was not remitted by the end of the month. 'I did not think ye would be so severe on a good tenant', Ryan observed glumly in the note which accompanied the full payment.¹⁰

In Banteer, the loss of crops or farm stock was occasionally met with a small gratuity towards rent by way of compensation. Except for extensive losses caused by floods, such generosity was rarely forthcoming in Tipperary, where land was more fertile and tenants were expected to be better able to deal with adversity. In July 1895, Edmond Sheehy of Ballydrehid lost a cow and a six-month-old calf, which, if sold, would have earned him £6. When the cow he purchased as a replacement at Clonmel Fair the following February choked on a potato and also died, Sheehy, with a family of five children to feed, was compelled to write to Rochfort to seek a small reduction in his rent. Although Sheehy's was a genuine case of distress, the agent did not yield to the request, merely noted that he had made 'a rule not to take such losses into account.' In Rochfort's view, the rent Sheehy paid was moderate and, having already been reduced from £17 to £12, did not merit a further reduction.¹¹

However, Rochfort was not completely insensitive in his treatment of tenants. In 1891, when Laurence Dunne of Killusty North was threatened with eviction, a neighbour, J. Keane, felt compelled to come to his aid and wrote to Rochfort to plead the man's case.

Lawrence Dunne ... is a very old man, I am sure over 80 years, and has met with a good many reverses of fortune those years past. His house was burned, and it cost him a considerable sum to build a new one. That accounts for his falling into arrears. He is a neighbour of mine, and I would wish very much to try to bring about a settlement. He owns a few acres of wretched mountain land, and I am sure if you saw the situation of the place you would not deal harshly with him. I shall thank you to let me know the terms you require.¹²



Compliments
22 December 1898
Sir,
Enclosed find cheque £5.19
half year rent for my holding at
Coolanure. I am sorry I could not send
your letter for the appointed day as
I had cattle for sale on the 15th Nov.
but failed to dispose of them, also
having heard of the death of Lord Dunmore
I came to the conclusion that I must postpone
the collection until a future date. I
would notify the tenants again.
Kindly acknowledge receipt
and will oblige,
Yours sincerely,
Patrick Ryan
Coolanure

Fig. 3: Letter from Patrick Ryan to William Rochfort relating to the lateness of his rent payment.

Having received Keane's petition, Rochfort reconsidered the matter and Dunne was spared from eviction.

Abatements were always forthcoming when a family suffered a bereavement or serious illness. The death of a family member could devastate a farm, where every pair of hands counted, and cause financial hardship owing to doctors' fees and funeral expenses, to say nothing of the emotional distress of losing a loved one, as a letter from John Byron of Ballydrehid attests:

Dear Sir I would be very thankful to you If you could give me a month or two for to make up the rent, I would have paid it today but my Wife got suddenly ill a fortnight ago I am sure she wont put in tonight, the Doctor gave her up yesterday she is very bad today and I want the little money I have to burry her. I would be very much obliged to you if you would give me a month or two I have pigs and I would have them sold by that time. Would you Please drop me a line and let me know if it will be alright I cant go to the house as I have nobody I am in great trouble as she is a great loss to me.¹³

Abatements granted as a consequence of death or illness depended on the size of the farm and the amount of rent paid. Thus, Johanna Gorman, who farmed 45 acres at Ballyboe, was given a gratuity of £5 when her husband James died in 1897, while John Daly of Knocknacklash, where he held seven acres, was granted just £1 when his parents died within three months of each other in 1895. At Ballydrehid, Bryan Donnell, who farmed 53 acres, was forgiven £3 of his rent when he fell seriously ill in 1896.¹⁴

Changes in tenure, whether occasioned by death, sale, or transfer, were carefully scrutinised by Rochfort, and any outstanding arrears were not tolerated. In 1895, when John Nagle of Coolhonon felt that he had grown too old to work the farm efficiently, his two sons, William, who was a curate and Patrick, who lived on the farm offered to take an assignment of the holding and work it for the benefit of the family. When Rochfort examined Nagle's record, he discovered considerable irregularities in rent payments between 1880 and 1885, which had resulted in Nagle being two and a half years in arrears. These, the family's solicitor David Higgins explained, had been the consequence of a series of heavy losses Nagle had experienced, when eight of his dairy cows, seven two-year-olds, and one yearling had died from pneumonia, six breeding ewes were stolen, and fifteen killed by dogs. To re-stock his lands, Nagle had been obliged to allow his rent to run in arrears, which he had then struggled to clear. Rochfort agreed to the transfer of the land, but only on condition that all arrears were fully discharged and a half year's rent paid in advance.¹⁵

Prospective tenants seeking to take on a farm were inspected with similar caution. In 1894, Joseph Brien of Cahir, recently returned from America, applied for Miss Doherty's farm in Ballydrehid. When Rochfort made enquiries locally, he discovered that although Brien had a good reputation as a steady man, he had very little money. As a result, Rochfort told Brien that there was no immediate prospect of the farm being let to him but that he would bear Brien in mind.

Tenants improving their holdings commonly turned to Rochfort for financial assistance, and were usually provided with a small allowance. Thomas Coffey, who had a pub in Barton, had his arrears forgiven when he repaired two cottages in Fethard, and James Lynch of Ballydrehid was given £4 9s towards thatching his house in 1893.¹⁶ In 1892, Michael Duggan decided to erect a small barn on his farm at Ballidrehid and wrote to Rochfort to seek a contribution on the grounds that 'I have thatched Houses and they are very expensive in fact the[y] take all the straw that grows on my land I always paid my rent with punctuality when others did not do so and under these Circunstances [sic] I trust you Honor will not refuse me.' Rochfort didn't, and gave Duggan £3 towards the barn.¹⁷

Often the sum of money promised to a tenant towards improvements came with conditions. When Michael Harris applied for financial assistance with the construction of a cow house on his farm at Ballydrehid in 1901, Rochfort granted him £3 on condition that 'the whole length (30 ft) is covered with galvanized iron and that the same is properly secured'. The money promised to Harris was deducted from his rent after the building was inspected and completed to Rochfort's satisfaction.

William Rochfort did not take kindly to anyone who tried to take advantage of him, as Mary Jane Sayers came to learn to her cost. She and her husband Henry, an agricultural implement agent, were a well-to-do couple who owned property on Main Street, Fethard (fig. 4). In 1892, Mrs Sayers embarked upon an ambitious scheme to repair one of the houses in her possession and make it suitable 'for a respectable person to reside in'. The



Fig. 4: Postcard of Main Street, Fethard, c. 1905 (The Leonard Collection, UL).

outlay turned out to be much heavier than she had anticipated. The house required a new staircase, the roof had to be replaced, and the upper storey was in such a bad condition that it needed to be rebuilt. Having spent nearly £200 on building works, Mrs Sayers wrote to Rochfort seeking a generous allowance to recoup her losses in some measure.¹⁸ When no reply was forthcoming, her husband Henry wrote a note to the agent, reminding him of his promise to help Mrs Sayers. Rochfort however had no recollection of such a promise:

I have always regarded the rent paid by Mrs Sayers to Lord Lismore on the nature of a ground rent, the repairs and improvements on the premises being a matter that solely concerns the tenant. I have some difficulty in entertaining the question of making you any allowance but on the payment of one and a half years rent if made on or before 15th December next Lord Lismore will contribute £2 (two pounds) towards the outlay on the house in question.¹⁹

Sayers was appalled by Rochfort's gesture, pointing out that the contribution amounted to just one percent on the outlay which his wife had made.²⁰ Things went from bad to worse, when Mrs Sayers paid the required rent but forgot to include eight shillings poor rate, from which she had been exempted during the twelve months the construction works were under way. Rochfort returned the cheque, and when Mrs Sayers failed not only to forward the correct sum but to meet the next rent payment, Rochfort instructed the estate solicitor to recover the money. Mrs Sayers was outraged. 'My Father the late John Richardson of Belline was one of Lord Bessborough's Land Agents', she wrote tartly when sending the correct fee to Rochfort, '& certainly this proceeding is very new to me accustomed as I was to the Estate office at Belline & knowing Lord Lismore as my Father did down there.'²¹ Rochfort did not engage in a war of words, merely forwarded her a receipt for rent paid.

Michael Duggan of Ballydrehid also learnt the hard lesson that unless improvements carried out by tenants had a direct benefit to Viscount Lismore, no financial assistance was forthcoming. In 1895, he undertook to drain a boggy field, which took several months to complete. In March 1896, Duggan wrote to William Rochfort to seek compensation for his long and toilsome labour:

Had I known it would be such a hardship to myself and my children, I would not commence it but I want to tell your honour it grew a poisonous weed which is called lea: And when eaten by sheep they die by it many of them died grazing on it. Mr. Gallohar had seen it one day as he was passing he can tell you how toilsome it was but he had not seen half the labour at that time[.] It is there to be seen to any man of dignity or rank that it was not done without expence and hard toiling in cold and wet. So if I do not be recompenced for it, Every man may say there is no use in honest labour.²²

While Rochfort was not unsympathetic to Duggan's efforts, his reply brought little comfort to the farmer: 'I fully admit that you are a hard working and improving tenant', he wrote, 'but as the improvements will be entirely for your own advantage I cannot advise Lord Lismore to make you any allowance therefore.'²³

Inconvenient Lane. PH3 / 366 (3)
 There has been nothing done to this lane up to the present
 it is in a very bad state nearly impassable Richard Ryan
 States they intended to Commence repairing it about the end
 of this week
 Dated this 11th June 1896
 W. Gallagher

Fig. 5: Note from William Gallagher complaining about the condition of a lane.

Communal building works carried out by tenants were however looked upon favourably. In February 1895, Rochfort agreed to contribute £4 towards the repairs of a lane in Lisnatubbrid, which Richard Ryan had undertaken. The condition of the money was that the work was completed to Rochfort's satisfaction before 1 May.²⁴ However, on 11 June William Gallagher reported to Rochfort that nothing yet had been done to the lane, which by now was in such a bad state of repair as to make it nearly impassable (fig. 5).²⁵ Stiff words were exchanged with Richard Ryan, and work got rapidly under way. On 6 July, Ryan was proud to report that 'we have the borheen in good repair I paid the men that worked it as far as the 4 £ went we gave help our selfs tores [towards] it[.] it is very well done.'²⁶

Local disputes often involved the agent, who was called upon to act as an arbitrator. This however was something Rochfort assiduously avoided. When William Walsh of Mullenaranky wrote to him to complain about a contractor who was quarrying stones on his land and in doing so damaging Walsh's passage, Rochfort effectively told him to go away. 'If the road contractor is interfering with the passage through your holding by quarrying stones', he reasoned, 'you clearly have your legal remedy against him'.²⁷ On the other hand, misdemeanours which affected or damaged viscount Lismore's property were taken extremely seriously. Edmond Sheehy of Ballydrehid got into trouble in 1899, when he cut a large ash tree which grew on the centre of a narrow boundary fence between his and the neighbouring farm. Sheehy, who had cut down the tree because it was doing damage to his haggard, had no idea that he had acted illegally. Initially, he was expected to pay compensation but as the ash tree had grown on the boundary of not only two farms but two different landlords, confusion arose as to which of them should receive the money! In the end, the matter was resolved by dropping the demand for payment and instead issuing Sheehy with a stiff warning not to do such a thing again.²⁸ A year later, John Ryan of Ballydrehid had his abatement of 10% withdrawn and was threatened with eviction when it transpired that he was in the habit of inviting people to hunt rabbits on

his farm every Sunday and, to ensure the success of the event, was obstructing Viscount Lismore's rabbit catcher in his work (fig. 6).²⁹

Conclusion

The voice of a tenant farmer is one not commonly heard in archival collections. As late as 1901, twenty-one per cent of the population of Ireland remained illiterate or able to read but not write and therefore unable to leave behind written evidence of their lives.³⁰ The letters of viscount Lismore's tenants in County Tipperary, combined with Rochfort's observations in the rent book, offer an exceptional view of life in a small rural community at the end of the nineteenth century. The documents also coincide with an important watershed in Irish history. In 1903, the year after the rent book closes, the passing of the so-called Wyndham Act resulted in cheap loans being advanced to tenants to enable them to purchase land, while landlords were granted compensation and bonuses to make the prospect of selling more agreeable. This, and the 1909 the Birrell Act, which made it compulsory for a landlord to sell to a tenant who expressed a wish to buy his holding, ended landlordism in Ireland and transformed the lives of Irish farmers.

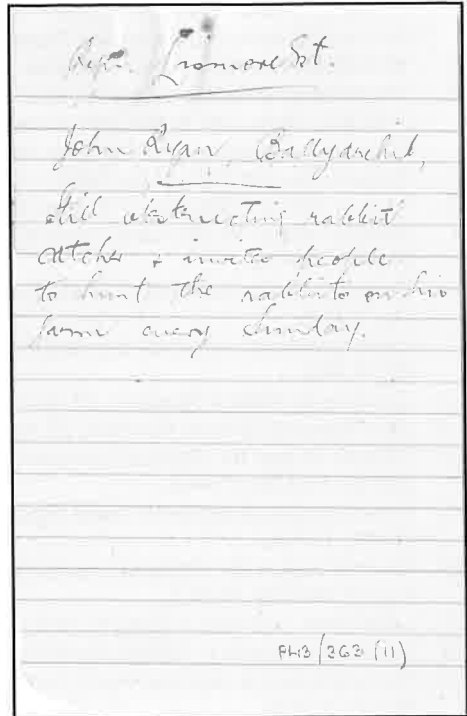


Fig. 6: Note complaining about John Ryan obstructing Lord Lismore's rabbit catcher.

The two land acts inevitably also heralded the end of the profession of land agents, a fact of which William Rochfort was only too aware. In June 1903, as the Wyndham Act was passing through Parliament, he wrote a letter to the editor of *The Times* to warn its readers of the effects of the bill on agents, and to highlight the important role these men played in society. 'As grand jurors, county magistrates, Poor Law guardians, and members of various country board', he observed, 'they have been prominent working members of the former county government administration, and during years of land agitation, comprising periods of great stress, responsibility, and personal danger, they have stood faithfully to their posts, promoting law and order, and using their position as a pacifying influence between conflicting interests'.³¹ Rochfort's rent books and correspondence not only offer a glimpse of a community on the cusp of a radical change but mark the end of an era of the Irish land agent.

References

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- 2 Smyth, William J. 'Estate Records and the Making of the Irish Landscape: An Example from County Tipperary.' *Irish Geography*, vol. 9, no. 1 (1976), pp. 30-31.
- 3 <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie/LandedEstates/jsp/estate-show.jsp?id=2284> [04 Jul 2018].

- 4 Donnelly, J. S. Jr. *Land and People of Nineteenth-Century Cork: The Rural Economy and the Land Question*. London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975, p. 173.
- 5 'Mr William Rochfort. An Appreciation.' *The Irish Times*, 14 September 1940.
- 6 The tenants' ledger for Viscount Lismore's estates in Clonmel, Fethard, and Ballydrehid (P43/80), forms part of the Tim Looney Papers, Special Collections and Archives Department, University of Limerick, hereafter referred to as TLPUL.
- 7 Richard Ryan to William Rochfort, 3 October 1893. P43/359 (2), TLPUL.
- 8 Note by William Gallagher, 11 June 1895. P43/371 (4), TLPUL.
- 9 Tenants' ledger for Viscount Lismore's estates in Clonmel, Fethard, and Ballydrehid, p. 7. P43/80, TLPUL.
- 10 Correspondence between Patrick Ryan and William Rochfort, December 1898. P43/364 (2)-(4), TLPUL.
- 11 Correspondence between Edmond Sheehy and William Rochfort, March 1896. P43/372 (2)-(3), TLPUL.
- 12 J. Keane to William Rochfort, 27 November 1891. P43/316, TLPUL.
- 13 John Byron to William Rochfort, 29 April 1910 [?]. P43/302 (10), TLPUL.
- 14 Tenants' ledger for Viscount Lismore's estates in Clonmel, Fethard, and Ballydrehid, pp. 4, 8, and 52. P43/80, TLPUL.
- 15 Correspondence between David Higgins and William Rochfort, November 1895. P43/351 (2)-(3), TLPUL.
- 16 Tenants' ledger for Viscount Lismore's estates in Clonmel, Fethard, and Ballydrehid, pp. 20 and 66. P43/80, TLPUL.
- 17 Letter from and note relating to Michael Duggan, May 1892. P43/315 (1)-(2), TLPUL.
- 18 Mary Jane Sayers to William Rochfort, 11 May 1893. P43/367 (1), TLPUL.
- 19 Correspondence between Henry Sayers and William Rochfort, December 1893. P43/367 (3)-(4), TLPUL.
- 20 Henry Sayers to William Rochfort, 14 December 1893. P43/367 (5), TLPUL.
- 21 Mary Jane Sayers to William Rochfort, 19 July 1894. P43/367 (9), TLPUL.
- 22 Michael Duggan to William Rochfort, 30 March 1896. P43/315 (5), TLPUL.
- 23 William Rochfort to Michael Duggan, 7 April 1896. P43/315 (6), TLPUL.
- 24 William Rochfort to Richard Ryan, 4 February 1895. P43/366 (2), TLPUL.
- 25 Note from William Gallagher to William Rochfort, 11 June 1895. P43/366 (3), TLPUL.
- 26 Richard Ryan to William Rochfort, 6 July 1895. P43/366 (5), TLPUL.
- 27 William Rochfort to William Walsh, 10 October 1895. P43/376 (7), TLPUL.
- 28 Notes and correspondence relating to Edmond Sheehy, December 1899. P43/372 (4)-(5), TLPUL.
- 29 Notes and correspondence relating to John Ryan, 1900-1902. P43/363 (6), (9), (11)-(12), TLPUL.
- 30 *Census of Ireland, 1901*. Part II. General Report, with Illustrative Maps and Diagrams, Tables, and Appendix. Dublin: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1902, p. 58.
- 31 'Land Agents under the Irish Land Bill – A Letter to the Editor' by William Rochfort; *The Times*, 1 June 1903.