



Castle Hyde and the Great Famine, 1845-51

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IN 1846, A YEAR AFTER THE FIRST SIGNS OF *PHYTOPHTHORA INFESTANS*, COMMONLY KNOWN as the blight, were first recorded in the Fermoy area of county Cork, the *Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland* proclaimed that Castle Hyde ‘ranks at present among the best mansions in Ireland’.¹ In the context of the social catastrophe that was to follow from the destruction of the potato crop and the effects this had on the economics of the Castle Hyde estate (Plates 1, 2), it was to prove within five years a highly ironic observation. For behind the façade of grandeur, the estate’s financial position had been deteriorating for decades; the Great Famine was essentially the catalyst that brought it to bankruptcy. In this respect, Castle Hyde was no different to hundreds of other estates: by 1849 there was property with an estimated rental of £2 million (out of a total national rental of around £13 million) under the control of the Courts of Equity. The growing crisis necessitated the introduction of emergency legislation that year – the Encumbered Estates Act – designed to simplify the transfer of encumbered property by breaking entail and conferring on the purchaser a parliamentary or indefeasible title. Over the next thirty years, an estimated 25% (or five million acres) of Irish land changed hands, including the Castle Hyde estate (and mansion). The aim of this paper is to briefly examine the background to the sale and how it proceeded within the wider context of the Famine in Fermoy.

While this is primarily an art-historical journal devoted to the architectural history of Ireland, it is important to consider that the architectural evolution of houses, their material culture, and changes in demesne and landscape design cannot be separated from the economics of estate life. Creation, consolidation and decline were dictated by wider economic and social changes in the circumstances of landed families. Great Georgian houses such as Castle Hyde, constructed during periods of economic prosperity and intended to reflect the social and often political prestige of individual families, were certainly not immune to the negative repercussions of calamitous social events such as the Great

1 – Nathaniel Grogan (c.1740-1807), *CASTLE HYDE ON THE BLACKWATER* (detail)
watercolour, 35 x 55.5 cm



2 – Nathaniel Grogan (c.1740-1807), *CASTLE HYDE ON THE BLACKWATER*
watercolour, 35 x 55.5 cm

Famine that undoubtedly led to the abandonment and later disappearance of some Irish houses (an area worthy of study in its own right). It also resulted in a significant transfer of ownership to new occupiers who brought with them their own tastes, which often resulted in dramatic alterations to houses and landscapes in the decades that followed from the 1850s to the 1870s. If this article should stimulate a more systematic examination of the impact of the Famine on such change – perhaps for psychological as well as other reasons – it will have fulfilled its objective.

THE 11,200-ACRE ESTATE ON WHICH CASTLE HYDE WAS LOCATED HAD BEEN IN THE ownership of the Hyde family since they were granted their lands by Queen Elizabeth I in January 1588.² The house was an impressive Georgian structure consisting of a centre block of three storeys over a basement, and seven bays joined by straight corridors to bow-fronted pavilions. It was backed up against a steep cliff face of Munster sandstone and limestone bedrock that enhanced its dramatic setting. On the cliff's edge stood the decayed and semi-clad ivied ruins of the medieval Carrigneedy Castle, originally the home of the Gaelic Mlawny family, who forfeited their lands to the Crown following the failure of the Desmond rebellion. It was in Carrigneedy that the first of the Hyde family, Arthur, originally settled. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, the growing confidence of the new settlers, allied to increased income from rising agricultural

rents and the establishment of a profitable iron works on the estate in 1669, encouraged his descendant, Arthur Hyde IV, to abandon Carrigneedy and build a more modern and grander residence to reflect his family's growing economic and social status. Carrigneedy ruins were kept as a folly to embellish the demesne.³ In a metaphorical sense they acted as a reminder to the defenceless house below of a distant and more turbulent past when Carrigneedy's fortified walls were meant to protect their owners from physical assault.⁴

The late-seventeenth century house was subsequently redesigned and embellished on at least two occasions over the next century or so. The first major remodelling took place in the 1770s, which some have attributed to Davis Ducart (sometimes Dukart or Duckart, died *c.*1785), although this remains uncertain.⁵ Again, this was during a period of prosperity for Irish landlords – in the main driven by the Napoleonic and American wars – that manifested itself in a dramatic increase in the number of country houses built in Ireland; in county Cork alone the number rose from around thirty at the beginning of the seventeenth century to around 200 by the late-nineteenth century.⁶ The town and immediate area of Fermoy benefited hugely from commercial expansion as prices soared and windfall profits accrued to merchant and landed classes alike.⁷ In 1784 John Anderson (1747-1820) arrived in Fermoy from Edinburgh in Scotland.⁸ Within a relatively short period he became an extremely successful merchant and stagecoach operator. In order to achieve social respectability, he purchased landed estates around Fermoy and adjacent to Castle Hyde, forming a solid personal and social relationship with the then owners, John and Sarah Hyde.⁹

Anderson was praised by contemporaries for his estate-management policies, his investments in 'majestic woods and waving plantations', and the 'order and industry' that he brought to the local rural economy.¹⁰ So also was John Hyde, who was similarly regarded as an improving landlord and progressive farmer. He imported large herds of Devonshire cattle and stall-fed a hundred sheep on turnips when it was not fashionable to do so.¹¹ In the early nineteenth century, Edward Wakefield estimated that the Hyde estate was worth approximately £8,000 per annum in rents.¹² Around the same time, Hyde also made impressive profits from the sale of mature trees on his demesne: in November 1812, Wakefield reported that he had sold sixty acres (8,000 trees of a hundred years' growth) for £10,000, as well as five acres of fir for £1,100 and 'timber of thirty years' standing for £800.¹³ Wakefield claimed that John Hyde was much more progressive than either of his landlord neighbours – the Duke of Devonshire and Lord Middleton – both of whom managed their estates in 'a most miserable manner' at a time when Hyde's tenants were 'eating wheaten bread and living in a comparative state of affluence'.¹⁴ Wakefield's claims were echoed a few years later when, in 1815, another social commentator, Horatio Townsend, wrote:

Mr Hyde's character stands very high in the class of modern and improved agriculturists. He has taken pains to procure and try every kind of implement, and contributed much to the introduction of a better style of farming into the neighbourhood.

The Devon breed of cattle have been found very thrifty, and excellent workers. He makes use of the Scotch swing plough, drawn for the most part by the bullocks, or two horses, the latter of which are always drove with long reins by the ploughman. His farmyard is very large and commodious, and he practices stall-feeding chiefly with turnips. Indeed there is hardly any kind of management which he has not tried.¹⁵

However, Townsend's observations also suggested that Hyde was living beyond his means. He spoke of Hyde's 'immense estates' that allowed him to embellish home and landscape with 'the same taste, elegance, and convenience' as the likes of the Marquis of Thomond and the earls of Shannon.¹⁶ By then, Castle Hyde had, indeed, been 'enlarged and modernised at great expense' for a second time to the design of Abraham Hargraves (1755-1808).¹⁷ At an estimated cost of £30,000 to £40,000, the remodelling seems a very significant sum to have invested on a rather modest income of £8,000 per annum.¹⁸ This significant expenditure may have influenced the sales of timber alluded to by Wakefield, but in 1815 the demesne was still said to be 'superior to all in the extent of the grounds and the rich abundance of its timber'.¹⁹ Others were to agree: two years later, as John Bernard Trotter walked the Blackwater Valley on his way to Doneraile, he passed 'the delightful place of Castle Hyde, one of the finest in Ireland',²⁰ and in 1837 Samuel Lewis described the park as being 'beautifully situated on the northern margin of the Blackwater, in the midst of a highly picturesque and richly wooded demesne extending on both sides of the river, of which it forms one of the most attractive scenes'.²¹

JOHN HYDE II DIED IN 1832, TO BE SUCCEEDED BY JOHN III (1803-1885). HIS TENURE began during an extended and damaging period of deflation and economic downturn that began with the ending of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. As soaring profits came to a rather abrupt end, one of the first major casualties was Hyde's neighbour John Anderson, whose provision trade was so badly affected by the price falls of 1816-20 that he went bankrupt. In 1820 his obituary claimed: 'the great and sudden transition from a state of war to a state of peace, for which few were sufficiently prepared, caught him somewhat unawares.'²²

Levels of agricultural rents were also badly affected. Unfortunately, there seems to be no surviving Hyde estate papers, but his near neighbour, Lord Mountcashel, later claimed that rents had to be reduced by up to 50% soon after 1815. (They had undoubtedly risen significantly during the boom.)²³ John Anderson reduced his Buttevant estate rents by 40% in 1819.²⁴ The financial consequences of having borrowed extensively during the boom years (as the Hydes had presumably done to remodel their mansion) soon became apparent. In 1846 Lord Mountcashel made a telling remark:

Supposing this increase of income permanent, [landlords] charged their estates with larger settlements by their wills and deeds than they otherwise would have

done, could they have foreseen the immense fall in rents which took place soon after the peace.²⁵

As credit facilities all but dried up, John Hyde's lifestyle became greatly different to his immediate predecessors – financially, socially and politically. Having inherited significant debts of £136,000, J.R. O'Flanagan later claimed that Hyde refused to stand for the county of Cork because 'in those days contested elections were of enormous expense and having to provide fortunes for his sisters and interest on heavy encumbrances, Mr Hyde declined the flattering offer and was content to avoid adding to an embarrassed fortune.'²⁶

One of the major obstacles to Hyde's ancestors in terms of capitalising on the rise in market values during the pre-1815 boom was the proliferation of middlemen on his estate who leased large tracts of 100 to 1,000 acres on extended leases at fixed rates, but who were free to exploit the market values by subletting to a mass of tenants beneath them.²⁷ In 1812 Edward Wakefield referred to a portion of the estate, around 300 acres, that had been leased by John Hyde's grandfather for three lives (which ran for fifty-six years) at eight shillings per acre. If the lease had not existed he could have hoped for around £5.16 shillings per acre.²⁸ Similarly, the townland of Ballyvoduna in the parish of Clondelane was leased for three lives at a yearly rent of £220, just over ten shillings per acre.²⁹ It clearly meant that those who benefited most from the boom were those who could rent such large tracts of land from the landlord and sublet to the masses below.

The demographic explosion that characterised the period from the 1750s to 1840s – in the country as a whole, the population rose from 2.5 million to 8.2 million – led to a dense concentration of cottiers on the Hyde estate. In September 1844, Hyde's land agent, Robert de la Cour of Fairy Hill near Mallow, said that he had recently surveyed the Fermoy area of the estate and found that

there were souls to the number of one to every four acres and a half, calculating five persons to each family. There were on it 297 families, persons who called themselves farmers, and 348 families who called themselves labourers, making an average of about four acres and a half to each soul.³⁰

Close to the town of Fermoy, some of the farms were deemed 'exceedingly small', the conditions of the small farmers 'very bad', and that of the labourers 'wretched'. Conacre, the land required for family plots of potatoes, was let at exorbitant rates of up to £13 per acre.³¹ Wakefield described the situation:

The cotter tenant hires a cabin, the worst in the country, with a small patch of potato land, at a rent of thirty shillings per annum ... At the same time he works for his landlord at the small wage of 5d per day; but when he comes to settle, he receives nothing, as the food of his few sheep is set off against what he charges per labour. In this manner the poor cotter must toil without end, while his family eats up the produce of the small spot of land he has hired. This is called by the lower

classes of the Irish ‘working for a dead horse’, that is to say getting in debt.³²

By now the dangers inherent in an economy almost exclusively dependent upon agriculture for a livelihood and the potato crop for sustenance became ominously apparent. Shortly before the Famine, another Fermoy agent, Matthias Hendley of Mount Rivers, spoke of the conditions of the labouring classes in the area:

...their maintenance is precarious; many subsist on an occasional meal of potatoes from their friends but they would not allow this to be considered begging; they do not allow a man to be put down as a beggar until he shall carry a bag on his back and beg for potatoes.

The labourer, he contended, could afford milk only in the summer, and their clothing was ‘in general very bad’. Thomas Perrott corroborated his evidence:

A very large proportion of the population is wretchedly poor and subsist upon charity but though the numbers of beggars appearing in the streets is not great, those who wander about the country and collect potatoes at farmers’ houses are in a considerable number.³³

It was around this time that some Cork land agents advised their landlords to consolidate smallholdings into more viable farms. Lord Midleton’s agent advised his employer to destroy ‘all the miserable cabins’ in one townland and divide it into two farms.³⁴

In 1838 the overhaul of the Irish Poor Law Act that made landlords liable for the full poor rates on holdings valued at £4 and under put an increased financial burden on Hyde and influenced him and others to clear their estates of impoverished tenants. By 1839, scores, if not hundreds, of Hyde’s evicted tenants made their way to the town of Fermoy, as described by a concerned Matthias Hendley:

Some proprietors of property in this neighbourhood, particularly Mr Hyde, are beginning to clear their estates of pauper tenants and to throw down their cottages. The unfortunate wretches thus turned out generally face to Fermoy and become inmates in out thatched houses, where they rent rooms at a small weekly stipend of about 8d or 10d each room. I cannot imagine it was ever the intention of the legislature to exempt any landed proprietor from payment of a poor rate; but those proprietors I allude to think that under the proviso they will be bound to take care only of the poor on their estates, and they are determined to have none by the steps they are taking to get rid of them.³⁵

Hyde’s agent, Robert de la Cour, defended the decision, claiming that tenants had defaulted on rental payments for so long that there was no other viable option, and that ‘without doing an absolute wrong, we are endeavouring to consolidate farms’. The aim, he contended, was to ensure that no tenant occupied less than twenty acres – the perceived minimum required to provide a comfortable living to farmer and family – and sug-

gested that cottiers would be enticed to give up their holdings ‘without violence and by gentleness and showing them they are not tenants ... there will be no ill-will about it’.³⁶ At this stage there was little collective opposition, one reason possibly being that strong farmers, more fortunate to remain, knew that evicted holdings could be used to increase the size of their holdings. Cork landlord William Bence Jones wrote tellingly in his memoirs: ‘Every good tenant soon found out that a broken tenant being put out might mean a substantial gain to himself, one very dear to his heart; he got the field close to his own house that he had coveted all his life, his very Naboth’s vineyard.’³⁷

As hundreds of the Hyde estate cottiers were forced to leave, they carried with them nothing more than the timber and thatch of their cabins. Again Matthias Hendley complained bitterly that ‘the evicted wandered into Fermoy and took up residence in the smaller thatched cottages’, which he described as ‘receptacles for thieves and robbers and every bad tenant and discharged labourer’.³⁸ In December 1839, Hendley tried to secure the support of the local gentry to finance relief.³⁹ Potatoes were extremely scarce and their price had risen dramatically, with the result that ‘the poor people became so clamorous’ that Hendley feared riots. He wrote: ‘I am apprehensive the scarcity of potatoes is so great ... that it will be more than we can accomplish with our present fund to continue our present operations until the new crop (which looks well) shall be available.’⁴⁰

Hendley was writing in 1839-40, a full five years before the onslaught of blight in September 1845 destroyed a third to a half of the potato crop in the Fermoy area, and at least a third on the Hyde estate.⁴¹ Levels of hardship in the area became so grave that at the height of the Famine in 1847-48 over 40% of the Fermoy Poor Law Union was in receipt of poor law relief.⁴² On 20th April 1846, Hendley was again scathing of the large farmers and urged landlords and agents to step up their efforts:

It is true that the potato crop in a great part of our union has failed, but there is still a large quantity of oats and wheat (more than usual at this season of the year) in the farmers’ hands, which if kept in the country would be sufficient for food. I do not recollect having ever seen at our market so great a supply of oats as on Saturday last. It was sold at 1d per stone. We cannot expect to have for three months at least a good quantity of new potatoes at market, and in the meantime I fear we shall be at the necessity of putting our hands in our pockets probably more than once.⁴³

A couple of weeks later, on 2nd April 1846, Robert de la Cour suggested that to alleviate the plight of the starving it might be a good thing if ‘a moderate quantity of Indian meal was offered for sale in the localities of Ballyhooly (a small village near Fermoy) and at Castle Hyde, the residence of Mr Hyde where some people are now in want of food’⁴⁴ It was too little: during the despair that followed, food riots of an unprecedented nature took place. In September 1846 the bread shops of Fermoy were sacked and emptied by a starving mob.⁴⁵ When the mob left the town they headed along the road to Mitchelstown. When they arrived at the Earl of Mountcashel’s demesne gates they threatened to break it down, but their attempts were foiled by the arrival of soldiers who dispersed the crowd.⁴⁶ It was,

as J.S. Donnelly Jr contends, the type of response that could be expected from starving people who were let down by the ‘glaring shortcomings in the provision and administration of relief’.⁴⁷

The Fermoy workhouse had been built to accommodate 800 people; by March 1847 it was overcrowded with over 1,800 persons, many of them diseased.⁴⁸ Between the end of November 1846 and the beginning of May 1847, an average of over forty people a week died there.⁴⁹ It was the highest rate of workhouse mortality recorded in the whole of Ireland during the Famine.⁵⁰ (Between 1841 and 1851 the total population of Fermoy union fell from just under 90,000 to just over 62,000 – a decline of around 30%.) In March 1847 the medical officer, Dr Eugene O’Neill, reported:

The mortality rate in the workhouse at present is very great, owing to the number labouring under chronic disease and fever on admission. Scarcely a pauper is admitted who is not in a dying state. The vitiated air of the apartments, the consequence of the overcrowded state of the house, is also a fruitful source of disease. The medical officer would urge – as a sanitary measure – the necessity of lessening the number in the house and admitting no further paupers.⁵¹

In March 1848 the Fermoy board of guardians reported to the British prime minister:

A pestilential fever is now raging through the house, every room of which is so crowded as to render it impossible to separate the sick and the healthy. That in many cases five or six are lying in one bed and all the horrors of disease are aggravated by the foul air engendered by a multiplicity of impurities unavoidable when fifty patients are crowded into a room too small for twenty ... By reason of this overcrowding of the house, the supply of bedding is so short as to render it necessary to place 4 or 5 in many of the beds, & on this day 30 children labouring under disease were found in 3 beds.⁵²

Cork landlords did not distinguish themselves by providing relief employment.⁵³ Only about 250 Cork landlords applied for loans from the government under the land-improvement acts that came into operation in 1847. (This scheme was intended to encourage landlords to borrow money at low interest rates in order to provide schemes of employment to improve their estates, rather than expending money on unproductive employment such as stone-breaking, as had been the case previously.) And fewer than 25% of those landlords made application for sums in excess of £1,000.⁵⁴ The Fermoy guardians were ‘shocked by the lassitude of many landlords in their union’ who ignored any responsibility to provide employment relief schemes on their estates. In September 1847 the guardians implored local landlords ‘in the most impressive language they can command to give employment ... in preference to throwing their labourers on the union for support, for which they must immediately pay out of their own pockets’.⁵⁵ It was not, however, until June 1849 that ‘the excessively frugal Fermoy guardians authorize[d] relieving officers to provide food outside the workhouse for some classes of able-bodied persons’.⁵⁶

It is arguable that John Hyde's hands were tied by his own financial circumstances. As a result of the unfortunate dearth of Famine estate records, there is no evidence to substantiate what levels of rental decline the estate suffered, or, indeed, to inform on what he may have personally contributed to the relief of destitution. It is probable, however, that rental decline was significant, possibly up to 50%. The clearance of cottiers from his estate was by no means atypical, and in a strict business sense was driven by cold economic forces; the correspondence of his agent de la Cour, quoted above, certainly suggests that it was motivated by the desire to avoid the payment of full poor rates on their meagre holdings. Matthias Hendley's public criticism of the large farmers and merchants suggest they were no less culpable in failing to alleviate the plight of those worse off. Whatever the exact nature of John Hyde's declining financial circumstances, he was bankrupted by the effects of the Famine, and by 1851 he had no option but to sell his estate.

ON 5TH DECEMBER 1851, JOHN HYDE'S ESTATES WERE ADVERTISED FOR AUCTION IN THE Encumbered Estates Court at Henrietta Street, Dublin (Plates 3, 4). The auction advertisement read as follows:

The mansion house stands on the north side of the River Blackwater, within about one mile of the garrison town of Femoy, and 12 of the Mallow station on the Great Southern and Western Railway. There is a spring of the finest and purest water in the Lawn near the river. The river, which runs through the demesne for the extent of upwards of a mile, affords angling for both salmon and trout, and has a fine long reach for boating. The demesne is ornamented with several acres of very fine old oak timber. The gardens with the pleasure grounds attached to them, are laid out in terrace walks in the old style, with handsome old-clipped hedges of yew and box; and comprise, with the orchards – which are productive of the best kind of cider apples – about 22 acres. At the extremity of the principal walk in the garden, just outside its precincts, stands the parish church, very neatly fitted up with oak pews and stained glass windows, and forming a picturesque object in termination of the view. The whole demesne is well walled in; and the southern division of the deer park, as it appears on the map, comprises over 90 acres, which lies on the side of a hill commanding a most extensive view, is well fenced in, and contains a good spring and supply of water ... Altogether this demesne possesses peculiar attractions, from the great variety of the ground, the extent of the much-admired river running through it, the style of the gardens and pleasure-grounds, and the number of its resources available for agricultural purposes, and in connection with mills, irrigation, roads &c and it is as well suited for a nobleman's or a gentleman's residence as any seat in the south of Ireland.⁵⁷

There was a steward's house, farming offices, stalls for up to a hundred fattening cattle,



3 – Castle Hyde as depicted in the 1851 Encumbered Estate Rental

4 – Advertising the sale of the Castle Hyde estate in the 1851 Encumbered Estate Rental

IN THE COURT OF THE COMMISSIONERS FOR THE SALE OF INCUMBERED ESTATES IN IRELAND.

IN THE MATTER OF THE ESTATE OF
JOHN HYDE, ESQUIRE, OF CASTLE HYDE, IN THE COUNTY OF CORK, OWNER AND PETITIONER.

RENTAL

OF
THE FIRST DIVISION OF THE ESTATES OF JOHN HYDE, ESQUIRE,
COMPRISING THE
**MANOR, TOWN, AND LANDS OF CASTLE HYDE,
AND OTHER LANDS,**
SITUATE IN THE
BARONIES OF FERMOY, CONDONS & CLONGIBBONS, AND IMOKILLY, AND COUNTY OF CORK,
THE LANDS OF TULLA AND CLOCASTA,
IN THE BARONY OF COSTLEA, AND COUNTY OF LIMERICK,
THE LANDS OF FARTHAGH,
IN THE BARONY OF GALMOY, AND COUNTY OF KILKENNY, AND
THE LANDS OF KNOCKANGLESEY, AND OTHER LANDS,
IN THE BARONIES OF CLANWILLIAM, ELIAGARTY, KILNEMANAGH, AND MIDDLETHIRD, AND COUNTY OF TIPPERARY.

To be Sold,

On **FRIDAY, the 5th day of DECEMBER 1851,** at the Hour of **TWELVE o'clock at Noon,**
BY THE COMMISSIONERS FOR THE SALE OF INCUMBERED ESTATES IN IRELAND, AT THEIR COURT,
NO. 14, HENRIETTA STREET, DUBLIN.

Rentals and further particulars can be had by application to the Commissioners at their said Court; to Messrs. SAMUEL S. & EDWARD REEVES, Solicitors, having the carriage of the order for sale, No. 22, Merrion-square, South, Dublin; to ROBERT DELACOUR, Esq. the Receiver of the County Cork Estates, Fairy Hill, Mallow; to HENRY BAGGS, Esq. his Solicitor, Mallow, or 84, Lower Gardiner-street, Dublin; to SAMUEL JELICO, Esq. Agent to the Tipperary Estate, Cahir; RICHARD O'BRIEN, Esq. Solicitor, Mitchelstown; and to Messrs. LIGHTFOOT, ROBSON & LIGHTFOOT, 26, Castle-street, Leicester-square, London.

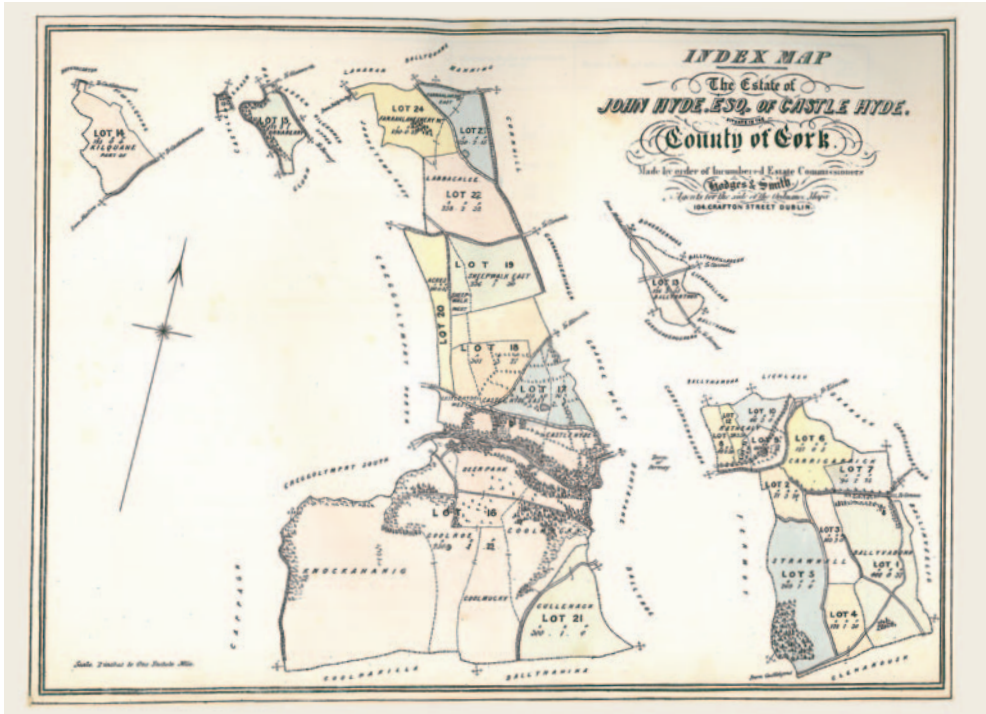
W. & C.

extensive stabling, a kennel for twenty couple of hounds, piggeries, a large barn, extensive lofts for the storage of corn and two gate lodges.

The descriptive particulars emphasised the appealing qualities of the lands and mansion. Lots 1 to 12, consisting of the townlands of Ballyvodoona, Strawhall, Carrigabrick and Rathealy (around 1,500 acres), were described as being of ‘a superior quality, and a considerable portion of them so immediately adjoining the town of Fermoy that in point of fact they may be considered as town parks’. The land north of the Blackwater was described as ‘good limestone soil, and quarries and limekilns have been already opened and erected there for the use of the tenantry’. Communication networks – good roads and rail connections – were highlighted. Fermoy was described as ‘a thriving and beautifully situated town, with excellent markets, and extensive barracks, and a large permanent garrison’. All the land lay in ‘a good sporting country’. Under different social and economic conditions, John Hyde could have hoped to have received a decent price for his lands, but the Famine and the attendant depression had greatly lowered the value of Irish land, with the average market value of estates falling from twenty-five years’ purchase of the annual rental before 1845 to fifteen years’ purchase by 1849.⁵⁸ In August 1849 one Cork landlord bemoaned the fact that the introduction of the Encumbered Estates Act had meant that ‘my Irish property is rendered as valueless as a Jamaica estate’.⁵⁹

The auction began at twelve noon and was carried through by Baron Richards, Chief Commissioner of the Encumbered Estates Court. It attracted ‘a most numerous attendance, every part of the court being crowded to its almost capacity of accommodation’.⁶⁰ Arthur Guinness, the famous brewer, was given preferential treatment with a seat under the judge’s bench.⁶¹ He was scouring the country, speculating in landed property in an attempt to enhance his social position within the landed elite, and, no doubt, with future profit in mind. There were quite a few Cork landlords, professionals and merchants present including Major Teulon of Bandon; G.R. Smith from Castlewidenedham; Joseph Fisher of Youghal; Alexander Deane from Cork city; Michael Bourke, a solicitor from Fermoy; Robert de la Cour, Hyde’s agent; Denis Francis Mahony, another Cork solicitor; and Dr Campbell from Fermoy. There were numerous solicitors there to bid on behalf of their absent clients.

The estate was not sold en bloc; instead it was divided into thirty-four lots, ‘each of which were put up separately for competition’ (Plate 5). The Cork estate of 6,000 acres was divided into twenty-five lots. (Hyde also had 3,760 acres in Tipperary, almost 700 in Kilkenny and 750 in Limerick.) Lot 16, which included the mansion house, was to be sold either in its entirety or in four divisions. The first division was made up of Castle Hyde, the out-offices, demesne and woods, comprising roughly 820 acres with timber to the value of £1,760. The second division comprised the townland of Coolmakee, comprising 370 acres; the third was the townland of Coolroe (385 acres), including the mill and woodlands, and the fourth division of over 970 acres was ‘the fine mountain farm of Knockannig’, the greater portion of which was set at rents of £270 per annum, the remainder of over eighty acres ‘being a plantation partly cut’.⁶²



5 – Map of Castle Hyde estates in the Encumbered Estate Rental, 1851

The bidding for Lot 1 – the townland of Ballyvodoona (about 400 acres) – began at £1,500 and was eventually purchased at £4,000 by George Teulon of Bandon. Lot 2 – part of the townland of Strawhill (about seventy acres) – was held by two tenants, John O’Sullivan and Dr Nicholas Roche. O’Sullivan held his lease for the life of Henry Becher, eldest son of Sir William Becher of neighbouring Ballygiblin, who would purchase Castle Hyde in a few years time. Bidding began at £1,200 before being sold to a speculator, Henry Mills, of 12 Upper Temple Street, Dublin, for £1,500. It seems that, unlike in the case of Lot 1, the bidding for Lot 2 was restricted by the presence of the existing leaseholders. The general trend during the auction was that where lots were held on long leases and the leaseholders were present, the bidding was less intense.⁶³ Some of the occupying larger tenants, such as G.R. Smyth, purchased their holdings. Hyde’s agent Robert de la Cour purchased Lot 23, about 150 acres in the townland of Lubbacally, for £1,800. Arthur Guinness purchased a number of lots totalling around 300 acres, including The Acres for £1,800.⁶⁴ Edward Sullivan (1800-1867), the tenth son of James Sullivan (a former gardener on the Jephson demesne at Mallow Castle), who had amassed a fortune as a wine merchant in Mallow, was also amongst the purchasers.⁶⁵

Lot 16 attracted most attention as it comprised the mansion with over 800 acres of demesne and parkland, a further 1,700 acres of farmland and woodlands, with ‘very old

oak trees, kennels for 20 couples of hounds, very extensive gardens ... equal if not surpassed by anything of the kind in Ireland'. The first bid was £10,000, and after 'a slow advance' it reached £17,000,⁶⁶ at which time there was:

seeming no disposition on the part of the purchasers to go beyond that sum; the courts were about to declare the purchaser when Mr Hyde, addressing their lordships, said he had hoped the property would not be sold at such a sacrifice. His father had expended about £30,000 on the house and demesne and offices, and it would be ruinous to him and to the creditors if it was allowed to be sacrificed in this way.⁶⁷

His solicitor Edward Reeves reminded the court that a similar application for a postponement had been granted in the case of Lord Gort of Lough Cutra in Galway, but the presiding judge was adamant that in that case 'there was but one bidder, and that was the incumbrancer ... in this case there were several bidders, and the court could not well refuse to proceed with the sale when fair and substantial offers were made.'⁶⁸ The highest bidder, John Sadleir (1813-1856) MP, was happy to support the judge's decision, threatening that if the court postponed the auction, he would discontinue his interest.⁶⁹ After negotiation, a few small advances raised the final price to around £19,000, and Castle Hyde was struck down to Sadleir.⁷⁰ The *Cork Advertiser* lamented that 'the amount which this beautiful and most desirable property sold for was only £125 over 15 years' purchase'.⁷¹ In total, the sale of the entire estate produced around £84,000.⁷²

John Sadleir's association with Castle Hyde was short-lived. Described by his biographer as 'the prince of swindlers', he had few scruples when it came to 'exploiting the financial difficulties of landowners by unsavoury practices'.⁷³ Born in the parish of Shronell in county Tipperary in 1813, his father was a well-to-do Catholic farmer and middleman.⁷⁴ In 1839 Sadleir and his brother James had founded the Tipperary Joint Stock Bank, with nine branches in Munster and Leinster. In the 1840s he moved to London and became legal adviser to railway entrepreneurs, amassing another fortune before becoming chairman of the London and County Joint Stock Bank which had sixty branches and over 20,000 accounts.⁷⁵

It has been estimated that Sadleir purchased over £233,000 worth of land on behalf of clients in the Encumbered Estates Courts. One of these clients was Vincent Scully, probably a relative on his mother's side, who gave him £10,000 in cash to invest in the Hyde estate. At the time, Sadleir is reputed to have owed Scully £9,000 from an earlier transaction. Sadleir paid £19,000 for Castle Hyde and demesne, hardly a coincidence in that it equated to the sum given to him by Scully plus the amount he owed him. However, Sadleir lived up to his later reputation and reneged, registering the purchase in his own name. A long legal battle ensued that eventually resulted in the sale of Castle Hyde to Herbert Ingram (1811-1860) in August 1852. Scully, it seems, failed to recover any of the purchase money from Sadleir.⁷⁶ Ingram, a native of Lincolnshire, was the founder of the *Illustrated London News*, which had published so many graphic images of famine suf-

fering in Cork over the previous few years. He died in a boating accident on 8th September 1860, probably never having actually resided at Castle Hyde.

Sadleir's fate was equally tragic. In Black '47, the worst year of the Great Famine, he had become MP for county Carlow. By the time he purchased the Hyde estate he had been joined in the Commons by his brother James and three of his cousins, all five being grandsons of James Scully of Kilfeacle. They formed the core of the so-called 'papal brigade' or 'Irish brigade' who pledged themselves to independent opposition. In 1852 the Irish brigade entered into an alliance with the Irish Tenant League (founded in 1850 in response to the agrarian crisis of the Famine which set out its demands in the 'three Fs' – fair rent, free sale and fixity of tenure). Forty of the MPs elected in 1852 were committed to supporting the movement by remaining independent of and in opposition to any government that would not grant specific concessions. The vote of these MPs helped bring down the Tory government that year, but when the new government emerged under Lord Aberdeen, Sadleir and one other of the brigade, William Keogh, accepted appointments – in Sadleir's case, Junior Lord of the Treasury – which was in contravention of his earlier pledge. This led to a bitter split and the eventual downfall of the Tenant Right movement (accentuated by the easing of the agrarian crisis from the 1850s). In 1854 Sadleir resigned his government position when he was found guilty of being implicated in a plot to imprison a client of the Tipperary Bank who had voted against him.⁷⁷ He had a massive overdraft of almost £300,000, and he compounded his personal position by becoming involved in fraud in an attempt to extricate himself, disposing of more than £1.5 million of client funds in disastrous speculations. Thousands of small investors in the south of Ireland were brought to financial ruin.⁷⁸ Unable to cope with the potential consequences, Sadleir committed suicide near Jack Straw's Tavern on Hampstead Heath on 17th February 1856 by drinking prussic acid.⁷⁹

Shortly after the death of Henry Ingram in 1860, Castle Hyde and its surrounding demesne lands were sold to Henry Wrixon Becher, 2nd Baronet of Ballygiblin (whose uncle by marriage was Hyde's former agent, Robert de la Cour) for nearly £45,000 or two and a half times for what they had been bought.⁸⁰ The Hydes were, by then, in residence in nearby Cregg Castle, about one and a half miles to the west of their former home. John Hyde died unmarried in 1885, and with him the main line of the Hyde family.⁸¹

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ENDNOTES

The following abbreviations are used:

- Brunnicardi, *Fermoy* Niall Brunnicardi, *Fermoy 1841 to 1890: a local history* (Fermoy, 1978)
DNB *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004)
 Donnelly, *Cork* James S. Donnelly Jr, *Land and People of Nineteenth-century Cork: the Rural Economy and the Land Question* (London, 1975)
 Donnelly, *Famine* James S. Donnelly Jr, *The Great Irish Potato Famine* (Stroud, 2001)

- ¹ *Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland 1844-45* (Dublin, 1846) 363.
- ² 'Calendar of the fiants of the reign of Elizabeth', *Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records in Ireland*, no. 3993, 4113 (Dublin, 1881) ; *Burke's Irish Family Records* (1976 ed.) 618.
- ³ See nineteenth-century description in Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, 2 vols (London, 1837) II, 289.
- ⁴ J.R. O'Flanagan, *An Octogenarian Literary Life* (Cork, 1896) 205.
- ⁵ Desmond FitzGerald, Knight of Glin, 'A Baroque Palladian in Ireland: the Architecture of Davis Duckart – I', *Country Life*, CXLII, 28th September 1967, 735-39; 'The Last Palladian in Ireland: the Architecture of Davis Duckart – II', *Country Life*, CXLII, 5th October 1967, 798-802; A.M. Rowan, 'Ducart, Davis (d.1786)', *DNB* (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/63113>, accessed 19th February 2007); John Logan makes no reference to Ducart's putative role at Castle Hyde in "'Dropped into this Kingdom from the Clouds": the Irish Career of Davis Dukart, Architect and Engineer, 1761-81', *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, X, 2007, 34-89.
- ⁶ David Large, 'The Wealth of the Greater Irish Landowners', *Irish Historical Studies*, XV, 1966-67, 21; T.C. Barnard, 'The Political, Material and Mental Culture of the Cork Settlers, c.1650-1700' in Patrick O'Flanagan and C.G. Buttimer (eds), *Cork History and Society* (Dublin, 1993) 309.
- ⁷ Donnelly, *Cork*, 45. For the development of Fermoy, see John Gough ['An Englishman'], *Tour in Ireland in 1813 and 1814* (Dublin, 1816) 237; D.O. Madden, *Revelations of Ireland in the Past Generation* (1848) 270-71.
- ⁸ See Niall Brunnicardi, *John Anderson: Entrepreneur* (Fermoy, 1987).
- ⁹ Brunnicardi, *Fermoy*, 74; Thompson Cooper, 'Anderson, John (1747-1820)', rev. Anne Pimlott Baker, *DNB* (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/484>, accessed 14th March 2007).
- ¹⁰ *The General Advertiser or Limerick Gazette*, 18 July 1820; quoted in Brunnicardi, *Fermoy*, 172.
- ¹¹ Edward Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland*, 2 vols (1812) I, 393-94.
- ¹² *ibid.*, 250.
- ¹³ *ibid.*, 250-51, 567.
- ¹⁴ *ibid.*, 250-51.
- ¹⁵ Horatio Townsend, *Survey of the County of Cork*, 2 vols (Cork, 1815) I, 481.

- ¹⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, 24.
- ¹⁷ *ibid.*, 480-81.
- ¹⁸ *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 97, 1992, 130.
- ¹⁹ Townsend, *Survey of the County of Cork*, 480.
- ²⁰ J.B. Trotter, *Walks Through Ireland in Years 1812, 1814 and 1817* (London, 1819) 279.
- ²¹ Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, 289.
- ²² *Morning Post*, 18th July 1820.
- ²³ *Cork Constitution*, 16th April 1846.
- ²⁴ Donnelly, *Cork*, 49.
- ²⁵ *ibid.*
- ²⁶ Flanagan, *An Octogenarian Literary Life*, 205-06.
- ²⁷ On the subject of middlemen, see, for example, David Dickson, 'Middlemen' in T. Bartlett, and D.W. Hayton (eds), *Penal Era and Golden Age: Essays in Irish History* (Belfast, 1979) 162-85; Kevin Whelan, 'An Underground Gentry? Catholic Middlemen in Eighteenth-century Ireland' in J.S. Donnelly Jr and K.A. Miller (eds), *Irish Popular Culture 1650-1850* (Dublin and Portland, 1998) 118-72.
- ²⁸ Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland*, I, 252.
- ²⁹ *The Freeman's Journal*, 14th November 1851.
- ³⁰ *Evidence Taken Before her Majesty's Commissioners of Enquiry into the State of the Law and Practice in Respect to the Occupation of Land in Ireland* [605], HC 1845, xix, 166.
- ³¹ *ibid.*, 167.
- ³² Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland*, I, 253.
- ³³ *First Report of his Majesty's Commissioners for Enquiring into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland, with Appendix (A) and Supplement*, HC 1835 (369), xxxii, 1.
- ³⁴ Charles Bailey's advice to Lord Middleton in 1840, quoted in Donnelly, *Cork*, 54.
- ³⁵ Quoted in Brunicardi, *Fermoy*, 151.
- ³⁶ *Evidence Taken Before her Majesty's Commissioners of Enquiry into the State of the Law and Practice in Respect to the Occupation of Land in Ireland* [605], HC 1845, xix, 168.
- ³⁷ W.B. Jones, *The Life's Work in Ireland of a Landlord Who Tried to do his Duty* (London, 1880) 102.
- ³⁸ Quoted in Edward Garner, *To Die by Inches: the Famine in North East Cork* (Cork, 1988) 29.
- ³⁹ Matthias Hendley to Sir Robert Abercromby, 6 Jan. 1840; quoted in Brunicardi, *Fermoy*, 151.
- ⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 152.
- ⁴¹ Donnelly, *Cork*, 73.
- ⁴² *ibid.*, 121; Garner, *To Die by Inches*, 30.
- ⁴³ Quoted in Brunicardi, *Fermoy*, 154.
- ⁴⁴ National Archives, Famine Relief papers, RLFC 3/1, Robert de la Cour to (?), 2nd April 1846
- ⁴⁵ *Cork Constitution*, 26th September 1846.
- ⁴⁶ *ibid.*
- ⁴⁷ Donnelly, *Cork*, 92.
- ⁴⁸ Donnelly, *Famine*, 103.
- ⁴⁹ Seamus Crowley, 'The famine in Mallow 1846-47', *Mallow Field Club Journal*, 15, 1997, 30.
- ⁵⁰ Donnelly, *Famine*, 104.
- ⁵¹ Quoted in Garner, *To Die by Inches*, 63.
- ⁵² Fermoy Board of Guardians, Minute Book, 10th March 1847; quoted in Donnelly, *Cork*, 94.
- ⁵³ Donnelly, *Cork*, 110-11.
- ⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 109.

- ⁵⁵ Fermoy Board of Guardians, Minute Book, 15th September 1847; quoted in *ibid.*, 108.
- ⁵⁶ Brunicardi, *Fermoy*, 158.
- ⁵⁷ Encumbered Estates Rental, Castle Hyde, county Cork, 5th December 1851 (in private possession)
- ⁵⁸ Donnelly, *Famine*, 164.
- ⁵⁹ Sir John Benn-Walsh, quoted in *ibid.*, 164.
- ⁶⁰ *Cork Advertiser*, 9th December 1851.
- ⁶¹ *ibid.*
- ⁶² *The Freeman's Journal*, 14th November 1851.
- ⁶³ *Cork Advertiser*, 9th December 1851.
- ⁶⁴ For further accounts of the sale, see *The Freeman's Journal*, 8th December 1851; *Cork Examiner*, 8th December 1851.
- ⁶⁵ Sullivan's rise in social respectability allowed his son Sir Edward Sullivan (1822-85) to become a celebrated lawyer and later Lord Chancellor of Ireland during William Gladstone's first administration. Sir Edward took a leading part in the conduct of the Irish Church Bill of 1869 in the House of Commons, which was to disestablish the Irish Church, and the following year he played an important role in the formulation of the Irish Land Act of 1870. R.V. Comerford, 'Land Acts' in S.J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* (Oxford, 1998) 295; C.L. Falkiner, 'Sullivan, Sir Edward, First Baronet (1822-1885)', rev. Nathan Wells, *DNB* (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26774>, accessed 14th March 2007).
- ⁶⁶ *Cork Advertiser*, 9th December 1851.
- ⁶⁷ *ibid.*
- ⁶⁸ *ibid.*
- ⁶⁹ *ibid.*
- ⁷⁰ *Return of the Several Purchases made in the Incumbered Estates Court by the Late John Sadleir or any one in Trust for him, Specifying the Name or Title of the Estate or Matter in which Each Purchase was Made, the Names of the Solicitors Having the Carriage of the Sale, and the Amount of the Purchase Money*, HC 1856 (187), liii.431.
- ⁷¹ *Cork Advertiser*, 9th December 1851.
- ⁷² *ibid.*
- ⁷³ James O'Shea, *Prince of Swindlers: John Sadleir MP 1813-1856* (Dublin, 1999) 100.
- ⁷⁴ James O'Shea, 'Sadleir, John (1813-1856)', *DNB* (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24455>, accessed 14th March 2007).
- ⁷⁵ See obituary in *The Times*, 18th February 1856.
- ⁷⁶ O'Shea, *Prince of Swindlers*, 100-101.
- ⁷⁷ *The Times*, 28th August 1852; see also Bill Sadleir, "'These men are signs of the times – emblems of our era.'" What does the fall of John Sadleir, and of his fictional derivatives, tell us about his age?' <http://www.suttonhousesociety.org.uk/JohnSadleir.pdf> (accessed 23rd June 2009).
- ⁷⁸ Joseph Lee, *The Modernization of Irish Society, 1848-1918* (Dublin, 1973) 41.
- ⁷⁹ *The Times*, 19th February 1856 and 10th March 1856. It is said that he inspired such Victorian fictional characters as Merdle in Charles Dickens' *Little Dorritt* (1855-57), Davenport Dunn in Charles Lever's *Davenport Dunn* (1862) and Jabez Morth in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Trail of the Serpent* (1892).
- ⁸⁰ Donnelly, *Famine*, 165.
- ⁸¹ Castle Hyde survives to the present day, however, having recently been restored by Michael Flatley.