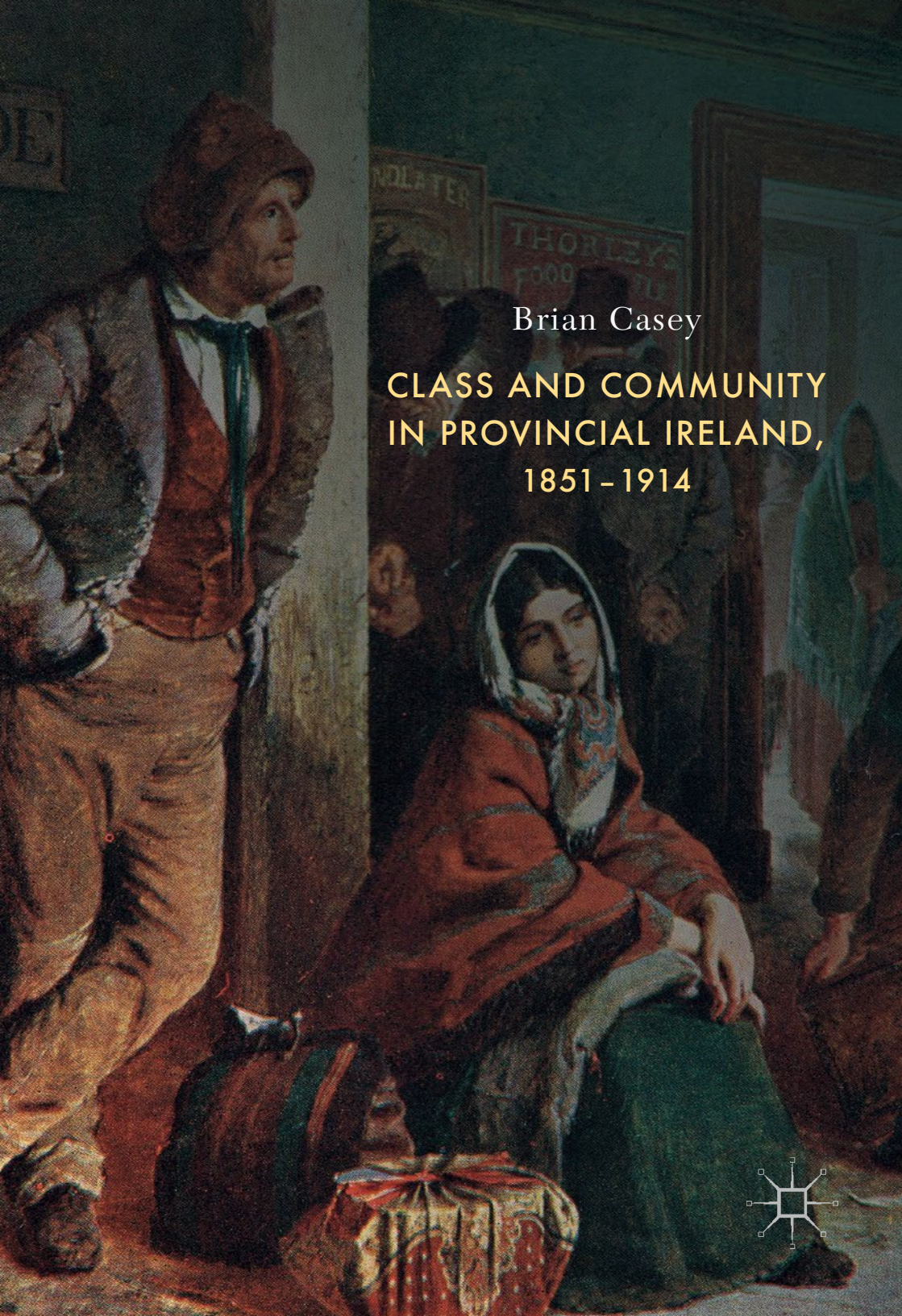




Brian Casey

CLASS AND COMMUNITY
IN PROVINCIAL IRELAND,
1851–1914



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For Mam—thank you.

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Ballinasloe
October 2017

Brian Casey

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ABBREVIATIONS

CDB	Congested Districts Board
INL	Irish National League
IPP	Irish Parliamentary Party
IRB	Irish Republican Brotherhood
MP	Member of Parliament
NAI	National Archives of Ireland
NLI	National Library of Ireland
PDA	Property Defence Association
RIC	Royal Irish Constabulary
UIL	United Irish League



CHAPTER 1

Introduction

I took a chance [with] the movement (the Land League), but I was rather inclined to think that so far from assisting in bringing about the independence of Ireland, that it would have the opposite effect; that when farmers would be emancipated and get their lands, such men would look on the boundary of their farms as the boundary of their country, because as a rule, farmers are very selfish men.¹

Matt Harris, MP for East Galway, 1889

A well-armed siege train set out from Portumna early in the morning on 26 August 1886 to evict Thomas Saunders from his thirty-four-acre farm at Drumeen, near Woodford. Woodford was the citadel for the Plan of Campaign, and the miserly Marquess of Clanricarde was provoking his tenants as he tried to get his rents at any cost. Such was the tension surrounding this particular eviction that twenty redcoats and 314 heavily armed policemen were involved, as the government was determined not to be humiliated by the locals.²

A crowd of 8000 people turned out to support Thomas Saunders in resisting this eviction. They became very animated by the arrival of the siege train. A large group barricaded themselves into the Saunders house and they were informed as to the progress of the eviction party; they were prepared to battle it out to the end. As soon as the party arrived, the crowd engaged in a ferocious fight to prevent the ‘emergency men’ and other members from taking ‘Saunders Fort’. As they began to charge at the house to gain control, those inside threw rocks, boiling water and even

beehives to repel the party. Following a ferocious battle, the house was surrounded by the authorities in the face of a hostile and angry crowd. Twenty-two inside the house were arrested and received harsh prison sentences for their actions in order to set an example. One, Thomas Larkin, subsequently died in Kilkenny prison and became a martyr for the people in the community, with 4000 people attending his funeral. Clanricarde's demands meant that each eviction was a pyrrhic victory as the cost in carrying them out was so high. The 'Battle of Saunders Fort' became a propaganda victory for the nationalist movement. The community in Woodford tried and failed to resist evictions; they were not assisted by the nationalist leaders who convinced them to be martyrs for the wider movement. This resulted in hundreds being forced to reside in League huts for years, even decades, after and the divisions following the Parnellite split saw the more middle-class elements of the movement assert their ideology over its direction.³

The story of Thomas Saunders is a story that is repeated across rural Ireland, in areas where the land agitation reordered Irish society. His story is unique unto itself only in particular details. Rural Ireland was remade in the experiences of ordinary people who lived on the land in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. But what was this remaking? And how can we grapple with the complexities of local conditions? While the experience of ordinary people is privileged throughout this work, this is a challenge to the haphazard nature of the archival record for the lower classes—that is, small farmers, labourers and town tenants. While they lived ordinary lives, their collective contribution to the changes that took place in provincial Ireland during this formative period was extraordinary. The nature of political movements, such as the Ballinasloe Tenant Defence Association, Land League, Irish National League and United Irish League, as well as lectures and provincial newspapers that provided educational outlets for them, were also vehicles for political change and agitation. They challenged the grip, which was interpreted as being almost feudal, that landlords could hold on local politics as they expected 'their inferiors to submit to their authority. Such an attitude ran counter to the democratic impulses of the time' and the 'continuing attachment to the importance of rank ran ill with the younger generation of countrymen in the 1880s and 1890s'.⁴ Like the Welsh rural poor explored by David Howell, the peasant of Eugen Weber's rural France, James Hunter's Highland Crofters or E.P. Thompson's English working class, the lower classes in Ireland have generally been written out of history. Consigned to statistical

fodder, the Irish rural poor have been quietly lost to posterity because they did not leave a paper trail, and what we know of them generally survives in testimony to various Special Commissions on poverty and the land question, and through speeches made on nationalist platforms and through the letters pages of local and national newspapers. Studies of them rely heavily on statistical data, inferences and generalisations. Social radicals like Michael Davitt and Matt Harris succeeded in creating an imagined community of small farmers which could only have been perpetuated if this sense of community was real. For people, the parish was their community; it was real, embedded in their social and economic reality and had strong emotional appeal. 'A strong feeling of local and parochial belonging existed over a very long period, and it declined slowly, and late, along with the civil and ecclesiastical parochial organisation that fostered it'.⁵ While the language of local political leaders at meetings and in letters to newspapers was heavily nuanced, their audience did not necessarily appreciate that and responded with violence on occasion. In relation to the Welsh poor, Howell rightly highlighted the challenge of trying to understand what their sentiments were and what grievances they actually had.⁶ This study faced similar challenges.

Through a re-examination of sources, along with a systematic interrogation and close reading of the local press, this book takes greater cognisance of the political engagement of this West of Ireland community in east Galway. By examining Ballinasloe—a large market town with a significant rural hinterland—it offers new insights into the shared experiences of class and identity formation. It explores the dynamics of rural proletarianisation in the West of Ireland through the prism of a community in flux in the town of Ballinasloe and its east Galway rural hinterland. It is true that historians cannot engage in participant observation of their subject matter, but 'advocates of an anthropologically informed approach...warn...that the cultural distance separating the historian from his/her "acting subject" is an even greater problem than the limitations of the sources'.⁷ The rural/urban chasm in historical endeavour is often presented as a polar rather than a symbiotic relationship; this can be traced to high political attitudes seeking to deal with either urban or rural problems separately. Cultural formations associated with popular liberalism were formed as its language extended to Ireland. While the West of Ireland was seen to be impervious to modernisation, the seeds of the Irish National Land League were sown in Ballinasloe through the prism of the Ballinasloe Tenant

Defence Association as the west became the citadel of the revolutionary change in rural Ireland in the late Victorian period.

The wide array of sources used gives a more textured picture to life in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ireland. Extensive engagement with local newspapers is critical in assessing the provincial experience as they give a fairly representative account of life in provincial Ireland at this time. The fact that they also reported on affairs beyond the confines of the locality ensured that residents of local communities could be informed of events beyond their immediate world, which was an important process in the modernisation of Irish society. In this context, modernisation refers to the social variables that contributed to social progress. Therefore, developments in education, literacy, communications, transport and political awareness amongst the lower classes all helped in the modernisation of rural Ireland in the time frame being examined. This gave western nationalism a more cosmopolitan hue as speeches that were reported had inflections of Enlightenment and Chartist thought. This painful march into modernisation was not a post-Famine or even an Irish phenomenon. Michael Huggins has previously explored such challenges in pre-Famine Roscommon and found that pre-Famine popular protest had a more complex and sophisticated set of beliefs, influences and objectives than had been understood previously. Liana Vardi has made similar arguments in her work on a village in northern France and Eugen Weber does similar in his sophisticated work on rural France.⁸

This study relies upon a wide array of parliamentary papers, newspapers, estate papers and diocesan archives which have been utilised to give as authentic a voice as possible to the lower classes. Estate papers are a rich resource but limited in the story that they can tell. While the voice of tenants can come through, deference to the landlord is obvious; this makes them useful for assessing the deferential dialectic, but they need to be approached with caution (this is explained in further detail below). Religious archives are rarely interrogated effectively as there is a lack of understanding of how and why certain records were created. Historians tend not to see the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland beyond the political acts that it was involved in and they ignore the fact that the Irish Catholic Church is a subset of a global church. Religious archives offer an indication as to the cultural attitudes of a particular period as the pastoral initiative of the clergy transcended the spiritual and entered the political and social world. By engaging with other sources—such as parliamentary papers, the Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers and police reports—

this book does offer a fresh perspective on the provincial experience that goes beyond socio-economic factors. While agriculture was the mainstay of the Irish economy, my interpretation of the sources presents the human stories behind the macro-economics. This work argues that the rural poor were not an inarticulate mass, but rather they were sophisticated and politically aware in their own right. With a few exceptions, their history has been largely neglected by scholars, and this book redresses this imbalance in historiography by deliberately focusing upon the rural poor's experiences in order to further develop our understanding of the complex class relations in provincial Ireland.⁹ Martyn Lyons has argued that writing and literacy served a range of essential functions during this period. Writers expressed themselves in pamphlets, letters to newspapers, threatening letters and petitions to the government, landlords and employers. Even the illiterate 'were writers with the help of intermediaries, and they were also part of the scribal culture of ordinary people'.¹⁰ They developed their own identity and interests which were expressed in a vigorous, democratic popular culture. This book provides a reconstruction of rural Irish social life and its complex class hierarchies, and contends that, in this formative era, the lower classes were self-aware and their respective identities as tenant farmer, labourer or grazier marked the limitations to their upward mobility.

The growth of local democracy expedited a shift in local power structures, and landlords were at a loss as to how this happened, resulting in an impotent response to the agitation. Landlords were often the centre of estate life and offered extensive employment to tenants, resulting in loyalty that fostered a sense of order which was interpreted as benevolence. In central New York, for example, the landholding system encouraged the persistence of paternalistic attitudes, and land was let as a reward for loyalty.¹¹ While class structures remained rigid because of tenants' sense of deference, they became more fluid as nationalists became increasingly confident, due to a more active participation in popular politics resulting from the democratic fervour that was capturing imaginations in Britain and Ireland. The approach taken here will allow for a recapturing of the nuances, ambiguities and contradictions of popular experience by examining the 'apparently irrational features of working class behaviour' as well as the rational, while accepting the varieties of ambiguity and the uneven survival of records to reconstruct the experience.¹²

In his examination of rural radicalism in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Norfolk, Alun Howkins presented how such radicalism

provided a basis for the Liberal and Labour electoral success that continued into the 1960s. He argued:

relationships between master and man on the farms of Norfolk in the period 1870–1925 were exploitative. This currently unfashionable notion means simply that in the pre-mechanised but capitalist agriculture, labour is the main source of value, and that the labourers were consistently underpaid for the production of that value...If we ignore the face of exploitation, the delicate balance of a deferential relationship is elevated to a permanent and harmonious reality.¹³

Building upon Howkins' argument, this study contends that the complexities of social relations in provincial Ireland are best understood through a study of this kind. It further posits that in the late nineteenth century, tenant farmers and labourers began to develop more sophisticated methods of social and cultural formation that were the result of improved literacy, communication and transport. While it concentrates primarily on the lower orders, the influence of landlords was all-pervasive and cannot be ignored. Therefore, the changing nature of social relations necessitates the assessment of the aristocracy from the perspectives of agrarian issues, class relations, denominationalism and proselytism within the wider West of Ireland milieu. In addition, it argues that the fall of aristocratic privilege must be read in the context of the rising Catholic and nationalist elites, while simultaneously examining the challenges presented to this community by the shifting axis of power/knowledge to tenant farmers and artisans. 'As with any relationship of inequality, the landlord-tenant type of relationship is likely to be an implicitly tense one in any society or any manifestation. In Ireland, the relationship appear[ed] tense by any European standard'.¹⁴ With the decline of aristocratic influence, middle-class elites sought to secure their respectability, which did not embrace the paternalistic endeavours of the landlord class—condescending as they could be. Nowhere was that more evident than in Victorian and Edwardian Ireland, where the urban poor suffered greatly because of the hubris of their new bourgeois overlords.¹⁵

The decline of aristocratic power in the late nineteenth century was a silent revolution that took place in Britain and Ireland. This revolution has generally been presented in terms of major movements. Recently, it has been reconceived as a fundamental change between the aristocracy, strong farmers, small farmers and other classes in provincial Ireland.¹⁶ However, these works have generally not captured the minutiae of the reformulation

of social relations. By using east Galway as a regional case study encompassing a sizeable market town and large agricultural tracts, the fundamental power dynamics of the urban/rural chasm will be assessed. During the course of the late nineteenth century the nature of elites evolved in the Irish countryside from a mostly Protestant aristocracy to a mostly Catholic middle class that adopted some of the affectations of respectability in order to reinforce the legitimacy of the social hierarchy as they saw it. They all embraced the concept of ‘community’ as an ideological gloss on their monopoly of power.¹⁷ They had a lot in common with landlords, whose influence waned at the twilight of the nineteenth century. They were now superordinate in the social hierarchy, so it was in their interests to ‘persuade those in subordinate positions to subscribe to the position which endorsed their own inferiority’.¹⁸ The Land War had succeeded in legitimating their authority in order to ‘maintain a set of values which confer status honour on those in dominant positions’.¹⁹

1 DEFERENCE AND NEW RELATIONSHIP FORMATION IN PROVINCIAL IRELAND

While deference can be seen to be the endorsement of a hierarchical class structure and a pattern of ingratiating behaviour, it can also be seen as part of a false consciousness amongst the lower classes. This study uses a framework formulated by Howard Newby to reassess how deference manifested and changed in Ireland. Central to Newby’s framework are the definition and critical components of deference, for example stability. Stability is at the heart of deference and it has the habit of stressing the superiority and legitimacy of a social hierarchy as elites are concerned with preserving their own traditions while offering a legitimation of power. Newby argued that deference can be calculative because some who behave deferentially wish to regard themselves as non-deferential. Newby has argued that behaviour *per se* cannot simply be regarded as deference and this presents problems in interpreting the meaning of the behaviour of various actors. Further to this, sporadic outbreaks of violence, anger and frustration that manifested through the Land War were too deep-seated to be aberrations. The lower classes were vociferous in their efforts to protect their own sense of self-respect.²⁰ Deferential interaction is generally embedded in a certain system of social interaction, rarely occurring within a social vacuum, and tensions in the deferential dialectic can be controlled by elite groups in order to assert their hegemony by employing a variety of techniques.²¹

The countryside played a vital role in the local economy of east Galway, with towns 'pulsating to the rhythm of the agricultural season'; urban/rural tensions were a key measurement of social relations in provincial Ireland.²² Rural tenants were suspicious of urban centres, while town tenants were aggrieved that they were so dependent upon the supposedly insular and backward rustics for survival, and this mutual circumspection that frequently bordered on contempt will be examined.

This book unravels the intricate web of relationships that existed in rural Ireland while exploring the complexities of these social relations between 1851 and 1914. By paying attention to the lives of the lower classes in provincial Ireland, it will be possible to assess the various highs and lows of life that they faced while showing a level of sophistication that elites found inconvenient and threatening, and 'all has provided a complex and disturbing picture of the multiple everyday ambiguities of ordinary, nonconformity', as this kind of history requires a 'complex reconstruction of a variety of independent lives and experiences'.²³ There are historians who 'argue that ordinary human beings seldom understand and have little real power to alter the anonymous structures, forces and processes that determined their everyday lives'.²⁴ However, the power of public opinion manifested through the Ballinasloe Tenant Defence Association, Land League, Irish National League and United Irish League challenges this. How these mass movements produced a country of quasi-independent and individualistic tenant farmers is a great irony. In addition, this book examines how large processes were passively experienced in the small worlds of everyday existence, and the social practices of the subaltern classes take centre stage. It asks 'social historians to examine working class cultures as well as social structures, popular experiences as well as political processes'.²⁵ It shows that the actors being examined, through challenging the nature of the deferential dialectic, began to refuse to accept assigned roles as passive objects of impersonal historical development and instead became active historical subjects. David Howell contends that Welsh landlords were culturally alien and therefore not 'fit leaders of the changed Welsh Society', with Mac Philib remarking that tenants were sometimes obliged to engage in elaborate forms of deference to landlords; folk memory comments on dire consequences if some did not doff their caps and bow before their landlord.²⁶ A generational attitudinal change that came about through increased literacy, confidence and politicisation brought this to an end and it was intensified because of the Land War. It is important to stress that conflicting ideas and actions are also explored

through the re-examination of sources and by drawing upon anthropological concepts while being aware of the cultural gap that separates the present from the past, a 'necessary correction to the cultural arrogance of historians who assume that their ways of knowing are superior to those of their subjects' or even scholars that came before them'.²⁷ Paul Rouse has observed: 'It is commonplace almost beyond parody for historians to justify their endeavours by railing at the previous (and always inexplicable) omission from the canon of Irish history of their latest project'.²⁸

This book draws upon a number of seemingly unconnected events through the prism of land, politics and religion, exploring the class relationships that existed in rural Ireland and applying E.P. Thompson's concept of class. Literature regarding Irish landlordism has heretofore focused upon the estate management policies, with attention being paid to the lives of landlords, their families and others involved in the operation of estates and the 'Big House', relegating the opinions and experiences of tenants that made up the estate to secondary importance. The burning resentment of these voiceless players in the Irish question needs now to be explored in its own right. As well as being neglected by historians, they were frequently marginalised in nationalist discourse, which imagined the Irish nation as one of strong and sturdy farmers, and this often forced them to engage in periods of localised violence against those above them in the rural class system.

The aloofness of landlords was partially due to their insipid response to the Land War and a belief that deference would spring eternal. Current literature rehabilitates the reputation of landlords after they were demonised by nationalists during the Land War, and it is correct to assert that many landlords were unfortunate recipients of belligerent treatment from formerly loyal tenants because of the actions of a few recalcitrant brethren. While evictions were legal, L.P. Curtis argues that the ethics of these events were highly dubious from policing and humanitarian perspectives. The political and cultural dynamics of land have been explored at length to the neglect of the experiences lived by the small farmers, labourers and town tenants. This book will argue that the actions of the rural working class and nationalists have not been fully understood, supporting Thompson's argument that 'their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experiences' and 'consciousness of class arises in the same way in different times and places, but never in just the same way'. Defining class and class relations in a theoretical framework to the neglect of the actual lived experiences causes our understanding to be severely shackled. Furthermore,

this book sheds light on the problem of paternalism. While paternalistic landlords frequently prevented tenants from falling into penury, ideological baggage prevented both landlords and politicians from properly tackling involuntary and structural poverty. The development of a public space through the provincial press helped politicise poverty during the 1870s, though this had been done by Quaker campaigners such as James Hack Tuke and also through the Congested Districts Board.²⁹ Landlord hostility appealed to rustic orators and the suggestion that landlords thought the lower classes were unable to absorb political arguments placed them in an invidious position on the eve of the Land War.

The growth of a wider popular liberal movement challenged aristocratic privilege through the prism of the Irish question as the extension of the franchise also saw a greater democratic movement now emerging in Britain. In Ireland, following the 1872 by-election in Galway and the elections in Mayo in 1874, the lower classes were no longer extraneous to the political process, and their actions also witnessed brief resistance to the overwhelming power wielded and exerted by the Catholic Church, with a shout of ‘Hurrah for Bismarck...Hurrah for Oliver Cromwell’ being uttered at an election meeting in the county in 1874.³⁰ The neo-Fenians of late Victorian Mayo and Galway were keen to construct an alternative sphere of political discourse, away from the malign and conservative influence of the landlord, clergy, shopkeeper and strong farmer. Rural classes adapted to the rapidly changing milieu stimulated by Gladstonian liberalism in Britain and this influenced popular political engagement in Ireland.

Also explored is the extent of intra-tenant conflict, which subtly bifurcated local society and saw the emergence of an avaricious element within the Catholic urban middle class as they sought to denigrate the poorest in their communities, partially as a response to a threatened increase in the striking of rates. This low-level class war was initially driven by anti-grazing rhetoric, which was quite strong and driven by grassroots leaders like Matt Harris, who was suspicious of the motives of graziers. He contended that they were a self-serving group that was interested only in arriving amongst the ranks of respectability with the declining aristocratic influence.

2 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

By taking an episodic approach in each chapter, this will allow for a greater understanding of the numerous challenges people faced as deference towards the aristocratic elite was challenged more forthrightly. The wider

British popular liberal challenge to privilege manifested itself through a virulent anti-landlord campaign in Ireland, and hostility towards aristocratic privilege was also witnessed in Britain. The seismic changes wrought by the ravages of the Great Famine, along with the facilitation of land purchase through the Encumbered Estates Courts, allowed for the more astute landowning families and business-orientated ‘new’ families to consolidate and increase their influence. Chapter 2 pays particular attention to aspects of the socio-economic conditions of the lower classes after the Famine and also focuses upon the estate management policies of landlords in east Galway, which were frequently disseminated through the auspices of the Ballinasloe Agricultural Society, agricultural instructors and pamphlets. The society’s operation was discussed at length in evidence given to the Devon Commission in the pages of the local press and the *Irish Farmers’ Gazette*. While the Devon Commission sat prior to the period being examined in this book, the evidence gathered paints a picture of the socio-economic conditions, improvements and management policies in the immediate post-Famine period.

The varying estate management policies amongst east Galway landlords also warrant assessment. Lords Clonbrock and Clancarty were hostile to the subdivision of holdings prior to the Famine and generally preferred estates of small farmers, while others such as Lords Ashtown, Clanricarde, Dunsandle and Allan Pollok were amenable to the highly profitable and labour-light grazing because it meant less risk for the landlord than subdivision, which could place an inordinate burden on landlords if the tenants were particularly poor. The fact that small farmers were cheek-by-jowl with graziers set the scene for significant animus towards these avaricious ‘shoneens’ who challenged traditional notions of sharing. The capitalistic nature of grazing challenged traditional notions of subsistence and is an example of the obstacles presented to the lower classes, who were grappling with various challenges presented to them, and it set the scene for further struggles in the late Victorian period, which are explored in later chapters. Fergus Campbell, whose work has also focused on east Galway, downplays the significance and extent of anti-grazier animus. This study challenges his assertions by pointing to the full extent of grazier farming in the region. While he cites Samuel Clark’s report of there being no anti-grazing sentiment expressed on Land League platforms, this book firmly challenges such contentions in subsequent chapters.³¹

Chapter 3 explores how provocative proselytism naturally attracted hostility in the region. While the most notorious examples of this took

place in Connemara during the Famine, embers still burned in a post-Famine revival, with aristocratic resistance to the Cullenisation of Ireland as Paul Cullen—archbishop of Armagh and subsequently cardinal archbishop of Dublin—implemented a series of changes to make the Irish Roman Catholic Church more ultramontane in its practices than before. Nuns were an important part of this counter-charge and the third Earl of Clancarty's hostility towards the Sisters of Mercy exacerbated tensions which, while generally class-based, were now taking on a confessional hue. He was chairman of the Ballinasloe Board of Guardians, and his refusal to let them enter the Ballinasloe workhouse threatened a breakdown of order that had previously been in place in the region. It was also a public manifestation of varying opinions amongst Protestant landlords, especially those who were not as unwavering in their religious zeal as Clancarty. The repeated attempts to have the Sisters of Mercy admitted between 1853 and 1863 symbolised open defiance against Clancarty and was the first serious threat to the total domination the Trench family had in local affairs in the post-Famine period. The previous ineffectiveness of the Catholic Church to adequately deal with the abject poverty, both temporal and spiritual, and a dearth of adequate educational facilities in the west ensured that the workhouse was ripe for a proselytising mission. The splenetic hostility of Archbishop John MacHale of Tuam to non-denominational education in the 1860s saw educational facilities in the west become stunted, and Bible schools were presented as a nefarious threat to the education of Catholics.³²

This chapter deals with four key events in Ballinasloe between 1851 and 1863 relating to Clancarty's proselytising activities, namely: provocative proselytism in Ballinasloe and its hinterland, souperism, educational provisions and the consequences of the arrival of the Sisters of Mercy in Ballinasloe for the control exerted by the family, as the third Earl's belligerent attitude towards their presence was a check on his control over affairs in the community.

Those engaged in the proselytising mission in the West of Ireland failed to fully understand the conditions in which these people were living. Attempts at forced conversions belied the sincerity of true evangelicals as this would be abhorrent to them. This is something not necessarily appreciated by historians, whose criticisms have often focused upon the Catholic response, condemning it for being unnecessarily hostile. Meanwhile, contemporaries and historians such as P.K. Egan—a Catholic priest—placed Lord Clancarty's evangelicalism into a simplistic confessional paradigm in

an effort to portray the Catholic poor as the victors in a struggle against an oppressive, bigoted landlord.³³ This trope was successfully deployed on future occasions in order to denigrate the Clancarty family in pursuance of a political agenda that was overtly Catholic.

Chapter 4 turns its attention to the 1872 by-election in Galway between Captain John Philip Nolan of Ballinderry, Tuam and Captain William le Poer Trench, third son of the third Earl of Clancarty. This became one of the most contentious by-election campaigns in late nineteenth-century Ireland and was the last before the Secret Ballot Act of 1872. The excessive influence of the Catholic clergy resulted in Judge William Keogh delivering a withering judgement and annulling the result, with the newly enthroned bishop of Clonfert, Patrick Duggan, and other clergy subsequently being returned for trial, accused of inciting violence. Such was the fallout from the judgement and subsequent trial that Gladstone feared it would start an imperial crisis. Nolan gave *de facto* recognition to tenant-right through the Portacarron award. The award followed clearances on his estate in 1864 and 1867 and the arrival of a grazier to farm 4000 acres outside Oughterard, west Galway. Nolan's expedience saw him become a more acceptable candidate to the clergy and this *volte-face* saw landlords form a superficial and doomed alliance behind Captain Trench. However, recently discovered correspondence between the first Marquess of Clanricarde and other Galway landlords showed that they always knew Trench's candidature was destined to failure because of his father's previous behaviour, and their desire was to limit the contagion that would spread from his candidature. This tranche of correspondence also reveals their hostility towards the lower classes' engagement in the political process as they saw that it presented a real threat to their power. Trench's tactical gamble of appealing the result worked in his favour as he took Nolan's seat after the result was annulled. The over-exuberance of the clergy angered Bishop John MacEvilly of Galway and formerly doctrinaire neo-Fenians who were beginning to flirt with constitutional politics. They started a rather short-lived and disjointed effort at a grassroots culture war against the institutional Catholic Church, which culminated in John O'Connor Power's election in Mayo in 1874 that reflected the popular will of the people, yet was in the face of clerical opposition. This chapter will show that Fenians had a greater appreciation of the democratic framework being constructed than had previously been thought, as the 1870s saw the debates on democracy that had taken place in the 1860s now being played out on the political stage in the regions. Fenians were hostile

to the forcefulness of the Catholic clergy in attempting to influence the result of the election and decide who could run for election. Members of O'Connor Power's election campaign team, such as Matt Harris and Michael Malachy O'Sullivan, had learned about the process of electioneering during the 1872 by-election in Galway and they formed an influential bloc that tried to stymie the hostility of the Catholic Church to the emergent democratic process.

Farmers clubs and tenant defence associations sprung up across the country from the 1860s as the lower classes became more politically engaged. Chapter 5 explores the aftermath of the failed 1867 rebellion as western Fenians begin to explore the merits of a constitutional movement that culminated in a series of New Departures. As part of this process of change, they were withering in their assessment of clerical interference in Galway in 1872 and Mayo in 1874, and this continued afterwards. These post-1867 Fenians were influenced by anti-clerical events in Europe, believing that religion could bind conservative forces together, reflecting Gambetta's maxim: 'Clericalism: there's the enemy'.³⁴ Fenians thought that the clergy were hostile to the burgeoning democratic framework as they tried to impose 'respectable' (ie middle-class) candidates for the electorate to mull over. The nascent small-town bourgeoisie saw politics as a means to gain respectability with associational benefits that could also be derived from political engagement. Along with other members of the 'challenging collectivity' of clergy and strong farmers, they wanted to challenge landlord dominance in local politics, with the local priest generally acting as final arbiter.³⁵

Despite the influence of the 'challenging collectivity' in local affairs, the establishment of the Ballinasloe Tenant Defence Association was an affront to notions of 'respectability' and its leaders had a greater understanding of the experience of the lower classes because they were of those classes and were firmly rooted in the communities in which they campaigned. Various attempts at courting popular support for progressive social reform were reported extensively in the local press. Increased literacy levels in post-Famine Ireland, along with the growth of the mass meeting and popular liberal sentiment, saw these ideas being diffused to a wider audience than was previously possible. The holding of meetings on market days or after mass, along with improved forms of transport, also aided in the development of class consciousness because politics now became more accessible and this shows that the lower classes were sophisticated in their own ways.

While Chartism had died as a movement in the 1840s, its legacy remained an integral part of the culture of certain communities and its influence lingered with the Great Reform Act of 1867 and the Secret Ballot Act of 1872. This reached a crescendo in the 1870s as Gladstonian liberalism saw the Grand Old Man appreciating the role the masses could play in challenging privilege. The proliferation of the provincial press and Fenian efforts to link the lower classes in Ireland together in a wider class struggle was an effort to encompass these classes in provincial Ireland into collective organisation, and it shows that the influence of Chartism transcended into political thought in the West of Ireland. The Ballinasloe Tenant Defence Association attempted to organise farmers and foster a sense of class consciousness in order to challenge both the authority of landlords and the threat posed by graziers to small farmers. This chapter explores the influences surrounding the establishment of the Ballinasloe Tenant Defence Association and its attempts to organise farmers and foster a sense of class consciousness in order to challenge both the authority of landlords and the threat posed by graziers to small farmers and labourers in the district.

The lack of formal, tangible organisations akin to trade unions has led some historians to argue that there was no effective leadership outside of the clergy for tenant farmers.³⁶ Yet the existence of informal associations in small towns and villages produced a precocious leadership in waiting and E.P. Thompson has argued that having a locally based leadership could ensure support. While the lower classes were generally passive, efforts were made to organise them and educate them politically, and latent radicalism could be brought out in times of crisis.³⁷ The formalisation of protest was a form of social disciplining and the emergence of the Land League was the culmination of several years' growth in political engagement amongst the lower classes; this is the focus of Chapter 6. While Isaac Butt and Charles Stewart Parnell were advocating the cause of Home Rule, grassroots social radicals, attuned to the desperate conditions in the West of Ireland, had been advocating land reforms as the most pressing social and political concern. Parnell realised this in 1878 in Ballinasloe, and by the time of the Land League meeting in Westport in April 1879, 'land for the people' was the phrase that was most important for any aspiring member of parliament to embrace.

The precarious position of small farmers, due to their marginal holdings and lack of security, increased their vulnerability during the crisis that precipitated the Land War. Their indebtedness to landlords and shopkeepers

saw the Land War become a bitter conflict between two sets of creditors. Previously, localised agrarian violence tended to be sporadic and lacking in any direction or sophistication, and this was common in peasant communities across Europe. This ribbon-type activity was generally a response to breaches of unwritten laws and was a form of extra-legal jurisprudence. Violence is a good vehicle to explore social relations at a micro-level as the conflict between peasant and elite culture manifested itself through this activity. Popular, unofficial courts settled disputes, especially in more remote areas where judicial authority was not recognised by communities and the moral authority of the community and unwritten laws superseded the official law.³⁸ The Land War gave these unwritten laws a greater sophistication and focus, and the Land League tried to direct violence into peaceful protests and mass meetings. The success of this could be seen when the law of the league superseded the ordinary law in bringing stability to the countryside. While the dichotomy of oppressor and oppressed was a fundamental factor of Land War dynamics, a little-understood phenomenon was that of intra-tenant conflict, which can only be extrapolated effectively through a study of this nature. This chapter pays particular attention to this while juxtaposing it with anti-landlord rhetoric, as the Land League eventually failed to reflect/represent the needs of the poorest farmers. It will also explore the cracks that emerged in the nationalist movement as popular agitation for land grew, culminating in the bulwark of strong farmers and shopkeepers coming out on top, to the detriment of small farmers and labourers.

Chapter 7 explores how the challenge to landlord deference was reflective of a wider popular/radical liberal phenomenon within the union, as explored by Eugenio Biagini, Ewen Cameron, Patricia Lynch and Andrew Newby amongst others.³⁹ Modernisation brought notions of respectability, and democratic structures were slowly coming into place as a result of anti-landlordism, which was in essence anti-privilege. Landlords were of the opinion that nationalists vilified them indiscriminately, with the improver being as reprehensible as the evictor. While there is justification for them feeling unjustly maligned, they often did very little to counteract public perception and their withdrawal from public life was interpreted as hubris, which antagonised tenants further. Challenges to aristocratic privilege were part of a wider popular liberal movement following the Third Reform Act of 1884. The tantalising nature of popular political engagement saw increased plebeian participation in democratic institutions, while the small-town bourgeoisie began to desire the respectability once held by

their landed masters in local politics. Land legislation and declining deference resulted in the slow disintegration of estates in Ireland. This silent revolution of aristocratic decline presented landlords with a multiplicity of problems in controlling their remaining local interests as they became increasingly isolated. Because of tenant action, landlords became increasingly apathetic and this alienated them from even their most ardent defenders in the Conservative Party.

In east Galway, previously infrequent criticisms of Clancarty and Clonbrock became more regular, with hostility towards other landlords such as Ashtown, Clanricarde and Dunsandle becoming much more vocal and animated. Prior to the mid-1880s, deference towards landlords was reasonably solid, though there had been some sporadic challenges to it previously. Rather than trying to turn public opinion totally against them, nationalists concentrated their efforts on local government boards. This chapter explores all these issues while examining how the highly disturbed area of Loughrea did not affect the peace of its neighbouring district of Ballinasloe.

Chapter 8 explores the unravelling of the world in which the aristocracy lived in the West of Ireland, while juxtaposing that with the emerging dominance of new local elites and their reticence about assisting the poorest as they sought to augment their new-found positions of influence. The myriad forces at play in late Victorian Ireland saw the Irish National League emerge as a quasi-governmental force that regulated the countryside. Irish landlords were at a loss after the vigour of the Land War and the Plan of Campaign as they realised that they would not be playing a significant role in local government, especially after the chief secretary, Arthur Balfour, refused to enact legislation to protect minority interests because of his desire to abolish class distinctions. In Britain, David Cannadine contended that members of the British aristocracy were reticent about becoming involved in new forms of local democracy due to 'the financial anxieties of many landowners [which] meant that they were less inclined to shoulder these traditional responsibilities or to assume new ones, while the break-up of their estates before and after the First World War only accentuated this withdrawal from county politics and local leadership', and Irish landlords faced similar anxieties.⁴⁰ This was further compounded by the rise of the 'gombeen man', whom George Russell called a more avaricious individual than the landlord, especially considering the associational links the Catholic middle class built with the poor that were consolidated during the Land War. Historiography has suggested that landlords were

excluded from participating in local government by an almost atavistic nationalism, though they frequently dislocated themselves from their tenantry. This chapter also explores the emergence of trade union organisation amongst shop assistants, the contentious issue of housing and working-class representation on the Urban District Council, all issues that dominated on the eve of World War One.

NOTES

1. Evidence of Matt Harris, 16 July 1889, Parnell Commission, vol. 1, p. 179, Q. 94,630.
2. Brian Casey, 'The battle of Saunders' Fort', in *South East Galway Archaeological and Historical Society Newsletter* (Spring 2013).
3. For published and unpublished work on Woodford and the Saunders eviction, see Casey, 'The battle of Saunders' Fort'; L.P. Curtis, *The depiction of eviction in Ireland, 1845–1910*; Anne Finnegan, 'The land war in south-east Galway, 1879–1890' (MA thesis, NUI Galway, 1974); Thomas Feeney, 'The Woodford evictions' (MED thesis, NUI Galway, 1976) and Miriam Moffit, *The Clanricarde planters and land agitation in east Galway* (Dublin, 2011).
4. David W. Howell, 'The land question in nineteenth-century Wales, Ireland and Scotland: A comparative study', *Agricultural Historical Review* 61, no. 1 (2013), p. 90.
5. K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and belonging: Community, identity and welfare in England and Wales, 1700–1950* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 13–14.
6. David Howell, *The rural poor in eighteenth-century Wales* (Cardiff, 2000); James Hunter, *The making of the Crofting community* (Edinburgh, 1976, 2000, 2010); E.P. Thompson, *The making of the English working class* (London, 1963); Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The modernization of rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford, 1976).
7. David F. Crew, 'Alltagsgeschichte: A new history from below', *Central European History* 22, no. 3/4 (1989), p. 397.
8. Michael Huggins, *Social conflict in pre-Famine Ireland: The case of county Roscommon* (Dublin, 2007); Liana Vardi, *The land and the loom: Peasants and profit in northern France, 1630–1800* (Durham, NC, 1993); Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*.
9. For some examples of discussions on class relations in Ireland, see: Paul Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland, 1858–82* (London, 1980); idem, *Conflict and conciliation in Ireland, 1890–1910* (Oxford, 1987); John W. Boyle, 'A marginal figure: The Irish rural labourer' in Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly Jr. (eds.), *Irish peasants: Violence and political unrest, 1780–1914* (Dublin, 1983), pp. 311–38; Fergus Campbell, *Land*

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10. Martyn Lyons, *The writing culture of ordinary people in Europe, c. 1860–1920* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 1–2.
 11. Thomas Summerhill, *Harvest of dissent: Agrarianism in nineteenth-century New York* (Chicago, 2005), p. 173.
 12. Crew, ‘Alltagsgeschichte’, pp. 398, 406.
 13. Alun Howkins, *Poor labouring men: Rural radicalism in Norfolk, 1870–1923* (London, 1985), p. 15.
 14. Séamas Mac Philib, ‘The Irish landlord system in folk tradition: Impact and image’ (PhD thesis, Department of Irish Folklore, UCD, 1990), p. 2.
 15. For more, see David Dickson, *Dublin: The making of a capital* (Dublin, 2014); Mary E. Daly, *Dublin, the deposed capital: A social and economic history, 1860–1914* (Cork, 1984); Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin slums, 1800–1925: A study in urban geography* (Dublin, 1998) and Ruth McManus, *Dublin, 1910–1940: Shaping the city and suburbs* (Dublin, 2001).
 16. See Philip Bull, *Land, politics and nationalism: a study of the Irish land question* (Dublin, 1996); Campbell, *Land and revolution*; Samuel Clark, *Social Origins of the Irish War* (Princeton, 1979); Terence Dooley, *The decline of the Big House in Ireland. A study of Irish landed families 1860–1960* (Dublin, 2001); David Seth Jones, *Graziers, land reform and political conflict in Ireland* (Washington, DC, 1995).
 17. Howard Newby, ‘The deferential dialectic’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17, no. 2 (Apr. 1975), p. 158.