

# A LOCAL EPISODE IN THE ‘LAND WAR’

BY JOE CANNING



**Map showing townlands of Knockduff,  
Kilmonaghan and Serse**

The authorities in Ireland faced many difficult issues in the course of the nineteenth century. One of these kept cropping up at various times during the century, particularly in the latter half, and the next century had begun, before a satisfactory solution was arrived at. This was the ‘Land Question’ – the relationship between landlord and tenant farmer. It led to the setting up of a number of government inquiries and the subsequent publishing of their reports, the passing of several acts of parliament, the authorship of a lot of books and pamphlets, and, unfortunately, to a lot of violence too. A campaign of agrarian strife, which began in 1879 and continued with decreasing intensity until 1903, came to be known as the ‘Land War’.

The land question was not the only issue dominating political life in the latter part of the nineteenth

century. There was also the national question – the quest for independence from Britain. Some of the leaders in the land question tried to keep the two issues apart, but it was inevitable that they should impinge on each other, and this can be seen in the episode described here. While legislation played an important part in solving the land question there are some matters of concern to farmers which cannot be solved by legislation, and these are weather conditions and prices. It was a series of bad harvests and falling prices that led to this dispute.

The location was the former Drumbanagher Estate. This estate, which contained over 10,000 acres, would be familiar to people living between Poyntzpass and Newry, and older people would remember the very fine castle that once stood to the west of the road to Newry. Up to the second decade of the nineteenth century, the estate belonged to the Moore family. The head of the family at that time was Sir John Moore and, as well as being a landlord, he was also a Member of the Irish Parliament. Along with two others he set up the Newry Bank. This bank flourished during the Napoleonic wars when the Irish economy was buoyant. However, the depression that followed the end of the war caused the collapse of the bank and it closed in 1816. The biggest loser was Sir John, as he had invested more money than his partners and was committed to underwriting the debts. He was forced to sell the estate and as the proceeds were not enough to clear the debt, he ended up in comparative poverty.

About nine thousand acres of Moore’s estate were purchased by Maxwell Close, and the three remaining townlands, with which this article is concerned, came into the possession of a family called Dowglass, who lived near Crumlin in Co. Antrim. The townlands in question are: Serse, containing almost 440 acres, Knockduff, 185 acres, and Kilmonaghan, 182 acres.

As well as being an excellent example of the problems of the landlord-tenant relationship, the reporting of this episode brings out very clearly the difference in political outlook of the two local papers, the ‘*Newry Telegraph*’ and the ‘*Newry Reporter*’, the former being conservative in outlook and a defender of the landlord interest, while the latter was more liberal and a supporter of the tenants.

*To Thomas Douglas Esq. etc*

*The petition of the undersigned and subjoined tenants  
residing in the Townlands of Kilmnaghan, Knockduff and Serree.*

*Most Humbly Showeth*

*That we respectively beg to approach your honour with all the high respect, veneration and confidence due to your most respectable character and we most humbly hope that the important subject on which we presume to Address you will be found to be entitled to your most serious and kind consideration.*

*Your petitioners beg leave to inform you that they have for some time past fully expected such a reduction of their rent as time and circumstances required, they or most of them having taken their little holdings when the price of agricultural holdings was at its height and when the linen trade (the staple ... of our country) was flourishing but both alas! for many years have been so depressed that no man (unless he had previously accumulated property) could pay those rents which were willingly and cheerfully paid in other times, a time, Sir, when the plough, the spinning wheel and shuttle seemed to vie with each other and go hand in hand in promoting the interest and welfare of both Landlord and Tenant, of this you are no doubt well aware.*

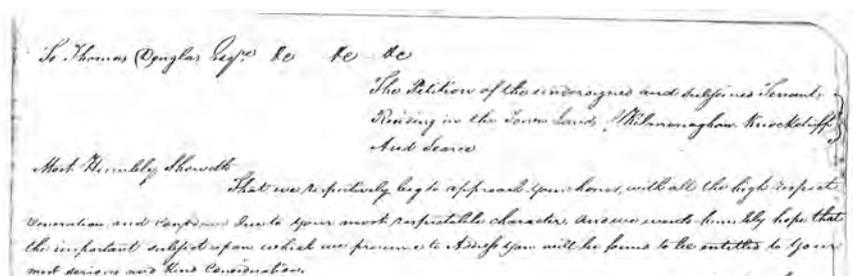
*That formerly most of your tenants were able to keep a cow or a pig and with a little meal and some potatoes to support their families tolerably decent: but now some of them cannot pay their rent by the hardest industry, only living on potatoes and salt, the following lease may illustrate the fact.*

*One of your tenants William Porter of Kilmnaghan has kept an account of his year's expenditure on his small holding and found that he was a loser even though he did not bring his labour 7 less of time at all into account, and this one of your petitioners like most, if not all the rest is well known to have abstained from the use or abuse of spirits, beer, ale or any intoxicating liquor for years, some of your tenantry are not able to pay their rent, being in arrears with all that industry honesty good conduct and perseverance could affect. The Minister of Religion and all their neighbours can testify this fact and your rent rolls and most respectable agent can inform you of some being in arrears who would most willingly pay up but have not the means.*

*That the petitioners beg to return you their most sincere and grateful thanks for your kindness in having a school erected for the good purpose you intended. They one and all look forward to you with hope and confidence for every other amelioration that lies in your power. They humbly and most respectfully implore and entreat Sir that you will be pleased to institute forthwith an enquiry into this situation and condition and make such reduction in their rents as the justice and expediency of the case may point out May you live long to enjoy the well earned confidence of your tenantry ever willing to work and maintain that character which they have hitherto borne . . . . .*

**Draft of the petition sent to  
Thomas Douglas (Dowglass) in 1887**

**Sample of  
original petition**



The dispute arose from the refusal of Captain George Dowglass to grant the tenants a reduction of 20% in their rent. The case had been presented early in February 1888 by three tenants, namely Hugh Gordon of Serse, Edward Lockhart of Kilmonaghan and Benjamin Thompson of Knockduff, acting on behalf of the other tenants. The matter first came to public attention in the *“Belfast Morning News”* of 1<sup>st</sup> March, 1888, with the publication, at the request of Edward Lockhart, of three letters. The first of these letters, dated 21<sup>st</sup> February, was from Joseph English, Captain Dowglass’s estate agent, to Benjamin Thompson, in which he stated that he had presented the request for the rent reduction to Captain Dowglass, that the latter could not agree to it and that the tenants should be ready to pay their rent, which had been outstanding since the previous November, by 1<sup>st</sup> March.



**Edward Lockhart**

The second letter, signed by eighteen tenants, informed English that they had considered his letter and had decided to stand by what they described as their *“moderate”* request for the reduction, and to abide by the consequences. They went on to point out that, if there was a breakdown in the good relations that had previously existed between Captain Dowglass and themselves, it would be his responsibility. In his reply English, basically ignoring what the tenants had said, told them that he would be at the schoolhouse (in Jerretspass) on 1<sup>st</sup> March, to give them the opportunity of settling the rent *“before further costs are incurred”*.

A deputation of tenants met English, when he came to Jerretspass, to repeat their request. He replied that he had no instructions to give more than 10%, but the tenants refused to accept it and left without paying their rent.



**Jerretspass School**  
*(built by Thomas Dowglass)*

When tenants refused to pay their rent the landlord had a number of options. In this case Captain Dowglass obtained authority for the seizure of some of the tenants’ property, the sale of which would cover the amount of rent owed.

The announcement of the seizure of chattels was ratified, at the sheriff’s office in Lurgan, on the morning of Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> March. The sales were to take place on the following Tuesday, starting at Lockhart’s farm at 12 o’clock.

The following description of the event is taken mainly from the *“Newry Telegraph”*. Lockhart’s farmyard was near Goraghwood railway station, so the reporter travelled there by the 11.08 train from Edward Street Station in Newry. About two or three hundred people had already gathered. They were either walking up and down or standing about in groups discussing the situation of affairs. In the farmyard were the Sub-Sheriff of County Armagh, Mr W. H. Moore, solicitor; Mr Locke, Portadown, auctioneer; and Mr Wm. Riddell, the bailiff.

Between the time of the reporter’s arrival, and 12 o’clock the time set for the auction, repeated visits were paid by Mr Lockhart and the sub-sheriff to the house, evidently with a view to coming to a settlement. However, shortly after 12 o’clock, the sub-sheriff and the auctioneer entered the haggard with a view to disposing of a large quantity of hay, which was stored under a fine wooden shed. The sub-sheriff announced that the sale was by virtue of a writ at the suit of Captain Dowglass, against Mr Edward Lockhart, for the sum of £120 9s 11d debt and costs. The auctioneer then added: *“and the terms will be cash”*. At these words a perfect storm of shouts and laughter burst forth. When the noise had subsided:

**Mr Peter Byrne:** *“Might I ask you, Mr Sheriff, if this is an ordinary debt or is it a rack rent?”*

**The Sub-Sheriff:** *“The writ does not tell me which”*.

**Mr Byrne:** *“I understand it is for a rack rent”*.

**The auctioneer:** *“How much for the hay?”*

**A voice** from the crowd: *“If you give credit, you may get a bid, but no one here has any money”*.

**Other voices:** *"I will give you four pence!"* (laughter).  
*"A penny here!"* (renewed laughter);  
*"Are you selling the childer?"* [referring to some youngsters who had clambered on to the hay] (great laughter).

The crowd then began to close in upon the sub-sheriff and his auctioneer, who bore the pressure good-humouredly, the latter asking for bids and being answered by shouts and laughter which drowned his voice.

**Mr. John Rantin:** *"How much of this is for costs?"*

**The sub-sheriff:** *"£5 16s"*. (Groans and hisses)

At this juncture the crowd began to hustle the sub-sheriff and the auctioneer, and as the ground sloped towards the hay shed it looked very dangerous, as if either had fallen, he must have been trampled upon. When the hustling had proceeded for two or three minutes, Head-Constable McQuaid, with three other policemen, forced their way through the crowd.



**Kilmonaghan House, Edward Lockhart's home**

Mr. Lockhart, addressing the crowd, asked them to let the sale go on quietly. The sheriff had treated him very decently and fairly, and they had no right to ill-treat him.

**The sub-sheriff:** *"I have been very badly treated"*.

**Mr. Lockhart:** *"I am very sorry, and if I knew who did it I would put him out of that"*.

**The sub-sheriff:** *"I am here trying to do my duty in the most agreeable way, and this is the return I get. If I have to come back again, I will bring a force that will clear the county. I am only one man against four or five hundred, and it is a fine manly state of things for a crowd to kick and beat me"*.

**Mr Lockhart:** *"I am sure I am sorry. It is not my fault"*.

**The sub-sheriff:** *"You looked on and let it be done. It is a very manly thing, and a thing to be proud of – four or five hundred against one man"*.

**Mr. John Rantin:** *"You staggered. You must have been beered"*.

**The sub-sheriff:** *"I saw people here whose faces I will remember, and who were urging the crowd. You, sir (addressing Mr Peter Byrne) I have noticed you"*.

**Mr. Byrne:** *"If you accuse me, I say it's a lie"*.

**The sub-sheriff:** *"It is very easy to use bad language"*.

**The auctioneer:** *"It is not a manly thing to try and injure a couple of men"*.

**A voice:** *"You have not been injured"*.

**The auctioneer:** *"I say we have been"*.

A farmer named Hanna, from Leish, here addressed the sub-sheriff, and said he should have a sufficient force there to enable the sale to be held. He was labouring under a great mistake if he thought the people of the North were going to stand quietly by and allow themselves to be robbed. They protested against being robbed. They were there as one man to protest; and as the law allowed it, the sheriff would have to take a sufficient force to carry out the sale, as he should have done that day – remarks which were greeted with cheers; *"this sale cannot be carried out now"*, he added.

**The sub-sheriff:** *"This sale is adjourned"*.

This announcement was received with tremendous cheering and shouts of *"Cheers for the Plan of Campaign"*. (The Plan of Campaign was devised as a response to tenant distress. It involved the tenants offering what they considered fair rents when the landlords refused to give reductions. When these were refused the money would go into a fund for the support of the tenants in the event of eviction. The Plan operated mainly in the south and west).

Hanna was chaired up and down the road, and finally a move was made to Jerrettspass, where preparations were made for a meeting. A mineral water van was utilized as a temporary platform, and, on the motion of Hanna, the chair was taken by Edward Lockhart.

Edward Lockhart himself was the first speaker. He said that they had proved to the world that they were not going to be tramped upon in the way in which landlords would wish to tread upon them, and he concluded by saying: *"It is my day today for having the sheriff in, and it may be yours tomorrow. Considering that, and that the law is no protection to you against a system that has ruined the country – the system of landlordism – they should neither stop nor stay until they cleared them out bag and baggage"* – remarks which were greeted with great cheering.



**Edward Lockhart's yard where the auctions took place**

He was followed by a number of other speakers. The first of these was Francis Brooks from Knockanarney in County Down. He proposed a resolution to the effect that the people of the district protested against the action of Captain Dowglass, in refusing to comply with the modest

request for 20 per cent reduction. He referred to the fact that there would probably be seizures in his own townland (which was owned by Captain Brooke of County Fermanagh) and said that he hoped to see all there. The resolution was seconded by local auctioneer, John Lockhart.

The next speaker was a Mr Eiver Magennis from Poyntzpass. He began by paying tribute to Edward Lockhart's father, describing him as "noble and honourable". He said he had come "to assist at opening a movement which would not cease until the Irish landlords were leaving the country with a brass band on top of the Mourne Mountains playing the 'Rogue's March'", a remark which was greeted with laughter and cheering. If he had been consulted on this matter he would have recommended the Plan of Campaign. He was glad to see so many of his Protestant and Presbyterian neighbours there. They were one united people, and in spite of removables or Star Chambers, when they were wanted they would be there. He concluded by saying that they knew that the landlord might succeed on this occasion "but this time twelve month he would regret the reply he had made to their request that day".

Magennis was followed by William Hanna of Leish. He asked his listeners to make sure that the local shopkeepers did not suffer as a result of their protest. His concluding message was: "The tenantry now had the power in their hands, and they could say to the landlord: 'What I d- please is your rent'". The next speaker was Mr James Smith of Glenn who spoke of the experience of the tenants on his estate, the landlord of which was Mr. Innes. He was followed by Mr Peter Byrne. He said it was his belief that landlordism had received a blow from which it would not recover in a hurry. They owed a debt of gratitude to Edward Lockhart for his manly stand against landlordism and for the grand example he had given to the tenants in other districts. Mr Lockhart and their friends in their action were not thinking of their own interests but the tenants who were poorer than they were.

### EDITORIAL REACTION

In the same issue in which it reported the incident, the 'Newry Telegraph' also had an editorial on the event. It complained of the "absence of a chivalrous spirit" on the part of those who harassed people who were only carrying out their duty, and said that the incident would cast a slur on the reputation "for fair dealing which has hitherto characterized that portion of the province". It then went on: "It is perfectly plain that those engaged in the affair permitted themselves to be made the catspaws of those who had their own axes to grind; and that their action was seized upon by the propagandists of a certain political creed with the greatest avidity. We are glad to know that the respectable inhabitants of the neighbouring townland of Mullaghglass universally held aloof; and that even the townland immediately affected afforded but a small contingent to the gathering. Glenn, and everybody knows how that district is constituted, provided the bulk of the protesters, and a perusal of the speeches will enable the general public to form an

opinion as to why they crossed the border to poke their fingers in another pie". Stating that it always believed in conciliation, it concluded by saying; "We are persuaded that the action of those who took a prominent part in the scenes at Kilmonnaghan will not be approved, except by those who are glad to use such manifestations as a means to the end, which they have in view. It is a pity that those whom they are pleased to use as instruments are not capable of discerning the cloven hoof".

The "Newry Reporter" could not let this pass without comment, which came two days later. It began by saying: "The spirit of the 'Newry Telegraph' has been deeply moved by the ominous but indisputable fact that three Protestant farmers – one of them a master of an Orange Lodge – have stood forth boldly as invincible champions of their brother tenants, in resisting exorbitant rent". Referring to the 'absence of a chivalrous spirit', it said that there was an absence of it on the part of the landlord "such as might have been expected from a soldier – towards those who were doing their duty by their fellow-sufferers in the most kindly way". It then took issue with the 'Telegraph's use of language, saying that it did not use plain English – why, for instance, when it talked about those with their own axes to grind, it could not simply have said "nationalists".



**Markethill Courthouse**

### SOME TENANTS IN COURT

Some of the tenants had to appear in court because of their failure to pay the rent. They were brought before the Quarter Sessions in Markethill on Saturday 7th April. The presiding judge was William Kisbey, County Court Judge of Armagh and Louth. Mr Samuel H. Monroe, solicitor, Armagh, appeared for Captain Dowglass, and Mr. James Williamson, solicitor, Armagh, appeared for all the tenants. The first case was one against Thomas Reid, and on being called, Mr Williamson said that with one exception the only question was one of time.

Mr. Monroe said that the Plan of Campaign had been adopted on the property, and that the landlord could consent to no time being given. He had instructions to oppose any application for extension of time. Mr Williamson then stated that of the tenants for whom he appeared, one man was over eighty years of age, and had been an Orangeman for over sixty years. Another

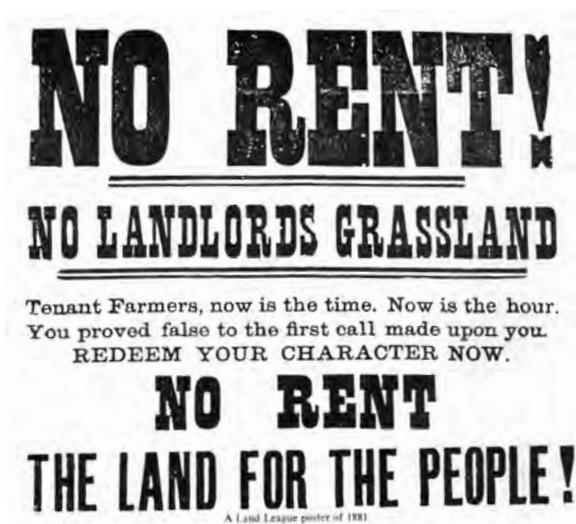
was the actual sitting Master of the local Orange Lodge, and of the other eleven for whom he appeared only three were Roman Catholics, and that not one of the tenants had either adopted the Plan of Campaign or joined the National League.

Thomas Reid was then sworn, and deposed that he was unable to pay and swore that he had been an Orangeman for over sixty years, and was now an Orangeman, and that he was now over eighty years of age, and he hoped that the brethren (meaning the Orangemen) would see him laid in his grave.

His Honour stated that he had nothing to do with whatever political aspect the case might have, and requested Mr. Williamson to go on with the case. His Honour then gave Reid a stay to 1<sup>st</sup> July, and if £20-00 were then paid a further stay would be allowed to the 15<sup>th</sup> October.

The next case was against Francis Carr brought for £16 7s 8d, one year's rent due, at November 1887. The tenant was examined and a stay granted to 1<sup>st</sup> July. The next was against James Byrne, and was for £1 13s 8d, rent for a small holding. His Honour refused a stay. The next was against David Gordon, and was brought for £23 18s 2d, one year's rent due the previous November. The tenant being examined deposed his inability to pay, and he was granted a stay.

At this stage of the proceedings, an understanding was reached between the two solicitors to the effect that a stay would be granted of one half year's rent to be paid on 7<sup>th</sup> May and the other half on 1<sup>st</sup> September. The stays were taken down by the registrar in the Crown Book.



#### *Land League Poster*

In the issue of the *Newry Reporter* that carried the report of the court proceedings there was a letter from Edward Lockhart. In defending his recent action he gave an account of his dealings with Captain Dowglass going back to the passing of the Land Act in 1881.

Because of poor harvests and other factors in 1886 the tenant farmers had difficulty in paying their rents, and Lockhart concludes his letter as follows: “*Last year he (i.e. Dowglass) said that it was reasonable that he should give an abatement of 10% and extension of time, but it appears that I am debarred from participating in it because I failed to remit a balance of £12 at the proper time, although he has allowed it to others since. This year is fifty per cent worse than last year, and he will give nothing but what the law gives – not even that, as he will only give it on the half year, and he will take from us by the law what the land did not produce, regardless of what is to become of us. What are we to do? Are we to beg, borrow or steal it? Beg we won’t; borrow we won’t, for we have borrowed too long; steal we won’t for it would break a higher law than he has at his back. Will we rob our families and voluntarily become paupers to satisfy his greed. That for the sake of ten per cent – in some cases seven and a half per cent – he would sell us up, and if necessary throw us on the roadside. No, we have a higher duty to perform. We have the well-being of ourselves and our families to look after. We have our neighbours’ and our country’s welfare to look after, and if we are to be robbed we will have no hand in it. We have resolved to let the law come and take it from us, and thus expose our precious, honourable landlord. Hoping that the above statement of facts (which can be corroborated) will throw some light on the part we have taken in this matter,*

*I am,*

*Yours truly,*

*Edward Lockhart,*

*Kilmonaghan, Jerrettspass, 9<sup>th</sup> April, 1888”.*

#### **SHERIFF’S SALE RESUMED**

The second attempt to hold the sale of tenants’ property for the recovery of rent took place on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> April. Both local papers reported on the event – the *Reporter’s* account being longer because it contained a lot of comment as well as recounting the facts. The sale began at Edward Lockhart’s farm in Kilmonaghan. In order to prevent a repetition of what the *Telegraph* describes as “*the disgraceful proceedings*” of the previous occasion, the authorities decided to draft in a sufficient force to make the law respected. The *Telegraph* goes on: “*Accordingly 100 police, under the command of County-Inspector Dobbyn of Armagh and District-Inspectors Davies of Newry, Bigley of Lurgan, and Leathem of Portadown, arrived at Goraghwood by the 11-30 train, and started for the scene of the first sale, which was held at Mr Lockhart’s, Kilmonaghan*”. The *Reporter’s* account of the arrival of the police and officials is slightly different; it says: “*Car loads of police, emergency men, sheriffs’ officers and all the other paraphernalia of the Tory government in Ireland might have been seen early last Tuesday morning proceeding up the Armagh road on the way to Jerrettspass. There was some difficulty in procuring cars, all the Catholic and some of the Protestant car-men refusing to convey the police for any such purpose. However cars were eventually obtained*”.



***Jerrettspass Farmers' Association C. 1920. Edward Lockhart circled.***

The *Telegraph* noted the presence of what it calls “the Sheepbridge Nationalist Band”, which it says, “was out acting as scouts and bringing in the stragglers”. It continues: “County-Inspector Dobbyn went forward with a body of his men, and stopping the band, informed them that if they played past the house he would take means to disperse them, and he would not be accountable for what the result might be. The spokesman of the band gave a guarantee that they would not play any music going past the house. The band was then allowed to pass, and the contingent which it had gathered, composed, as it was, of Nationalists from other townlands and a number of farm labourers – very few of the farmers of the district taking part in the proceedings – proceeded into the yard where the sale was to be held. The constabulary were then drawn up along the road with the exception of the ‘baton men’ who went into the yard to prevent any of the officers of the law being molested or hustled”.

The sub-sheriff, the auctioneer and the bailiff then entered the premises. After the sub-sheriff had read the writ the auction began with the auctioneer announcing that there would be no auction fees and that the terms were cash, the latter statement being greeted with laughter and someone asking where would they get the cash from. A horse and cart were the first items put up for sale, and, although there were bids from two persons described by the *Reporter* as ‘emergency men’ they, along with all the other items were purchased by Lockhart himself, “amid the cheers of

hundreds” according to that paper.

What happened next is described as follows by the same paper: “After the purchase of the requisite quantity of property, the auctioneer and officers took up their papers and (to be scriptural) walked. The next move was in the direction of Mr Benjamin Thompson’s farm in Knockduff. The whole train – including the sheriff’s party, the people and police – was not less than a quarter of a mile long. Accompanied by the Sheepbridge Band, playing ‘Farewell Killeavey’, ‘Auld lang syne’, and other popular airs, the crowd passed by the Jerrettspass school house, up ‘The Round’, and, after a mile’s steady hill-climbing entered the Orange quarter of Knockduff. A similar scene has never been witnessed there in the recollection of the oldest inhabitant”.

The *Reporter* describes Benjamin Thompson as, “an eminently religious man, a careful and thrifty farmer, and a tenant of whom any landlord could be proud”. It then continues: “He is naturally very popular in the district, and cheer upon cheer went up for him when he was raised on the shoulders of two of the crowd and carried round in front of the police”.

The auction had the same result as the previous one, with Thompson buying back his own stock. With regard to the sale at Hugh Gordon’s the *Reporter* states: “There would be little necessity to refer to the scene at Mr Hugh Gordon’s – a man of the same type as the other two, with the difference that he is the Master of an Orange Lodge – were it not for a sell, in more senses than one, which an enthusiastic

emergency man received for his fervid zeal. A nag worth, on an exaggeration, about thirty shillings, was led forth from a stable. Scarcely was its head out when the emergency man shouted loudly £12. 'Give it to him', said the considerate crowd, and assuredly he deserved something after standing five long hours in the wet, bidding well and loyally, and being jeered at by the people present. He got his purchase, and the landlord is congratulated on his acquisition. Shortly after this, Mr Gordon being compelled to adopt the same system as his neighbours, the party descended the hill, the 'war horse' in front, to the music of the 'spirit-stirring drum'.

### SUBSEQUENT MEETING

After the departure of the officials and police, the tenants and their supporters held what the *Telegraph* describes as a 'consolation meeting' at Jerretspass. Benjamin Thompson was – in the quaint language of the time – "moved to the chair". In the course of his remarks he spoke of the ignominy for the landlord of having to use British bayonets to exact a rack rent and of justice being on the side of the tenants, whose supporters could be numbered in thousands. However, he said, "it was not the landlords that they had to blame for the arbitrary government that supported their exorbitant claims. The blame lay with the tenant farmers themselves, for they had hitherto assisted these men to make the laws for themselves. They ran with their eyes open to increase the power of their oppressors. The tenant farmers were hoodwinked by the pretensions of the landlord party at electioneering times to vote for tenant right. He need not tell them, however, what tenant right was. It was landlord right", a statement which was greeted with much laughter.

The next speaker was Edward Lockhart. He praised those present for their peaceable and orderly conduct, "considering the vexatious course which the landlord has thought fit to pursue". He spoke of the correspondence with the landlord, and of how the latter's letters would end with the words "for if you don't further costs will be incurred". He went on to blame the present agent, Mr. English as being part of the problem, because before the latter's appointment as agent Captain Dowglass, "was a tolerably fair man. But this petty sessions clerk, Mr. Joseph English steps in, and I believe he has some hold on the property that none of us know anything about".

According to the *Reporter* there were repeated calls for the next speaker to address the meeting. This was Mr. Peter Byrne from Newry. He began by saying that he had been asked to propose a resolution which had just been handed to him, which was: "That we, the tenant farmers of this district, combine in the strongest manner against the latest move of the English garrison, and that we pledge ourselves to contest every inch of ground with them until the system is entirely abolished". In his remarks he said that in spite of the payment of the unjust rent the tenants had reason to congratulate themselves because they would find that Captain Dowglass

would not be so ready again to answer writs and that he would not think it a very pleasant thing to send for police at the next rent collection.

However he went on to say that he would have preferred to have acted in a different way, and he recommended the Plan of Campaign which, he said, was the only way of keeping up the battle. He commended the local tenants for standing together and said that this would ensure that no one would suffer financial loss because of the action that had been taken. Mr. Gordon might have been deprived of a horse, but if he wanted a hundred he would have them to put in his crop.

Byrne also referred to an attempt at making a seizure of goods that morning in the townland of Knockanarney just across the border in County Down. A large force of police had been drafted into the district to protect the sheriff. All arrangements were complete on the side of the authorities, but when the farms were reached nothing was visible except closed doors, a half cock of hay and a cat. The sheriff and the police had therefore to leave without achieving anything.

Next to address the meeting was William Hanna of Ballydogherty. He said that "if they had a minister of religion there he would be compelled to propose a vote of thanks to Captain Dowglass, for he had done more to promote Christianity in the county than any minister in the neighbourhood". He had taught them how to work in harmony together, how to close up their ranks, and how to confide in each other for the benefit of all. He spoke of the influence of the landlords in Parliament where they could make laws to suit themselves. Landlords should have no representation in the House of Commons, and tenants should not vote for the nominees of landlords.

The next speaker was Eiver Magennis of Poyntzpass. Like Peter Byrne, he spoke strongly in favour of the Plan of Campaign, and hoped that in twelve months' time there would be no need for someone to come from Dublin to invite them to join. He commented on the unity among the tenants irrespective of religious affiliation. His speech appears to have been a fairly passionate one. Referring to an indictment of himself and some others for having committed what he describes as "a highly illegal and unconstitutional act" he says "What I have done I would repeat, and I would double it again", and after much cheering he continues: "We are here, and we intend to remain here in spite of the English garrison. No emissary from that quarter will suck the honey that our bees have gathered. (Cheers). No garrison that protects Irish landlordism will reap the crops that we have sown. (Cheers). The land is ours, and we intend to remain on it. It is not a question of Presbyterian, Protestant or Catholic, but of one whole Irish nation, because it is our land and we intend to keep it. I think I have now qualified for the plank bed,

*but it has no terrors for me. (Cheers). We will fight this cause out to the bitter end, and we will teach a lesson to all Ulster under the insuperable bonds of the Plan of Campaign. (Cheers)*

Another Lockhart - this time John, a local auctioneer as well as a tenant farmer – was the next speaker. He stated that when he said at the previous attempted seizure that it was the proudest day of his life it was a rash statement, because this day was an even prouder one. He went on: *“I cannot but realise and value at its proper worth the assistance and support which the men of Down and Armagh have rendered us in this momentous crisis”*. He concluded by saying: *“I am not a Home Ruler yet, but if things go as they are it will not be your fault if I join the League. The fault will be with those who drive us into it, and although we are well united as it is I think the day is not far distant when we will be closer in the bonds of justice and humanity. (Cheers). In the meantime let us do our duty to ourselves and our country, and fight this battle out on fair and honourable grounds”*. (Cheers)

The meeting concluded after four other persons had spoken.

### COURT APPEARANCES

The second auction was by no means the end of this episode. It will be recalled that in its report of the first auction the *Telegraph* talked about the crowd beginning to hustle the auctioneer and the sub-sheriff, and going on to say that *“as the ground sloped towards the hay shed it looked very dangerous, as if either had fallen, he must have been trampled upon”*. It reported how the sub-sheriff had complained to Edward Lockhart about the treatment he was getting, alleging that the crowd tried to kick and beat him and that he was nearly thrown down.

Going by the *Reporter’s* account, the incident did not appear all that serious. It speaks of the officers of the court being hemmed in by a surging crowd and being *“almost jostled off the ground, when the police appeared on the scene and stood between the sheriff and the people”*. The sheriff is quoted as saying: *“It is unmanly for such a crowd to interfere with three unprotected men. I have been struck on the head and I feel it through my hat”* – a statement that had been greeted by the crowd with laughter and cheers.

However, the authorities took a more serious view of the event. On Saturday April 21<sup>st</sup> the *Reporter* published the text of summonses that had been served on the following *“respectable”* men: Peter Byrne, Newry; Laurence McCourt, Corgary; William J. Hanna, Ballydougherty; John Rantin, Money more; Thomas Woods, Maddydrumbriest; Peter Carr, Carrickrovaddy; and Bernard Rice, Hill Street, Newry. All were charged with taking part in a riot on 20<sup>th</sup> March at Kilmonaghan, while Byrne, McCourt, Rantin and Hanna were charged with *“wilfully and unlawfully”* obstructing William Moore in the execution of his duty as under-sheriff on the same occasion. All were to appear at the Courthouse, Poyntzpass on 7<sup>th</sup>

May, 1888 at twelve o’clock noon.

On May 3<sup>rd</sup> both Newry newspapers carried a letter from Messrs. Lockhart, Thompson and Gordon. They said that the action of the Down and Armagh tenant farmers involved in the recent struggle had *“been misunderstood and unfavourably criticized in certain quarters”*, and they went on to give a detailed explanation as to why they had acted as they did. At the end of their letter they referred to the seven men who had been summoned to appear in court *“because”*, in the words of the three writers, *“they dared to feel for their fellow-sufferers”*. They continue: *“We cannot anticipate the result. One thing is certain, they will be held to the hatred and odium of a certain class, but, on the other hand, they will secure the admiration and gratitude of a much more numerous one”*.

The trial took place as arranged on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> May before two magistrates. A Mr. Monroe presented the case for the prosecution, focusing on the charge of taking part in a riot. After giving a description of the event at Kilmonaghan, he went on: *“There were some nineteen or twenty persons in about the sheriff, who were not content with the cheering that was going on, but who, as one witness has very expressively described it, were ‘jundying’ the sheriff from place to place, and I need hardly tell your Worshipships that if the sheriff had fallen from his feet in the tumult he might have been trodden to death. The gentleman who was most active in these proceedings was Mr. Peter Byrne from Newry. His is the first name in the summons, and there was scarcely anything you could conceive scurrilous enough that he did not bring into the transaction. He, that is Byrne, described the sheriff as being ‘beered’, because Mr. Monroe had almost been thrown from his feet by the crowd”*.

The first witness was the sheriff, Mr. Moore. His version of the *‘jundying’* was: *“About that time the crowd began to press in and jostle me. I was in danger. I was pushed a yard or two on several different times. Subsequent to that I was in greater danger. The cheering and shouting continued on very slight intervals. I then got one very rough push from behind, and I turned and caught a man by the collar and said I would hold him ... I thought it better to let him go. I was afraid to hold him, being one man among so many. After that the conduct of the crowd got greatly worse, and I and the auctioneer and the bailiff were jostled about for the space of about a couple of perches. I then got a very strong push, which greatly staggered me; and I believe I should have fallen only someone caught me by the left arm ... After I recovered my balance the pushing and shoving continued, and I got a slight kick and a slight blow on the hat, both from behind. I could not say what the blow on the head was given with. Shortly the head-constable and a couple of men made their appearance, and I was very glad to see them”*.

The next witness was George Locke, the auctioneer. After giving his version of events at Kilmonaghan, he said that he got a kick on the leg but could not say who was responsible. He was then asked: *“Was it, as suggested, your favourite corn that was trodden on?”* This caused some laughter, and the witness replied: *“I have no corns”*. He went on to say that he suffered very much for ten days as

a result of the kick. Referring to the pushing on the sheriff, he said it was he (Locke) who caught him as he was falling. Three policemen next gave evidence. One of them said that the sheriff was evidently in danger of personal violence, while another said that the sheriff appeared to have been kicked.



**Edward Lockhart's grave, Jerrettspass Presbyterian Churchyard**

Defence counsel, Mr. William Redmond, contended that there was no case against Woods, Carr and Rice. After retiring for a few minutes the Chairman said that after considering the matter, they had decided to dismiss the case against these three.

Edward Lockhart then spoke as a defence witness. He said in relation to Peter Byrne: *"Byrne had come there at my request to bid for me, if there was a man to bid for the landlord. The instructions from me were not to bid unless someone else bid. I saw Byrne trying to prevent the crowd from pressing in upon the sheriff. Byrne was more a protection to the sheriff than anything else. So far as I could see he was not a ringleader"*. The defence and prosecuting counsels made their concluding statements. We are not given anything of their contents but merely told that *"Mr. Redmond addressed the Bench in a eloquent and temperate speech"*.

The magistrates then retired to consider their verdict and after a long consultation they returned to the court and announced that Byrne, McCourt, Hanna and Rantin were guilty on the charge of riot. Byrne and Hanna would be sentenced to imprisonment for two months. In the case of McCourt and Rantin, they would be allowed out on their own recognisances – themselves in £10 and two sureties of £10 each, or, in default imprisonment for one calendar month. Mr. Monroe, prosecuting counsel, said that he would not proceed with the charge of obstructing the sheriff. On the application of Mr. Redmond, the Bench altered the order from *'with hard labour'* to *'without hard labour'*.

John Rantin gave bail, but Laurence McCourt refused, and he, with Messrs. Byrne and Hanna, were removed to the police barracks, *en route* to Armagh Jail.

### RELEASE OF THE PRISONERS

Messrs. Byrne and Hanna were released on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> July.

They were met in Armagh by a small group of supporters, and they all travelled on the 2 p.m. train to Goraghwood. Here they were met by a large number of farmers from the district, and led by the Sheepbridge Band, they were escorted to Edward Lockhart's residence.

Mr. Benjamin Thompson who *"was moved to the chair"*, introduced the two men in what the *Reporter* describes as *"appropriate words"*.

The first speaker was Peter Byrne. He spoke about their summer holidays in Balfour's Hotel. (Arthur Balfour was Chief Secretary for Ireland at the time). And referring to people who had been convicted of political-type offences, he said that there were many honourable gentlemen in Armagh Prison. He spoke of the power of the National League in defying the power of the Coercion Acts, and said that it was because he was a member of that organisation that he had been sent to prison. The action that had been taken in March had, he claimed, brought the adjoining landlords to their knees forcing them to make concessions to their tenants.

In his speech William Hanna thanked the Rev. Dr. Smith, Armagh and Dr. Magennis, Lurgan for *"the unremitting attention he received"* from them during his time in prison. He congratulated *"the men of Sheepbridge and the National League there upon the honourable and dignified conduct of Mr. McCourt who preferred to go to jail than to give bail to keep the peace"*. He concluded by saying that, *"until their aspirations were realised and a native legislature granted to Ireland they would never have the land question settled on a satisfactory basis, and then, and not till then, would the black cloud of despair and discontent which had marked the annals of their country be dispelled for ever"*.

Mr. Eiver Magennis in response to repeated calls, said he, *"never put in any contract for speaking there – (laughter) – but he desired to say that those who turned out in such imposing numbers to welcome their friends were fully deserving of a share of the honour which they had won at the hands of Mr. Balfour"*.

In addition to its lengthy report on the release of the two men the *Reporter* had an editorial on the subject. By contrast, there were just over twenty lines in the *Telegraph's* report which was headed *"The release of the Kilmonaghan 'martyrs'"*. It claimed that the two men had been met *"by about one hundred farmers and farmers' boys, who as usual were recruited from Knockanarney and Glenn, headed by the Sheepbridge National League Band"*. It says that speeches *"of the customary type"* were delivered and *"the usual denunciations of Mr. Balfour and the Government were freely indulged in"*.

It concludes its report by saying: *"Altogether, the affair was very poor; and not much of a return to the 'martyrs' for their suffering in the 'cause'"*.

One result of this dispute was the establishment of a 'Tenants' Property Defence Association'. This took place at a meeting at Jerrettspass on 29<sup>th</sup> June, which also expressed solidarity with the prisoners. While there is a press report of a monthly meeting, it is not possible to say how long the association survived. With regard to the stand-off between Captain Dowglass and his tenants it appears to have resolved itself gradually. Subsequent newspaper reports in 1890 and 1892 speak of the tenants asking for reduction when they came to pay their rents and the Captain agreeing to a small reduction.