

# Tragedy at Doolough

*One of the most infamous occurrences in County Mayo during the Famine happened in March of 1849, in the Louisburgh area. The circumstances of the event, which needlessly compelled many starving people to walk twenty miles or more, gives testimony to the callous and uncaring attitude of some officials charged with administering the Poor Law. The tragedy has long lived in the minds of the people of the Louisburgh area and is now commemorated annually by the Famine Walk, from Louisburgh to Delphi.*

## TO THE EDITOR OF THE MAYO CONSTITUTION.

Louisburgh,  
April 5th, 1840.

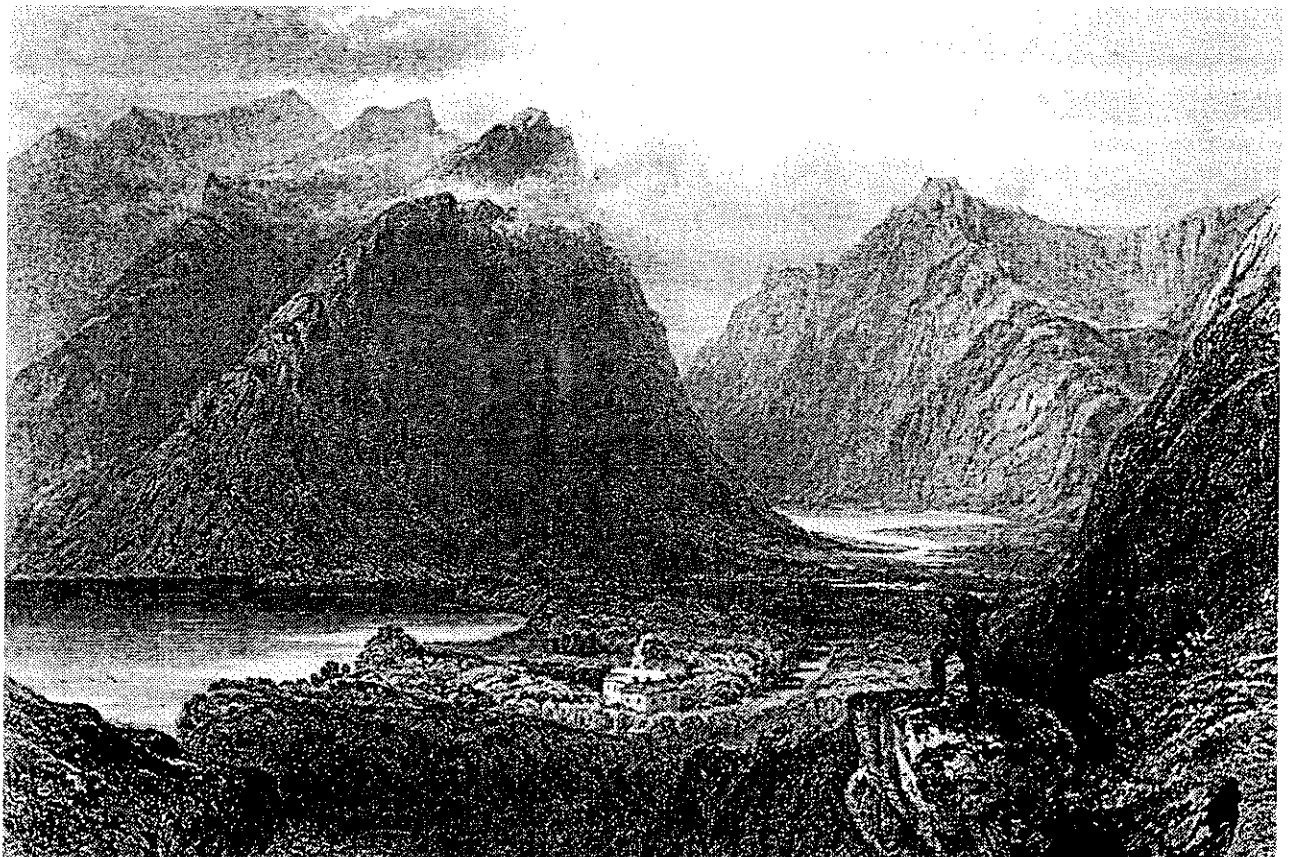
Sir - On last Friday, 30th ult., Colonel Hogrove, one of the vice guardians of Westport union, and Captain Primrose, the poor law inspector, arrived here on that morning for the purpose of holding an inspection on the paupers who were receiving outdoor relief in this part of the union, but, from some cause or other, they did not, but started off immediately for Delphi Lodge. In a short time after, the

relieving officer ordered the poor creatures forthwith to follow him to Delphi Lodge, as he would have them inspected early on the following morning, Saturday, 31st; and in obedience of this humane order, hundreds of these unfortunate living skeletons, men, women and children, might have been seen struggling through the mountain passes and roads for the appointed place. The inspection took place in the morning, and I have been told that nothing could equal the horrible appearance of those truly unfortunate creatures,

some of them without a morsel to eat, and others exhausted from fatigue, having travelled upwards of 16 miles to attend the inspection.

It is not for me to say why the inspection took place at Delphi, it being the most remote part of the union, and some of the poor, as I have before stated, having to travel upwards of sixteen miles.

I have now the melancholy duty of informing you and the public, that a woman named Dalton, from Wastelands, six miles to the West of this town, her son and daughter, were all found dead on the road side, on



Delphi Lodge.

the morning after the inspection, midway between this town and Delphi: and about one mile nearer to this town, two men were found dead – in all, five. The bodies of these ill-fated creatures lay exposed on the road side for three or four days and nights, for the dogs and ravens to feed upon, until some charitable person had been buried in a turf hole at the road side.

Now, Sir, I call upon you, as the sincere friend of the poor, and in the name of that just God who is to judge all at the last day, to call upon the Lord Lieutenant of this county to demand a searching inquiry into this melancholy affair, and prevent, if possible, so many of the poor being sacrificed. If inquests are held, I will let you know the result. –

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

A RATEPAYER.

Mayo Constitution (10-4-1849).

## DOOLOUGH

### TO THE EDITOR OF THE MAYO CONSTITUTION

Louisburgh, April 13th, 1849.

Sir – In my letter of the 5th instant, I attempted giving you an account of the first loss of life which took place in this part of the country, on the night of the 31st ultimo. I have this day the melancholy day of informing you that two more miserable creatures were found on the mountain passes dead – in all 7, and I am confidently informed that 9 or 10 more have never reached their homes, and several of those that did, were so fatigued with cold and hunger that they in a short time ceased to live. Gracious God! will my Lord Lucan, as Lieutenant of this county, suffer such extraordinary and cruel conduct to pass without a deep and searching inquiry, and to punish those who dare to sport with the lives of the people.

I tell Colonel Hogrove, and Captain Primrose that the relieving officer ordered the poor creatures to follow them to Delphi, in order that they might be inspected at 7 o'clock on the morning of the 31st, at that lodge, and I challenge them to contradict what I state; further that the cause of their not stopping at Louisburgh was, that the relieving officer had not his books ready, and it was at the court-house the following order was given – all persons not attending at 7 or 8 o'clock in the morning, at Delphi, would be struck off the relief; the people did attend, but the relieving officer did not until 12 o'clock.

I now think it right to inform you that a strictly private inquest was held by Mr. Coroner Burke, aided and assisted by a member of his family. Doctor Burke, who is the poorhouse doctor, and the jury returned the following verdict, after a post mortem examination on the bodies of two of them:– “Died from starvation and cold,” when instead of providing coffins for those creatures, the bodies were again thrown into a mountain slough, with a few sods thrown over them immediately after.

The Coroner and his staff proceeded to Delphi Lodge, and on the following day returned and held another inquest; like verdict was returned, when the Coroner and doctor returned to their mansions, leaving three more unfortunate creatures at the road side, with scarce a covering of sods upon them.

Thank God all are not so hardened as the above, for that excellent and humane clergyman. I mean the Rev. Thomas O'Dowd, the Catholic Curate, gave five coffins to Mr. Walshe, who, to his credit be it said, both himself and his men had all the bodies taken out of the sloughs on the 12th instant, and placed in coffins, and had them respectably interred to a burial place.

It is much to be regretted that both Mr. Moroney, R.M.; Mr. Garvey, J.P., and Mr. Walshe

did not attend, if they did, I am certain that they would not sanction hole-and-corner inquests to be held. Why not examine witnesses who would prove who issued the inhuman order to follow their honours to Delphi Lodge? I tell both the coroner and his staff, as well as the guardians, that, a deep and searching inquiry shall and must be held, and show those gentlemen that they cannot sport with the lives of the poor in this part of the country.

Now, sir, will you believe it, that the relieving officer will take no applications for relief from any persons in this town or neighbourhood, but obliges the creatures to go to the village of Cregganbane, a distance of at least six miles, before he placed their names on the relief book, and then his honour must be followed to Westport.

I will now leave the matter in your hands, knowing you to be the sincere and steady friend of the poor. In my last, I stated that the poor had not to travel more than 10 or 15 miles, I now tell you that the residence of some of those found dead was at least 28 miles from Delphi – the same distance back.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

A RATEPAYER.

I omitted giving you the names of the persons found dead – Catherine Dillon, Patt Dillon and Honor Dillon, mother, son and daughter, living two-and-a-half miles from this town. Catherine Grady and Mary McHale of Wastelands, 10 miles from this; James Flynn of Rinnacully, 13 miles; so that instead of receiving their rations of the 30th – the day they expected it – in this town, they had to proceed on to Delphi Lodge, without a morsel to eat, a distance of at least fourteen miles. Furthermore, unless some steps be taken, I fear much that ere one month many a poor creature will meet the same fate.

Mayo Constitution (17-5-1849).

as heartless, but at present, when want and death are decimating the poor people we look upon it as monstrous, and the promoters of it less humanised than savages.

Tyrawly Herald (7-9-1848).

## GEORGE BINGHAM, 3rd EARL OF LUCAN

Lord Lucan has 60,570 acres in Mayo, part of it around Castlebar, where his substantial old house stands; part of it at Cloona Castle, near Ballinrobe. From several parishes extensive evictions were made from 1846 to 1850; throwing together the smaller holdings, several large grazing and a few considerable tillage farms were made. Lord Lucan, in his terse, incisive style, asserted that "he would not breed paupers to pay priests." With a sort of military despotism, he has endeavoured personally to rule his estates. Hurried visits to Mayo have not, however, always furnished him with sound information as to agricultural or social difficulties; his local lieutenants have had small authority; their opinions have often been hastily set aside; little has been done to develop either Castlebar, the villages on the estate, or the agriculture of the country.

(Finlay Dun: "Landlords and Tenants in Ireland" - 1881).



Earl of Lucan (From the Wynne Collection).

## KILMACLASSER – MORE LANDLORDISM IN MAYO

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MAYO TELEGRAPH.

Half-Parish of Kilmaclasser, Westport,  
June 24, 1848.

Sir – I beg leave to enclose you a correct list of the houses that have been demolished and the persons evicted within the last three weeks in this parish – all on the property of the Right Hon. the Earl of Lucan: for be it known to all whom it may concern, that His Lordship has the enviable distinction of being hitherto the only Gerrardiser in the electoral division of Kilmaclasser. In the course of a few days you shall have a list of the depopulations in the Kilmeena divisions. I may add, that severals of those whose houses have been levelled by that pink of landlords, the Earl of Lucan, had actually made fine tillage; but, alas! of them it may be well said, "Sic vos non vobis," – they have sown, but others shall reap.

Yours truly,

THOMAS HARDIMAN.

### NUMBER OF HOUSES LEVELLED IN KILTRANE

Martin Cain, having 10 in family, living in Knockmenard.  
John Cain, having 6 in family, do. do.  
Thomas Cain, having 2 in family, living in Kiltrane.  
George O'Brien, having 2 in family, living in Knockmenard.  
Widow Reilly, having 1 in family, living in Michael O'Brien's.  
John Moran, having 10 in family, living in a shed.  
Daniel McGreal's orphans, 4 in family, living in Knockbee.  
Widow Cusack, having 2 in family, living in Patt McLoughlin's.  
John Sheridan, having 6 in family, living in a shed.  
Thomas Cusack, having 6 in family, living at Louisburgh.  
Hugh Cain, having 6 in family, living in Fahy.  
Widow Wehan, having 5 in family, living in a shed.

### AUGHAGOWLMORE

Sarah Scanlan, having 2 in family, living in a neighbour's house.  
Henry Kearny, having 4 in family, do., do.  
Widow Cusack, having 3 in family, do., do.  
John Horan, having 3 in family, gone to England.  
John Heraghty, having 3 in family, do., do.

### AUGHAGOWLABEG

Pat Carney, having 2 in family – wife living in a neighbouring house.

### DRIMULRA

Pat Gannon, having 4 in family, gone to neighbouring house.  
Patt Quinn, having 8 in family, living in a shed of his own.  
Terence Quinn, having 4 in family, do., do.  
Austin McGreal, having 6 in family, do., do.  
John Quinn, having 5 in family, do., do.  
Edward Gibbons, having 4 in family, do., do.  
John McGreal, having 3 in family, do., do.  
Michael Salmon, having 5 in family, do., do.  
Widow Lackey (McGreal), 6 in family, do., do.  
Anthony Moran, having 3 in family, do., do.  
Widow Salmon, living in a shed.

The Telegraph (5-7-1848).