

Evictions in Kerry 1845-1852

Evictions occurred in Ireland when tenants could not pay the rent? While this might be the simplistic view it is not the full story. Inability to pay the rent was usually the reason, but there were also a number of other explanations. Unreasonable and unjust rent increases or landlords consolidating land from smallholdings that had been divided and sub-divided was another reason. Quarrels and disputes between the chain of 'middlemen', agents and owner/landlord often ended in the ejectment of the unfortunate tenant who became a pawn in their disputes.

The Irish Famine Eviction project has to-date logged details of over 400 evictions carried out during the years 1845-1852 countrywide. Ten of these eviction sites are listed for Kerry with one hundred and thirty two families dispossessed. Trinity College was the beneficial landlord of all of these particular estates and while we don't have exact details for all of the evictions, in the case of one which I chanced on this week, while researching a Kerry ancestry in the Civil Parish of Killury, the reason was a dispute between the immediate middleman and the chain of middlemen appointed by Trinity College. In May 1849 the Leinster Express reported that Trinity College, the largest landowner in Ireland, had issued eviction notice against a number of tenants:

The Clashnagarrane Eviction Scene of 1886

David D. Healy, a prominent farmer from Clashnagarrane, was a committee member of the Killarney Poor Law Union for many years. In 1886, a large eviction took place on Healy's farm. It was also reported in the Kerry Sentinel on 26 February 1886 that David D. Healy was president of the Irish National League branch in Kilcummin.

The same article recorded the passionate words of one J. Buckley, who stated that the tenants of Kilcummin would:show the tyrant landlord and cruel agent that they have made a mistake, by their conduct, they have kindled a fire that will not be easily extinguished.....we hereby pledge ourselves to share the same fate rather than pay a single farthing of rent to Lord Kenmare until he (Healy) is satisfactorily reinstated.

The account of the eviction is quite a detailed one, with descriptions of locals raising the alarm through 'horn-blowing and other means' throughout the countryside. A large contingent of the RIC marched in 'three companies', many armed with rifles, making their way to Clashnagarrane. At least sixty police were armed with the batons, excluding the riflemen. When they

reached Healy's residence, they were greeted with 'a storm of derisive cheering and booing, mingled with horn-blowing'.

What makes the eviction all the more interesting is that David D. Healy was reported as being the 'deputy vice-chairman of the Killarney (Poor Law) Union and had been one of the most punctual tenants on the estate' as reported in the Kerry Sentinel on 19 February 1886. Healy had held such a position on the Killarney Board of Guardians in 1882, and earlier.

An estimated crowd of 400 persons attended the eviction. During the gathering they sang 'God Save Ireland' for upwards of half an hour, after which cheers were given for Parnell, Davitt, Archbishop Croke, the National League, and the Manchester Martyrs.' What follows is the full text of the extraordinary 'Protracted Eviction' of David D. Healy as reported in the Kerry Sentinel:

The eviction campaign which was opened latterly on the Kenmare Estate against the tenantry for non-payment of rent, and suspended for the past few weeks, was resumed this morning in the neighbourhood of Kilcummin, near Killarney. The large police force engaged yesterday were detained last night in Killarney for today's eviction work, with the exception of about thirty, who were ordered back to their respective stations in the country.

The first move was made shortly after nine this morning, and as they moved into the country, notes of alarm and warning by horn-blowing and other means could be heard from the surrounding hills. The police were arranged when marching along in three companies, each having some special mark of distinction. A party carrying their rifles charged, whilst about sixty had nothing but batons. A supernumerary of Lord Kenmare's named Malachy Moynihan, who acts as a sort of bailiff in the north-western portion of the estate, guarded by two policemen guided the evictors.

When the party reached Kilcummin, large numbers began to collect at the residence of Mr. David D. Healy, who, it was suspected, would be made the victim. At Clashnagarrane and about a quarter of a mile from the residence obstructions were placed on the road at intervals of twenty or thirty yards apart, and this proceeding seemed considerably to annoy the authorities. Large stones were placed across the road presumably to hinder the progress of the sheriff and bailiffs, and about a dozen policemen were despatched to remove them.

To guard against a repetition of this proceeding, relays of constabulary were placed on duty for the remainder of the day on a large portion of the road, and it being also apprehended that an obstruction, something more substantial than a mere row of stones, would be attempted. Sometime after eleven, the

cavalcade arrived at Mr. Healy's, and here a large crowd of persons were collected in a field some distance from the house, and as the police reached the residence, a storm of derisive cheering and booing, mingled with horn-blowing, was commenced.

On the sheriff meeting Mr. Healy in the yard, he inquired if he intended to pay the amount demanded of him, and, receiving a negative reply, he gave orders to the bailiff to commence the work of the eviction, and this decision roused to a pitch the anger and indignation of a large number of women and girls who were collected quite convenient to the house.

The door was barred against the bailiffs, and with no more ado, a determined lusty looking character seized a large stone, upwards of a half cwt. in weight, and violently dashing it at the closed door, burst it inward, affording his party free access to carry out their desolating work. The Sheriff demanded the place to be handed over on 'a writ of possession against the tenant, through the farm being sold at an execution sale in Tralee on last St. Stephen's Day, and being purchased in the landlord's interest by an emergency bidder for £5. Mr. Healy and his predecessors had been in possession from time immemorial, the tenancy being continued from father to son.

The area of the holding is 105 acres, and the rent at present is £72, the poor-law valuation being £69. Up to c'74 Mr Healy held the place through the middleman paying up to that time a rent of £60 per annum. In that year, the middleman's interest fell through, and Mr. Healy became responsible tenant to Lord Kenmare.

Portrait of David D. Healy

At this juncture the agency of the estate, was invested in Mr Hussey, and that astute gentleman, with a view to improving his master's condition at the risk of destroying an industrious tenant, had the rent quite unexpectedly run up to £90 per year. To somewhat minimise this extraordinary increase, and as Mr. Hussey said to the tenant, 'To make the land equal to the rent', a promise was given that a dwelling house would be built, and the land submitted to a thorough system of drainage and reclamation.

After a time, he agreed to give the tenant £150 towards the building of the house and Mr. Healy accepted the offer, but had to spend an additional £250 out of his own private resources before the completion of the structure, in addition to an expenditure of £60 for the slating and doing up of the barn and dairy. Mr. Hussey's promise of draining and reclaiming all the unproductive land on the farm was also made to be broken. In October '85 Mr. Healy was peremptorily served with a writ for £36.

This £36 is demanded by the landlord as a running gale, and the tenant absolutely denies he owed any such amount. Taking no action on the writ, the lands were sold by execution last December, for an insignificant amount, and hence arose today's proceedings.

Mr. Healy, who is Deputy Vice Chairman of the Killarney Union, had always been one of the most punctual tenants on the estate and a highly popular man in the locality, has declined to pay an amount which, as a running gale, he claims no knowledge of, and, if such there was, he is entirely irresponsible for. Representing the matter latterly to the now agent of the estate, he clearly proved by his receipts that no such amount was due of him.

The eviction proceedings occupied the entire day, three bailiffs being employed throughout in clearing to that outside yard the household offices. Gradually, during the day, large crowds began to collect around the premises, and when they were fairly on, something about 400 persons were present. In the opening of the proceedings the women became rather excited, and at the insistence of the officers of the police were ordered to remove them off the yard, and several of their names taken. Constables could be observed here and there taking notes of individuals, evidently with a view to prosecution.

Each time Mr. Healy made his presence he was greeted with an enthusiastic outburst of cheering and sympathetic utterances. At one time the crowd sang 'God Save Ireland' for upwards of half an hour, after which cheers were given for Parnell, Davitt, Archbishop Croke, the National League, and the Manchester Martyrs. The name of Mr. John Morley received a warm greeting. About four o'clock, the eviction work concluded, and possession was given to a bailiff on behalf of the trustees. It was the Sheriff's intention to carry out another eviction, at Mr. Foley's, Kilbrean, but owing to the lateness of the hour it was postponed.

The eviction party then returned to Killarney. In the early part of the day a determined but unsuccessful attempt was made to seize some of the horns, but without fail. It was pitiable in the extreme to see the mother, grandmother, and young children ordered out to a chilly atmosphere by the relentless executors of the law. Tomorrow the evictions will be resumed, it is presumed, at Kilbrean, and the police will be billeted in Killarney tonight for the purpose of tomorrow.'

A week later on 26 February 1886, it was reported in the Kerry Sentinel that David D. Healy was the president of the Irish National League branch in Kilcummin. Healy was also present at the meeting to re-establish a branch of the Irish National Federation in Kilcummin in 1897, and he was a Poor Law guardian at the time. Due to his apparent prominence, it could be speculated that the eviction was politically motivated. Healy is recorded in the 1911

Census as being sixty-nine years of age and listed as a 'Magistrate and Farmer'. There is little doubt that Healy was reinstated to his home at Clashnagarrane as his descendants farm the land to this day.