

## FRANK BROOKE, A VICTIM OF THE TROUBLES

People of my generation were horrified by 'the Troubles' which afflicted the North of Ireland during the years prior to Good Friday Agreement of 1998, and they sometimes fear their return. We know much less about the Troubles which affected the whole of Ireland between 1919 and 1921 which led to the Partition of the country in 1922, and which formed the subject matter of J.G.Farrell's remarkable novel of that name, published in 1970.

One of the victims of these earlier Troubles was Frank Brooke. I first came across him when I was working on a book entitled *Earl Fitzwilliam's Treasure Island*, which told the little-known story of how the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl Fitwilliam took a party of friends and associates on a treasure-hunt in the Pacific Ocean in 1904-5.<sup>1</sup> Brooke was Fitzwilliam's Irish land agent and lived in Shillelagh, County Wicklow, where the Earl had a large estate, and a magnificent mansion - Coollattin House, designed by John Carr of York in the first years of the 19th century.

We know from the Journal written by George Eustace Cooke-Yarborough, and from the photographs he took, that Brooke was amongst the most adventurous of the party, despite his being (at 54) somewhat older than several other members. For example, he was one of only five who travelled up to San José, the capital of Costa Rica, by rail and by mule, when doubt was thrown on the validity of Fitzwilliam's permission to excavate on Cocos Island. Likewise, when Fitzwilliam's party first landed on the Island, Brooke was one of only three who went ahead to spy out the land. The adventurers spent five days on the Island, and found no treasure. Instead, the miners attempted to dynamite a rockfall, but succeeded only in blowing themselves up; and Brooke was injured in the process, though not seriously.

There are two photographs in Cooke-Yarborough's album, each of which suggests that Brooke may have had adventures of another kind. The first shows him in Panama with a glum-looking woman and a child, the second in Barbados with a jolly-looking (female) street-vendor. In the first, Brooke has his hand on the child's arm, and is looking rather seriously at his companion. In the second he is sheltering the woman with a parasol, while she is smiling, if not laughing. Nothing in the Journal throws any light on the circumstances. Our suspicion is aroused by the caption 'Brooke and his Panama family'; but the nature of the relationships is obscure.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See also Chapter 11 above.

<sup>2</sup> See illustrations 35 and 36.

When I wrote the book, I had a picture of a group of (mostly) young men, who (courtesy of Fitzwilliam's enormous wealth) were able to go on what was probably the adventure of their lives at no expense to themselves, at a time when the British ruled over the largest sea-based Empire the world had ever seen, and when Ireland was an integral part of that Empire. There was certainly no hint of any trouble there, in Cooke-Yarborough's account; and all concerned seemed to have had 'a rattling good time' - a phrase Eustace used for one day's hunting, but which might have applied to the whole four months tour.

But in fact the life of an Irish land agent, working for a prominent member of the Protestant Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, was never entirely secure. In particular, land agents were the subject of widespread intimidation during the Land War of the 1880s.<sup>3</sup> Further, by the time the Irish War of Independence broke out in 1919, Frank Brooke was much more than a mere land agent. He was a landowner in his own right and an important member of the British Establishment. A cousin of Basil Brooke, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Brookeborough (future Prime Minister of Northern Ireland), he was Deputy Lieutenant of County Wicklow and County Fermanagh, a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy, a Justice of the Peace for County Fermanagh, a Privy Councillor of Ireland, and Chairman of the Dublin and South-Eastern Railway. A newspaper report also described him as:

Prominently associated with the commercial life of [Dublin]. He was a director of the National Bank, the Norwich Union Fire Insurance Society, and a Commissioner of Irish Lights [and] member of the Turf Club.<sup>4</sup>

In short, Brooke was an obvious target for the men of violence; but it still comes as a shock to read that he was assassinated, by the IRA on 30 July 1920. There was a graphic account of the murder in the *Dublin Evening Telegraph*:

#### DETAILS OF SENSATIONAL AFFAIR

The Right Hon. Frank Brooke, P.C., D.L., Chairman of the Dublin and South Eastern Railway, was shot dead in a room at the Railway Station, Westland row, while he was chatting to Mr. Cotton, Traffic Manager, between 12.15 and 12.30 this afternoon. A party of men undisguised, and stated to number between six and 8, entered the Boardroom, and opened fire, firing about eight shots in all.

Mr. Cotton had a narrow escape, three shots going wide of the mark, one bullet crashing through a window into a typist's room below. Mr. Brooke shot twice through the lungs and died almost immediately.

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<sup>3</sup> Townshend.

<sup>4</sup> *Dublin Evening Telegraph*, 30 July 1920.

He was taken by the Fire Brigade Ambulance to Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital, where life was found to be extinct. Two bullet wounds were found in the lungs.

Even more chilling, perhaps, is a report which appeared in the *Belfast News-Letter* on 13 November 1920, concerning Brooke's will. This document contained a direction to his beneficiaries 'If I am killed by any of these blackguards, I want George and Dermie to get as much as possible out of the Government.' So, he had known in advance that the IRA was coming for him; and, surely, if Brooke knew that, others did too. Yet the assassins did not even bother to disguise their identity, and they struck in broad daylight.

The most moving tribute was paid in the context of a claim for compensation which was made by his widow. In a report which speaks volumes about the breakdown of law and order in Ireland in 1920, the *Wicklow People* for 6 November explained:

#### **COMPENSATION FOR HIS DEATH.**

Everyone knew Mr. Frank Brooke, and everyone who knew him liked him. He had, as far as his family and friends knew, no private enemy. He was one of the most popular of men: but he took a prominent part in public affairs in this country, and he was associated with matters which brought him into conflict with the forces of disorder in this country.

On the question of the amount of compensation to be awarded, he left a widow, a son (Colonel George Brooke), who was now in South Africa, and a daughter, who was married to Mr. Doyne, and who succeeded to the agency held by Mr. Brooke, of the Fitzwilliam estate. He received a salary from the Fitzwilliam estate of £900 a year, and, in addition had the use of a very beautiful house free of rent, all repairs and upkeep being done by the estate, while free fuel and free lighting, as well as some grazing land. These were put at a sum of £292. As Chairman of the Dublin and South-Eastern Railway he had a salary of £900 a year, as director of the National Bank £500, and as the of the Irish Committee of the Norwich Union he had fees which depended on his attendance at meetings of the Board, and last year these amounted to £87 4s. In addition he acted as agent for the company and he was entitled to the ordinary agency commission. Deducting Mr. Brooke own personal expenditure at £500n the net income was £2,2488. Counsel asked his lordship to deal with the case liberally.

Mr. Brown handed in the verdict of the coroner's jury, which stated that Mr. Brooke died from shock and haemorrhage caused by bullets fired from revolvers by persons unknown. He mentioned that the only witness examined at the inquest, who was present at the crime, was absolutely

unprocurable. It was impossible to get any other evidence of anyone who saw these men going in or out the station premises.

Who was responsible? *Wikipedia* tells us Brooke was killed by I.R.A. members Paddy Daly and Jim Slattery. There can be no proof, of course; but these men were certainly prominent members of Michael Collins's 'Squad', also known as the Dublin Guards, who were charged with assassinating members of the police and security forces. Paddy Daly (1888–1957) was leader of this unit, and subsequently held the rank of major-general in the Irish National Army from 1922 to 1924.

On a personal level, the assassination of Frank Brooke was a tragedy, especially when we know how full of life he had been, only fifteen years previously; but does the episode have something to tell us about the management of the Fitzwilliam estates in Wicklow? The question arises because the Fitzwilliam family have long enjoyed a reputation as benevolent landlords and progressive politicians, both in England and Ireland. In 2016, I even wrote this:

The Fitzwilliam family continued to enjoy its favourable reputation in the 19th and early 20th centuries, despite the radical changes in master-servant relationships brought about by the Industrial Revolution and the advent of democracy. Indeed, they were regarded with respect and affection even in the South of Ireland, where hatred of the Protestant Ascendancy ran deep. Many country houses belonging to the British aristocracy went up in flames during the Irish War of Independence of 1919-21; but Coollattin House and Carnew Castle still stand.

I might have added that in 1948, more than 20 years after Irish independence, the 8<sup>th</sup> Earl Fitzwilliam still owned Coollattin; and that his widow Olive, Countess Fitzwilliam (née Plunket) lived there until 1975, though the Coollattin House was subsequently sold and is today a golf club.<sup>5</sup>

What accounts for this apparent paradox? To answer the question it is necessary to examine more closely the careers of some of the owners of the Wentworth Woodhouse estate in Yorkshire and their relationship with Ireland, especially the County of Wicklow. When we do so, we will see that it was more complex than I at least had been led to believe.

The English - or rather the Normans - first arrived in Ireland in the 12<sup>th</sup> century; but the connection between Wentworth and Wicklow dates from the time of Thomas Wentworth, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Strafford (1593-1641). Notorious for his execution on Tower Hill, he built his reputation as Charles I's most effective minister on the basis of his career as Lord Deputy in Ireland, between 1634 and 1640; but whatever success he had politically was short-term, and won at the cost of alienating all sections of Irish society ('mere Irish', Anglo-Irish and the more recently arrived

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<sup>5</sup> See the Club's website.

colonists in Ulster); and the result of the widespread discontent with royal government was the rebellion of 1641, which was not put down until Cromwell reconquered Ireland in the early 1650s. Strafford therefore left a bitter political legacy; but no so bitter as the social and territorial one.

It was easy for Englishmen who held office under the Crown to acquire land in Ireland on favourable terms, because the Crown did not fully recognise the title of Irish chiefs to the lands they occupied, and made a regular practice of making grants to English and Scottish incomers on a provisional basis, while officials investigated the matter further and 'found' that it had an underlying entitlement. Strafford took advantage of this situation, and of his position as Lord Deputy of Ireland, to acquire around 34,000 acres of land in counties Wicklow and Kildare. Of these, 14,000 acres were acquired by royal grant, while he bought the remainder for £35,000. Much of the land he bought in Cosh and Shillelagh was 'planted land', which he acquired very cheaply - it was reckoned that he had paid £10,000 for land which had an annual value of £3,000 - and in addition he borrowed at least some of the money from the Irish Exchequer. Strafford also made enough money to build a house larger than Hatfield or Longleat at Jigginstown near Naas, which cost him £22,000. Lest it be said that he was only doing what large numbers of other Englishmen did, we should remember that even C.V.Wedgwood (who once looked on Strafford very favourably) characterised this deal as 'singularly dishonest;' and Hugh Kearney wrote that 'the acquisition of property compels some reassessment of the extent to which his political idealism may be taken seriously.' We should also remember that the modern Irish view is that much of the land in County Wicklow rightfully belonged to the O'Byrnes who inhabited it, if it belonged to anyone at all.<sup>6</sup>

The 2nd Marquis of Rockingham, who presided over the family estates between 1750 and 1782 was a Whig, but one who famously opposed George III's policies towards the American Colonies. It is less well known that he also made use of his position in the House of Lords to support a motion that Britain should make commercial concessions to the Irish, in particular that Ireland should be allowed to send grain to England, and export some of her woollens. On the other hand, there were limits to the degree to which he was prepared to advocate policies which were not in his own interest. So, when a bill was brought forward in the Irish Parliament to lay a tax upon the rent rolls of absentee landlords, he opposed it and, indeed made sure that it did not become law.<sup>7</sup>

Rockingham's nephew, the 4th Earl Fitzwilliam, inherited Wentworth Woodhouse from his uncle in 1782, together with the leadership of the Whigs. Like Rockingham, he sympathised with the Irish, and thought it necessary to introduce moderate reforms, but he was no revolutionary; and would always put his English

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<sup>6</sup> Wedgwood, 223-5.; Kearney, 170-184; Melvyn Jones showed how profitable at least one part of the estate could be in *Coppice Wood Management in the Eighteenth Century: an Example from County Wicklow* (Irish Forestry, 43: pp 17, 30).

<sup>7</sup> Hoffman, 353-4; 285-6.

interests first in the event of a conflict. So, when William Pitt the Younger sought in 1785 to place the economic relationship between the two kingdoms on a new footing, Fitzwilliam again made sure that no significant change was made.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, when appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1795, he insisted that he be allowed to introduce a measure of relief for Roman Catholics, from their civil disabilities, and was recalled when he persisted in this policy in the face of royal objection. However, when the Irish Rebellion of 1798 broke out, he naturally sided with the forces of law and order; and his house at Coollatin in Wicklow (where there was a protracted guerrilla war, which continued after the defeat of the main rebel forces), was burnt to the ground.<sup>9</sup>

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was remarkable in that the Wentworth estate descended in the same family throughout, from the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl Fitzwilliam to the 5<sup>th</sup> in 1833, and from the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl to the 6<sup>th</sup> in 1857, while the latter survived until 1902. Subject to what is said below, all three Earls Fitzwilliam were Whigs and enjoyed a reputation for philanthropy. So far as their Irish estates were concerned, the historian of the Fitzwilliam Clearance in the late 1840s, Jim Rees, wrote this:

The family already had a reputation as liberal landlords who paid higher wages and charged lower rents than other employers and landlords in the region. They also ran a 'Poor Shop' which operated as a savings club; and, in most cases, the savings were used to buy blankets and clothes from the shop at favourable rates. [In addition] the Fitzwilliams not only gave permission but in some cases donated land and contributed towards the cost of erecting [Catholic & Protestant] churches. Schools, Catholic and Protestant, were also encouraged and many were either wholly or partly maintained from the estate coffers.<sup>10</sup>

This favourable verdict was roundly endorsed by the authors of the particulars of sale of the Coollattin estate (who were instructed by the Executors of the widow of the 8<sup>th</sup> Earl Fitzwilliam, Lady Olive after her death in 1975). They referred to the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl in particular as 'an exemplary landlord'; but, less predictably, it was also repeated by the authors of the Coollattin Golf Club's short account of the House, published long after Irish Independence and by people whom one would not necessarily expect to take the Fitzwilliam 'line'. After telling us that the Coollattin Estate extend to 90,000 acres at its height (and therefore to the whole of south-west Wicklow, and more) the writer(s) continue:

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<sup>8</sup> Smith, 87-9.

<sup>9</sup> Smith 175-212; 247-53. *The Story of Coollattin House* (published by Coollattin Golf Club), 2. The 18<sup>th</sup> century building was known as Malton House. Coollattin House was built in the aftermath of the rebellion.

<sup>10</sup> Rees, *Surplus People*.

The administration of the Fitzwilliam Estate during the poverty stricken Ireland of the 19th century could not be further removed from the stereotypical image of the Irish absentee landlord's estate. The administration of the estate from Coollattin at once provided a housing agency, a health service, an education authority, a public library, a farming advisory service, a roads authority, a conservation board - an administration which was all pervasive and sought to improve both society and living standards at all levels.

As south Wicklow emerged from the dark days of atrocity and reprisal which marked the year 1798, villages on the estate such as Carnew and Tinahely lay in burnt out ruins - the countryside was littered with burnt out farms and homesteads. The estate from its headquarters at Coollattin undertook a mammoth rebuilding programme extending through both villages and the war torn rural landscape. The rebuilding programme and with it the employment provided in the Fitzwilliam sawmills, building yard, forests and slate quarries, provided much-needed hope in a depressed and poverty-stricken land.

During the 19th century the estate built and funded a total of 32 schools on the estate. Between 1829 and the early 1860's £18,000 was spent on building, expanding and maintaining these schools. The liberal Earl insisted that the Roman Catholic clergy should be allowed into these school to give religious instruction to their flock.

In a forward looking move funding was made available for providing widows' pensions. Contributions to hospitals, dispensaries and other charities amounted to £300 per annum.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Earl Fitzwilliam's tenure of his Irish estates between 1833 and 1857 coincided with the greatest crisis to date in the history of Ireland, as a result of the Great Famine, triggered by the failure of the potato harvests in 1845 and 1847. This resulted in around one million deaths from starvation, but also to mass emigration, which caused the island's population to fall by at least 20%. No such calamity affected Britain, where the 1840s were known as 'the Hungry Forties', but where the population continued to increase, and the living standards of even the poorest gradually improved. In Ireland, however, the population continued to decline throughout the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; and the British (and especially the absentee landlords) were blamed for the disaster - or at least for failing to do enough to relieve it. Moreover, the Famine led to an abiding hatred of British rule, especially amongst the millions of emigrants who went overseas, especially to the USA.

One of the ways in which Fitzwilliam sought to alleviate the distress on his Irish estates was by assisting emigration, by providing free passage and a modest sum to help the emigrants once they reached their destination. Jim Rees explains further:

In most cases, the sum was ten shillings, but some managed to negotiate much better terms. The estate also agreed to purchase any crops in the ground. Of the two and a quarter million Irish people who went to America between 1845 and 1854, only 50,000 received financial help from their landlords, almost 6,000 of these were from the Fitzwilliam estate. None, except a relatively small number of workhouse inmates, received any assistance from government to emigrate. The Fitzwilliam clearance policy ran from 1847 to 1856 and a total of 5995 "surplus" tenants sailed for Canada, reducing the estate's population from 20,000 to 14,000.<sup>11</sup>

One particular clearance scheme will forever be associated with the Coollattin estate. In 1847 the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl arranged for emigrants to go and work on a new railway, to be built by the Saint Andrews & Quebec Railway Association. The scheme ran from 1847 to 1856 and cost him in excess of £16,000; but, unfortunately for all concerned, it was badly managed. From the start there was a misunderstanding between the Earl and the Railway Company as to numbers. The Railway had asked for 100 able-bodied men, but Fitzwilliam sent around 2,000 men, women and children, by no means all of whom were able-bodied. Moreover, when they did arrive, the Canadian authorities were totally unable to cope with the influx, and many of the emigrants died of cholera and other diseases, while they were detained in holding camps. In the end, the Railway laid them all off and went into liquidation, condemning the emigrants to find support from the public purse or move on elsewhere in Canada, or to the USA.

The story of the emigration from Wicklow to St Andrews is told by Jim Rees in *Surplus People* (2000,2014); and it is interesting that, in a blog to be found on the County Wicklow heritage website, Rees replies to criticism that he was too favourable towards Fitzwilliam:

When I started researching the Fitzwilliam clearances I had [an adverse opinion]; but five years' research showed them to be - as I often describe them in my talks - 'among the best of a bad bunch'. I fully agree that they were landlords who I believe had no right to the lands that had been taken from the native people, but anyone who has carried out even minimal research into the Fitzwilliams will see that they treated their tenants far more fairly than the rest of the landlords.

This is interesting, because although the final verdict is favourable,<sup>12</sup> Rees cannot forget the original injustice involved in the expropriation of the native Irish

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<sup>11</sup> Rees, *Surplus People*.

<sup>12</sup> See also Coollattin Golf Club: "During the middle of the century £34,568 was spent on a structured scheme providing assisted emigration. Improvement in crop and animal husbandry was given a high profile. Improved stock were bred at Coollattin for distribution amongst the tenants and £10,000 was spent on an elaborate drainage scheme".

by British settlers and absentee landlords. However well-meaning the Fitzwilliams may have been, they could not change the fundamental nature of their landlordism, which was based on trickery and usurpation. Rees is not alone in taking this view. It underlies the histories written by *Sinn Fein*'s P.S.O'Hegarty, for example, and was (and is) shared by Irish Nationalists in general.

Political opinion about Ireland in Britain became polarised when Gladstone, the leader of the new Liberal Party, introduced his first Home Rule Bill in 1886. By then, Charles Stewart Parnell's new Irish Parliamentary Party had won 86 seats in the House of Commons. The result was to split the Liberal Party, while the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl Fitzwilliam, along with many others, became first a Liberal Unionist and then a Conservative. The polarisation in Ireland was even more severe, because Parnell was not merely the leader of a political movement, but President of the Irish Land League, which adopted the so-called 'Plan of Campaign'. This involved direct action against landlords and their agents, in support of tenants who were under threat of eviction for non-payment of rent. The League's methods included 'boycotting', the first victims of which included the eponymous Captain Boycott, who was land agent for the Earl of Erne in County Mayo in 1880, and the Earl of Clanricarde in Galway; but the newspaper reports of the day show that the League also regarded Earl Fitzwilliam and his agent as a target. In particular, there is a report of a mass meeting in County Wexford early in September 1888, where the leaders of the League spoke against them forcefully.

The meeting was addressed by none other than Michael Davitt (1846-1906), the founder of the Land League, who used harsh language to condemn absentee landlords in general. The *Wexford People* for 3 October 1888 reported:

The land grabber as an institution is as dead as the Irish elk, and neither Balfour's coercion nor the Pope's rescript can again revive the unchristian practice (Hear, hear).<sup>13</sup> It would be far better, in my judgment, for the landlords to try and discover some rational way to a final settlement of this agrarian war. They would find this a more profitable line of action and a far more reasonable one than allowing the battle to be fought by the Clanricardes of their class. Their system is played out, and they know it (Cheers).

Clanricarde was a well known landlord who believed that the correct response to protests about high rents was to stand firm, and refuse to offer any reduction. By contrast it was well known that Earl Fitzwilliam had offered his Irish tenants a reduction of 50%; but while some praised him for this, others pointed out

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<sup>13</sup> Balfour was responsible for Ireland during the Tory administrations of the 1890s. They did not agree with Home Rule and sought to quell Irish unrest by a policy of coercion, combined with land reform. On 20 April 1888, Pope Leo XIII issued a papal rescript criticising the Plan of Campaign and boycotting, as well as advising the Irish clergy to refrain from any involvement. Davitt was one of many to denounce the papal intervention. (O'Hara)

that he had reduced the rent of some of his English tenants to zero.<sup>14</sup> As for Davitt, he regarded Fitzwilliam as little better than the rest, indeed in some ways as worse, because he was cleverer:

Some of the Nationalists of [Wicklow] have recently performed an act for which every man calling himself a patriot [there] should blush for shame. I learn that Nationalist tenant farmers and members of the National League in Wicklow have subscribed for a testimonial to be presented to Earl Fitzwilliam on the anniversary of his fiftieth marriage day. I had thought that the days of tenant slavery and obsequiousness had gone by in Ireland for ever (Hear, hear!). It may be true that this man is not a Clanricarde, that he has not been the rack-renter and exterminator that some of other landlords have been; but this in no way extenuates the fact that, were Earl Fitzwilliam twenty times as good a landlord as they say he has been - and which I doubt very much he is - he is still a supporter of the infamous system that is responsible for the ruin and degradation of Ireland (Hear, hear).

After condemning Fitzwilliam, along with the rest of the 'land-grabbers', Davitt also pointed that one of Fitzwilliam's sons had recently stood for election in the constituency of Doncaster as a Liberal Unionist, and therefore as someone who was directly opposed not only to the activities of the Land League, but also to the very idea of Home Rule for Ireland:

A short time ago the son of Earl Fitzwilliam was the Unionist candidate for the constituency of Doncaster. He appealed to the electors of that constituency to return him, in order to crush the movement of which Mr. Parnell is the head. What will Yorkshire democrats and Home Rulers say now when they learn that some of Mr. Parnell's followers in county Wicklow have presented a testimonial to the landlord and Unionist father of the Unionist member for Doncaster? I hope from my heart that Earl Fitzwilliam will double the rent upon every Nationalist farmer who has disgraced his name and his cause by having anything to do with such a testimonial (Applause).<sup>15</sup>

There is further evidence of the adverse opinion which some Irishmen felt towards Earl Fitzwilliam in 1888 in a letter to the editor of a local newspaper, recounting the experience of the correspondent's father. This man had been coerced into agreeing a rent for a property in Wicklow which was more than he could afford, so that he was eventually forced to sell up; and this was the work of Fitzwilliam's agent, one Doyle.

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<sup>14</sup> Contrast correspondents in the *Weekly Irish Times*, 16 January 1886 and in the *Flag of Ireland*, 2 January 1886.

<sup>15</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 3 September 1888.

I was at various times applied to by persons of the mean, toady class, to attend meetings and sign adulatory addresses to Lord Fitzwilliam. I declined joining in such addresses, and stated my reasons for so doing. Men are on their guard against persons of the Clanricarde type. It requires the craft of a Fitzwilliam to go on increasing ill-gotten acquisitions, to the further impoverishment of the country.<sup>16</sup>

The Land League was successful in that British governments of both persuasions (Liberal and Tory) did enact a series of Land Acts between 1870 and 1903, which enabled owner-occupiers to improve and eventually purchase their properties; and by 1923 it was estimated that about 414,000 tenant farmers became owner-occupiers, involving around 14 million acres.<sup>17</sup> In particular the so-called Wyndham Act of 1903 was the work of a Conservative government; and by this time the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl Fitzwilliam had been succeeded by his grandson, 'Billy Fitzbilly', who became the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl. It is therefore interesting to consider his attitude to the new policy of his own party, which was effectively to sanction and finance a system of compulsory purchase, for the benefit of Irish tenants. What we find is that the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl sold almost all his Wicklow estates under the Wyndham Act;<sup>18</sup> but that he was criticised (in particular by James O'Connor, the Irish Nationalist MP for County Wicklow) for failing to fully co-operate with the Commissioners established by the new Act, in relation to these sales. Specifically, it was alleged, though never proved, that in 1904 and 1906 Fitzwilliam (or more likely Frank Brooke, on his orders) had coerced tenants into buying land on his terms, by bringing forward the date upon which rent was due, and in serving eviction notices for the arrears which thereby accumulated. Such methods were described (in the House of Commons) as 'intimidatory'.<sup>19</sup>

But this view of the matter was not shared by the authors of *The Story of Coolattin House*:

In the autumn of 1903 an era spanning almost four centuries came to a conclusion with the transfer of the Coolattin estate to the ownership of the tenants. This took place under the terms of the 1903 Wyndham Land Act and was carried through with a minimum of fuss, consultation or arbitration. Following a meeting between the tenants and the agent Frank Brooke, Viscount Milton who had recently acceded to the title 7<sup>th</sup> Earl Fitzwilliam,<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Wexford People*, 3 October 1888.

<sup>17</sup> O'Hara.

<sup>18</sup> *The Wyndham Land Act, 1903: the Final Solution to the Irish Land Question?*, Patrick John Cosgrove, PhD thesis, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, September 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Hansard, HC Debates 4 August 1904 vol 139, c991; 23 May vol 157, cc 1288-9; *Wicklow News-Letter and County Advertiser* - Saturday 06 February 1904.

<sup>20</sup> Aka 'Billy Fitzbilly' (1872-1943).

replied in the affirmative. In his letter, dated October 3rd, 1903, one detects an air of poignancy, when he says, "I must confess that I am not in the least anxious to part with the Estate which has formed a direct heritage in my family for generations, but as times change we have to change with them, and I have, therefore, with much regret, decided to meet the request my tenants have made."

There were only two conditions to be met. The Estate had to go, lock, sotck and barrel - remaining on as a tenant was not an option. Secondly, since he had, 'such pleasant memories through many successive generations', he wished to retain the right to hunt, shoot and fish on the Estate'.

The Conservative Government which enacted the Wyndham Act (and was allied with the Unionists in Ireland and in Britain) certainly hoped that it would satisfy the land hunger of the Irish peasantry, and with it their abiding resentment of British rule; and to some extent it did; but of course it did nothing for those who had hoped to see Home Rule enacted; and by the time that legislation was introduced into the Westminster Parliament once more in 1911, the world had moved on, in two very significant ways.

Firstly, it had become clear that Ulster was deeply opposed to the policy:

In 1912, as the Ulster Covenant, pledging resistance to the 'conspiracy to set up a Home Rule parliament' by 'all means which may be found necessary', was signed by almost half a million people, it took increasingly military shape. A craze for public drilling – which turned out to be not quite so illegal as most people had assumed – swept the province. In 1913 a formally organized citizen militia, the Ulster Volunteer Force, approached a strength of 100,000. When nationalists in turn mobilized to support Home Rule, forming the Irish Volunteers in December 1913, republican activists could move from the sidelines to the centre of events."<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, it was clear that many nationalists were no longer content to follow from the traditional parliamentary road, if that meant sitting at Westminster. The new political party, *Sinn Fein* ('Ourselves Alone'), founded in 1905, stood for a complete severance of all the old ties with Britain. Other nationalists joined the Gaelic League, founded in 1893, which advocated a revival of Gaelic culture, language and traditions, including sports. Others again joined James Connolly's socialist Citizens' Army, founded in 1913.

The outbreak of the First World War had profound repercussions. It meant that Home Rule was postponed for the duration of the war; but, as we have seen, many nationalists had already moved beyond Home Rule. At Easter 1916, a group of revolutionaries staged a hopeless insurrection, in the name of an Irish Republic.

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<sup>21</sup> Townshend.

Though this Easter Rising was put down, it produced countless martyrs for *Sinn Fein*'s cause, both in the form of rebels who were executed, and those who were interned without trial. Moreover, although the numbers who participated in it were relatively small, it effectively provided *Sinn Fein* with an army, from the union of the Irish Volunteers and Connolly's Citizen Army. It is very significant that in 1917 *Sinn Fein* decided as a whole that complete separation from Britain meant establishing a Republic.

In April 1918, as a response to the German Spring Offensive, the British Government decided to introduce conscription in Ireland; and this led to a wave of revulsion in the nationalist community, uniting *Sinn Fein* and the Catholic Church in opposition to the idea that Irishmen should be compelled to join in a British war. After the Armistice of November 1918, there was a General Election, when a greatly enlarged electorate, voting in 105 Irish seats, returned no less than 73 *Sinn Fein* M.P.s. However, instead of taking their seats in the Westminster Parliament, they convened in Dublin and proclaimed the Republic, vowing to achieve complete separation from Britain 'by any means necessary'. Thus began the Irish Revolution.

The new republican government had an army, formed by the merger of the Irish Volunteers and the Citizens' Army, which was now known as the IRA. They refused to recognise the British authorities, and started to seize weapons, vehicles and supplies from the Royal Irish Constabulary (or RIC) and from the British Army. During 1919 and the early months of 1920 IRA attacks made much of the South of Ireland ungovernable, and the government resorted to the employment of two paramilitary forces in support of the Police: the so-called 'Black and Tans', who were mostly English and Scottish ex-servicemen, and the Auxiliary Division or 'Auxis'. Both were to say the least highly unpopular, not least because they engaged in indiscriminate reprisals against the civilian population, which were found unacceptable even by the British authorities. The IRA response was now to engage in a programme of assassination of anyone deemed to be an agent of the British Establishment; and their spearhead in Dublin was Michael Collins's Dublin Guards.

Why did the Dublin Guards select Frank Brooke as a target? There may have been some residual bitterness, arising from the fact that he was still Earl Fitzwilliam's land agent); but the phrase which stands out in several contemporary newspaper reports is that he was 'a close friend of Sir John French' (and was for that reason always accompanied by a detective). French was Commander-in-Chief of British Home Forces from 1915 (having been in charge of the Western Front before that); and he had been in charge at Dublin Castle when the Easter Rising of 1916 was suppressed. Even more importantly, he had become Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in May 1918; and he was responsible for bringing in the Black and Tans and the Auxis. As his friend, Brooke was therefore at the very heart of 'the Castle', which was regarded by the IRA as their principal target. He was shot for the same reason as Lord Louis Mountbatten was murdered in 1979 - because the IRA wanted to 'tear the heart out of the British Establishment.'

There is one thing which is superficially difficult to understand. The edition of the *Dublin Evening Telegraph*, which reported the murder, also reported that Brooke had recently come to the public's attention 'in connection with the hold-up of traffic at Kingsbridge on yesterday week.' This referred to the fact that, like many members of the public, Frank Brooke had been unable to catch a special train laid on that day, in connection with the races at the Curragh. The reason for this was that the Black and Tans had commandeered the train and, as a result, the railway trade union was refusing to service it. Unlike other members of the public, Brooke thought he could do something about this; and he sought to make use of his influence at the Castle by getting in touch with the Irish Military Command, in an attempt to have the Black and Tans withdrawn from the scene of the disturbance.

Brooke's intervention went unheeded - the Black and Tans were not withdrawn - but it was publicised; and one might have thought his attempt to restore normality would earn him some recognition, at least with some members of the Irish community. In fact, it did him no good at all, apparently only serving to highlight his importance. The gunmen shot him just over a week later, because of what he was, rather than because of who he was. Such is the nature of terrorism.

#### A POSTSCRIPT

At the suggestion of a relative of Frank Brooke's, I have just read Ulick O'Connor's book 'A Terrible Beauty is Born' (Panther, 1981), which is said to contain an explanation of why Brooke was assassinated by the IRA in 1920. Whilst the book does not mention him by name, it does indeed explain his murder.

In January 1920, the head of the IRA was Michael Collins, who re-organised it and turned it into a disciplined force. When the British authorities refused to recognise the new Irish Republic and started to engage in a policy of repression, Collins decided to 'put out the eyes of the British'. This meant eliminating anyone who was in a position to give useful information to the Police and the Army. He compiled a database of these 'spies' and sent his 'Squad' to identify and shoot them. Frank Brooke was doubtless one of the targets, because of his numerous contacts with the British Establishment in Dublin Castle.

An explanation, then of why 'he had to die'; but I suspect that whether one regards this as a justification will depend very much on one's nationality. From a British point of view, Brooke was just doing his duty. From the Irish nationalist point of view, he was a British agent, in a war which had been going on for centuries, but was originally of Britain's making.



**Brooke and his Panama family, late 1904**



**Brooke in Barbados, early 1905**



**Brooke towards the end of his life, 1920**