

# JOHN HONE (C.1740–1819) GENTLEMAN OF GREAT MARLOW AND DUBLIN

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*In 1987 the author found 22 letters in a Southampton shop.<sup>1</sup> They are the correspondence for 1787 between John Hone, gentleman of Great Marlow and two Dublin lawyers administering his Irish properties. Hone was exasperated with the strain of extracting income from distant Irish tenants. That spring the Dublin Parliament expressed alarm at growing resistance to absentee landlords. Hone referred to other Buckinghamshire families involved in Ireland – including the Lowndes and the Lovetts. He boasted of having the ear of the highest in Ireland through Buckinghamshire social life: the Marquis of Buckingham returned from Stowe to Dublin as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in November that year and Hone spoke of being in his circle; the Irish Chancellor of the Exchequer knocked on Hone's door in Marlow offering to accompany him on the Holyhead mailcoach. The age of Irish quasi-Home Rule and of a proud Georgian Dublin was coming to an end – the rebellion of '98 and the French landings in Ireland made rule from Westminster inevitable. Of all the English home defence forces raised in 1794, only the Royal Buckinghamshire Militia served in Ireland in 1798, a hint of the involvement of the county's gentry in Irish affairs.*

John Hone, Esq., (c.1740–1819) lived in Great Marlow – the civil authority later dropped the 'Great', while the ecclesiastical parish retained it. He had 'two freehold houses situate in the High Street Great Marlow with two fields adjoining estimated at one acre and quarter.'<sup>2</sup> One house seems to have been his home: he wrote always of home, children and family in Marlow, and nowhere else. He was a Justice – one letter refers to his meeting the Marquess of Buckingham at Quarter Sessions in January 1787. In 1802 John Hone paid £22 Poor Law rate on a house in Great Marlow. Local directories for the 1790s list Hone as both Esquire and Gentleman. He was one of two Marlow gentry of any rank listed on the 'County Strength' (*Posse Comitatus*) during the invasion scare of 1798.<sup>3</sup>

To judge from the signatures, the same John Hone witnessed Marlow weddings in 1779, 1786 and 1803.<sup>4</sup> His own marriage to Anne Todd, daughter of Mary Todd of Fleet Market, London, took place around 1774 and produced 6 children, of whom only two, John Hone junior and Susannah Russell Hone, lived beyond the age of twenty-one.<sup>5</sup> Hone's widowed mother Susannah died in the year before the letters were written; his father, William,

of Marlow, died some years before that. The Susannah Hone (1798–1869) commemorated in Marlow church was Susannah Edge who in 1824 married John Hone (1800-1832), the third of that name and grandson of the John Hone of this article.

Anne Hone, née Todd, came of age in 1775. Her widowed mother Mary had administered Irish properties in Kings and Queens Counties (today Co. Offaly and Co. Leix) on her behalf up to then, evidently a bequest from Anne's father.<sup>6</sup> Mary's name was still attached to a long-standing case in the Irish Chancery Court for twenty years arrears of repayment and interest (totalling about £1300) on a mortgage bond of about £600 from one Coulaghan (or Callaghan), tenant on land now unidentified. Mary Todd, possibly married into the Todd family of Toddstown, Co. Down, died in January 1787 and left her personal estate to her sister Mrs Elizabeth Lowndes, possibly married into the Buckinghamshire Lowndes who also owned land in Ireland. Mary's and Elizabeth's maiden name was Russell and the Hone family took pains to preserve it (see Note 4).

Other arrears were owed to Hone, besides Coulaghan's. These were due to tenants' sickness,

refusal to pay, legalised avoidance due to the mixing of church tithe with rent, and claims to obscure customary rights. In 1773, around the time of his marriage, Hone had inherited land in Kings County from a Mrs Lovett, so far unidentified. The Lovetts of Iscombe, Buckinghamshire, intermarried with the Derby family of Leap, a 'pasteboard gothick' grand house and estate in Kings County. Jonathan Derby of Leap, married one Susannah Lovett (1713–1776) and their daughter, Susannah Derby, married her cousin Sir Jonathan Derby of Leap. Around this time the Irish branch of the Lovetts with homes in Dublin and Tipperary became the main line of the Buckinghamshire family. They in turn were related to the Verneys of Buckinghamshire who also had land in Kings County.

In all, Hone might have expected to receive £1000 a year from his Irish lands, one of several thousand absentees reaping similar income. Some drew much more. It was a cause of growing Irish unrest and uneasy English consciences, expressed two decades later by Maria Edgeworth in *Castle Rackrent* and *The Absentee*. Fellow Englishmen accused them of tax avoidance. Hone's generation sowed the seeds of a resentment which ripened into agrarian unrest, the uprising of 1798, and the more effective nineteenth century land war of rent refusal and ostracisation of landlords like Boycott and Bence-Jones. The resentment, reinforced by the Famine and mass emigration, found expression through religion, politics and class.

Despite Hone's fulminations against 'the laws of Ireland which do me no justice' and his threat to 'part with everything I have in Ireland and swear never to have any business with Ireland or Irishmen more while I live', he kept his Irish lands intact until his death thirty years later, although he thoughtfully provided 'if my son should dispose of the said lands.' By then the artificial boom of the Napoleonic wars was over and Ireland with a rapidly accelerating population was feeling the pinch.

### HONE'S IRISH TENANTS

Ireland was to England what Egypt was to Rome, or the Congo to Belgium. Norman barons found opportunity there, defusing their threat to the English crown. Notoriously, Ireland's invaders went native, producing what has been called 'colonial nationalism'. The name-prefix 'Fitz' (*fits*) came to

sit easily with the equivalent Gaelic prefixes 'O' and 'Mac'. The Reformation allowed both countries to express their identities in contrasting religious terms, but revealingly it was the devout Catholic monarchs Mary Tudor and her consort Philip of Spain, the Ferdinand and Isabella of England, who placed the first 'plantations' in Ireland. These settler colonies were named Queens and Kings Counties, and their county towns Maryborough and Philipstown. The politics of national and ethnic supremacy – 'ascendancy' – came before even doctrinal differences. Queens and King Counties were choice arable, timbered and pasture regions.

A century later the Cromwellian settlements brought 'godly' fervour, but by the later eighteenth century, Catholic and Protestant, Gael and Planter descendant, had learned to live together and intermarry, even subverting the harsh laws against Catholic land ownership by placing it in friendly Protestants' names. The Dublin Parliament repealed the penal laws as Hone was writing. Irish history is not a simple continuum. Its complexity created the tangle of subtenants, middlemen, and subdivided land from which Hone was trying, by remote control, to extract an income.

1787 was not a good year. Attorney-General Arthur Wolfe warned in the Irish Parliament that tenants were 'being ground to powder by relentless landlords'. Hone, however respectable a figure on Great Marlow High Street, was one of them. Ireland's rural wealth was being siphoned abroad, growing rural poverty accompanied a doubling of population between 1750 and 1790 and inevitably resentment grew. That spring thousands of constables were sworn in and 32 new Chairmen appointed to Quarter Sessions to meet rural unrest. Hone muttered about 'some secret we do not see', possibly referring to pressure on his tenants.

He named sixteen tenants in the letters. They ranged from Irish clansmen, through Elizabethan planters, eighteenth century English gentry, speculating merchants (as was probably Hone himself) and widows from Skinners Row, Dublin, 'who use me ill', to the rural native Gael. Hone and his ilk looked to the great and the good – the Grenvilles, the Parnells, the Wolfes – to protect their interests in a wild land. With the semi-autonomy of the Dublin Parliament and the relaxation of penal law, the old Irish aristocracy regained influence. One Fitzgerald, whose status was too much for Hone,

had a name with resonance. Edward Fitzgerald, Earl of Kildare helped lead the '98 uprising; James Fitzgerald, Earl of Leinster, was Master of The Rolls and Serjeant-at-Law in Dublin. The Fitzgeralds of Kildare were ancient Norman Irish aristocrats, their Earldom wider than the later Co. Kildare and including the land of Kings and Queens Counties. Hone clashed with his lawyers over Fitzgerald, accusing one of them of being overawed by Fitzgerald's 'connections'. They were, however, strong enough to make Hone himself suggest 'settling this matter amicably'. He asked one lawyer to 'talk to him as from yourself and be of service to us both.' The lawyer responded describing 'a visit from a certain great man who you expected great assistance from and that very man is nearly related to Fitzgerald and his attorney is concerned for Fitzgerald.'

At the other end of Hone's tenant list were the smallholder Joseph Burke and 'poor Rawlings, not worth sixpence at his death' in January 1787. By April, one Moore, widow Sherlock and one Ralph 'have paid me not one farthing'. Ralph, however, 'has been sick all this summer and I fear will never pay.' The poor man was not only sick, but in arrears, and at the end of his 'lives' or lease-term. Coullaghan and Moore, more prosperous and certainly more 'savvy', bluntly refused payment altogether. They took advantage of the long odds against an absent landlord. Coullaghan had already resisted Hone's mother-in-law (and presumably father-in-law) for years. In sheer frustration, Hone called Moore 'a scoundrel ... a disgrace ... an artful trickster ... a bad man ... a worse does not live.' Moore, who may have been Henry Moore (1744–1815) of the O'Moores of Queens County, promised much and regularly, but delivered nothing. The lawyer agreed with Hone, 'as bad a man as lives'.<sup>7</sup> Hone demanded from his lawyers the ejection (eviction) of Moore and a closure on the security held for Coullaghan's mortgage bond.<sup>8</sup>

Edward Briscoe, however, another tenant, eyeballed Hone's Dublin lawyer in the street and refused all payment. 'Briscoe of Screggan' was an Elizabethan settler family who assumed its title from its first Crown grant of land. Cromwell confiscated Briscoe lands because they were Catholics, but around 1720 they set about regaining their lands, renaming Briscoe House near Philipstown, 'Mount Briscoe'. Hone inherited his part of their land from Mrs Lovett in 1773 and had visited

Mount Briscoe in 1775 to discuss rent terms. Briscoe quibbled about detail – a matter of pride, as of fast footwork – and insisted on a rebate for a perpetual quit-rent his family supposedly paid to the Crown as planters in lieu of armed service. Hone disagreed with the amount of quit-rent exemption claimed (about £14). In fact, he waxed apoplectic about it, although his indignation was often calculated, eloquent theatre.

Established gentry also found themselves subtenants of an absentee gentleman speculator – (James) Johnston Stoney (1759–1824) of Oakley Park, Parsonstown (now Birr), and Robert Harding of the same planter town in Kings County, were Hone tenants, as were Thomas and John Nicholson of Queens County at Ballykineen who may have come from a family of Dublin merchants.

#### HONE'S IRISH LAWYERS

Copies survive of ten letters from John Hone to John Denny Pain, his Dublin lawyer; Hone, in turn, preserved Pain's seven letters back to him. An eighth he forwarded to John Carroll, his other lawyer, in February. It cost 3s 9d (Irish sterling) to send from Dublin by sail packet boat and mail coach. Communications were for the wealthy. Perhaps to save money, John Carroll, possibly a barrister, responded only through Pain, despite five letters from Hone to Carroll, also preserved in copy. In April 1787 Hone complained of 'waiting with impatience' for a response to four letters sent since January. After a fifth sent in November, he concluded lamely 'it is but wasting paper to write to Carroll, for he is not a man of his word', although he deleted in the draft 'I will not write to him any more'. Finally Pain relayed from Carroll that it would be good if Hone came out toward the end of the year. This incensed Hone even more. 'Why could these orders be not made out *this* [Law] Term [and he objected] to the expense as well as a long and disagreeable journey.'

Hone's draft letters show how he juggled words for maximum effect, helpless by distance from his property and dues. How far the Irish attorneys were playing him along precisely because of this distance, we cannot say, but Carroll and Pain were as much targets of Hone's indignation as the defaulters they were supposed to be fighting. An Englishman observed anonymously that 'the levity with which a law suit is conducted in the Court of

Chancery lacks only a bottle of wine for the conviviality of the scene.<sup>9</sup>

Carroll and Pain were admitted to the Dublin King's Inn c.1750 and 1759 respectively, as were others like Sir Arthur Wolfe, Irish Attorney General, also mentioned in Hone's letters.<sup>10</sup> John Denny (Dennis) Pain, Attorney of the Exchequer Court, practised from chambers in Bride Street Dublin until his death in 1811. Lawrence Pain, possibly his father, was also admitted to the King's Inn in 1734 and died in 1762. Pain was Hone's lifeline in the process of extracting his dues from his Irish tenants. John Carroll, Attorney of the King's Bench Court, had chambers on Golden Lane, near Chancery Lane, a more up-market area of Dublin.

Hone accused Pain of collusion with 'Fitzgerald's friends', and Carroll of dishonesty, neglect, 'cruel, ill and shameful use' and even of being 'a waste of paper'. 'Good God, how can you use me so,' he wrote to Carroll, 'What have I done to you that my children must be thus injured ... I will write to you every post until I have an answer, or come to Dublin and stay until I get that justice so long denied me.' To Carroll, however, Hone was small fry. Carroll's local clients included the Earls of Milltown and of Lanesborough. However, while lamenting that Irish property was not worth the return – arrears of mortgage interest (£1300) stretching back twenty years, of rents, and of travel expenses over two years costing him £150 – tunnel vision took over Hone. 'I will never lose the money [owed by Fitzgerald] *cost what it may* ... I had rather give up something *than spend a great deal in law*' smacks of muddled financial sense.

Hone could dismiss a halfpenny or overlook a poor man's rent: concern for rightful income was not necessarily rapaciousness. His sense of propriety made him point out to Pain 'a small mistake against yourself' of three shillings. Lawyers fees and wearying, expensive travel were no obstacle to his use of the courts to pursue his due. By comparison postage costs were small beer. In fact Hone paid nothing back into Irish land for improvements, but invested happily instead in the Irish legal system. With pride he called himself 'gentlemanlike'. When he threatened to bring up Carroll's mishandling of the Coullaghan case with the Marquess of Buckingham, the once and future Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, 'next week at our Quarter Sessions' he did so obliquely, noting merely that he had 'had *some thoughts of mentioning* this matter to him,

knowing of his great interest in Ireland, but on mature deliberation I am determined not to mention it until I hear again from you, for though Carroll serves me ill, I would not do an unjust or an ungentlemanlike act for the world.'

In the September and October of the Law Vacation 1787 no correspondence came from Dublin. In November Pain finally advised him to come over, but well into January 1788. Moore's eviction had been stayed by the court pending an appeal in April 1788, although Pain was trying to distrain some of Moore's goods. Carroll, as usual, had been so busy in court that Pain had no more to report on the Coullaghan case, having seen only Carroll's office staff.

The Dublin with which Hone corresponded was that of the last Irish Parliament. The Four Courts had just been started, the Custom House was nearly finished and Sir John Parnell had just completed Avondale in Co Wicklow, his seat and later the home of his famous great grandson, Charles Parnell. The ambitious and resplendant Marquis of Buckingham was about to begin a second term of office in Dublin from November 1787. The penal laws against Catholics were abolished between 1778 and 1793. Peace had been concluded with America, but the principles of Thomas Paine which lay behind the American bid for freedom were well-understood in France and in Ireland. Three republican revolutions followed in domino sequence, 1776, 1789 and 1798. The last one failed. It took economic depression, a swollen population, a land war and finally a war for independence to spell out to many other John Hones the reality of their precarious position.

The correspondence ended with Hone's 'complaining loudly' of the 'long, dangerous and expensive journey and the disagreeable necessity of leaving my family. You are the sole cause of it. You promised me when I was in Dublin last [1785] not one moment should be lost. Two years and a half have since elapsed and little, very little done.' Sir John Parnell, Irish Attorney General and MP for Maryborough, in Queens County, had called on Hone in Marlow. He had offered to accompany him to Dublin, but needed to be there long before Hone was due to set out. The information was irrelevant to the Dublin lawyers, and to the cases now dragging well into 1788, but it made Hone feel better that he could still remind everyone how close he was to the real power in the land. In reality it probably did him little good.

## REFERENCES

1. The Hone letters are now in the Buckinghamshire County Archive, AR 99/2004 – CD/X 1699.
2. John Hone's will, 1813, probate 1819. PROB11/1615
3. *Universal British Directory*, 1791; *Kellys Bucks Directory*, 1794; *Buckinghamshire Posse Comitatus*, ed. Ian F. Beckett, Buckinghamshire Record Society, 1984, Vol 22, p. 228. By 1798, Hone would have been almost 60. The Posse does not list those already in arms such as militiamen or regulars, only those between the ages of 15–60 capable of being called out.
4. Registers of Births Marriages and Deaths, Great Marlow Parish.
5. Will of Susannah Russell Hone, spinster, 1843, probate 1844, PROB 11/1991.
6. Will of Mary Todd, 1787, probate 1787, PROB 11/1149
7. The O'Mores were an ancient Gaelic clan dynasty ruling much of what later became Queens County.
8. Some of Hone's tenants, such as the Briscoes, can be linked with their lands – see Note 9. The Keenaghan lands may be linked with Ballykineen, the Nicholson seat in Queens County. Ballycarroll, a house, park and townland of 777 acres lies east of Maryborough (now Port Laoise), Queens County (now Co. Leix). Moore's land, which may have been Ballycarroll, was in Queens County, as his case was heard in Maryborough Assize. Ballycarroll features in Hone's will of 1819 with all the others lands mentioned in the 1787 letters. One additional (?) property in Queens County seems to feature in 1819, 'Carricknell (?) Park'.
9. Screggan, Lowerton (Lurtan) Beg, Mullaghcrohy and Ballintaggart, all evidently former Briscoe land, came to Hone through Mrs Lovett in 1773. Screggan or Scraghe is a townland near Tullamore, on the Frankford (now Kilcormac) – Tullamore road, just southwest of Charleville Park. The area contains a ruined mound castle built by the first Briscoes in 1588. A trenchwork called 'Cromwell's Lines' lies under Screggan Hill. Lowerton Beg (Lurtanbeg) and Mullaghcrohy townlands, 360 acres and 245 acres respectively, lie south west, nearer Kilcormac, in Killoughy parish. Lord Milltown, one of John Carroll's many well-heeled clients, owned Lowerton More, formerly belonging to one Maurice O'Connor. A large well established farm called Ballintaggart lay in Mullaghcrohy townland. See OS 6 inch map, Queens County, 1840; *Gazeteer of Ireland*, Samuel Lewis, 1837; *Townlands, Towns, Parks and Baronies of Ireland*, T. Cross, London, 1851.
10. *Ireland 1804*, Anonymous, London, 1805.
11. *Kings Inn Admission Papers*, Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1982; *Irish Prerogative Court Wills, Vicars, 1898*; *Dublin Registry of Deeds*, Irish Manuscript Commission, 1954, Vols 2 & 3.