

Rev. Edward Geratty and the building and burning of Killeedy Church and Glebe House 1817-22

• LEONARD HOWARD

The background and context of the destruction of the Protestant church and glebe house in Killeedy in 1822 are outlined and analysed. While sectarianism may have been an issue, it is argued that economic hardship and the Rockite response to it was of greater significance. The actions and attitudes of the incumbent rector are also seen as important factors.

The Rev Edward Geratty¹ was no doubt pleased at his appointment in 1803 as Church of Ireland rector of the west Limerick parish of Killeedy. Having spent the previous four years as rector and prebendary in Effin he must have considered his new position a lucrative promotion.² The gross amount of tithes due to him from his new parish represented an increase of roughly a half to around £500 per annum³ while its church glebe comprised 27 acres as opposed to 7 in Effin.⁴ The size of his new congregation – about a dozen people – was fairly similar to his old one.⁵ Furthermore, west Limerick in 1803 was peaceful and relatively prosperous since agriculture, particularly tillage farming, was booming due to the Napoleonic Wars.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Church of Ireland was an ineffective and badly administered institution. However major financial assistance from parliament soon led to a significant improvement in church infrastructure. From 1808 substantial interest-free loans were provided to the Board of First Fruits for the construction and repair of parish churches and glebe houses. This led to a major national church and glebe-building programme and Limerick shared in this boom.⁶ By 1817 the Rev Geratty had

¹ Edward Geratty (the name sometimes appears as Geraghty but he himself spelled it as Geratty) was born in 1770 in Dublin, the son of Peter Geraghty, a merchant. He entered Trinity College Dublin in 1786, graduated with a B.A. in 1793 (M.A. in 1832) and was ordained in 1796. He was prebendary (an ecclesiastical person who enjoys a revenue from the estates of a cathedral or collegiate church) of Effin from 1799 until 1803. In 1814 he appears as a Rural Dean and one of the ten prebendaries of the Diocese of Limerick. S.P. Lea, *Ecclesiastical Registry of Ireland for the year 1814* (Dublin, 1814) p. 221; J.C. Erck, *The Ecclesiastical Register* (Dublin, 1820) p. 80; J.B. Leslie, *The clergy of Limerick*, (1936 and updated by D.W.T. Crooks, Representative Church Body, 2011) p.118.

² The existing rector of Killeedy, James Ellard, was at the same time transferred to Effin, a straight swap with Edward Geratty, Lea, *Ecclesiastical Registry*, p. 222.

³ The composition of all tithes within the parish of Killeedy on 6 September 1824 was £525, *Tithe Applotment Books 1824*. Ten years later it was £529, *Second Report of His Majesty's Commissioners of Inquiry into Ecclesiastical Revenues and Patronage in Ireland*, 1834, p. 92. Effin in 1834 had 10 Protestants and 2413 Catholics and its net tithe income was £294-1-8, *Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland*, 1846 (Reprint Bristol, 1998), vol. 2, part 2, p. 172.

⁴ Lewis, Samuel, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (London, 1837), vol. 1, p. 596; vol. 2, p. 136.

⁵ He later claimed that there was not a single Protestant farmer in Killeedy (National Archives of Ireland Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers (hereafter CSORP) CSORP/SC/1821/639).

⁶ Twenty-one Limerick parishes received gifts or loans for church building between 1810 and 1822, Erck, *Ecclesiastical Register*, p. 83. New churches were built or rebuilt in Killaliathan (near Broadford), Loughill and Abbeyfeale in 1812, Glin and Shanagolden in 1815, Nantinan in 1817, Ballingarry and Rathronan in 1820, Kilsconnell and Chapelrussell (near Pallaskerry) in 1822 and Rathkeale in 1831, Gerard Curtin, 'Religion and Social Conflict during the Protestant Crusade in West Limerick, 1822-49', in *Old Limerick Journal* (Winter edition 2003) p. 47. By 1824 due to the glebe house building developments, twenty-six of Limerick diocese's fifty-one benefices had resident incumbents, W.A. Phillips (ed.), *History of the Church of Ireland*, 3 (London, 1933) p. 91.

overseen the construction in Killeedy of a substantial church costing all of £1,421-10-9.⁷ We have no information regarding the source of this large sum. It was almost three times the cost of the Athlacca church built around the same time (1818) for £500. While no important landowner actually resided in Killeedy, the earl of Devon who was a lay patron of the diocese of Limerick, Ardfert and Aghadoe and had extensive holdings in Killeedy may well have been a major contributor. Geratty himself may have made a donation – he paid almost half the construction costs of a fine new glebe house, described some years later as ‘a complete edifice, built in the most modern style, excellent offices and most tastefully furnished’.⁸ This building had actually cost more than the church. Mr Geratty claimed to have spent £1,440, made up of a loan of £750 from the Board of First Fruits and the remaining £690 from his own funds.⁹ The £690, however, included a First Fruits gift of £100 towards the glebe house construction expenses.¹⁰

The Rockite Rebellion

By 1817, however, when the new buildings had been erected, economic and social conditions had changed drastically. The boom times of the Napoleonic Wars for Irish agriculture had ended with the defeat of France in 1813. Over the following few years demand for agricultural goods had slumped and prices for some produce had halved. Rents and other charges had not seen a corresponding drop and a widespread climate of hopelessness, dissatisfaction and desire for change soon spread.¹¹

In 1818 the arrival in Newcastle West of Alexander Hoskins as a replacement for the popular, indulgent Courtenay Estate land agent, Edward Carte, provoked a local crisis. Hoskins increased rents, cancelled abatements, pursued arrears, evicted tenants, discontinued estate improvements consequently throwing workers out of employment and forbade the letting of conacre to cottiers and labourers.¹² Killeedy was directly affected since the Courtenay Estate owned most of the parish. A direct result of Hoskins’s harsh policies and vindictive behaviour over the next two years was the emergence of a secret organised discontented group, the Rockites, with their mythical leader, Captain Rock.¹³

Rockites had their own aims, their own codes of behaviour; they used intimidation and violence as their normal weapons of warfare and administered their own rough justice. The Irish peasant tended to look upon the law as an engine for coercing him, administered by hostile persons in a hostile spirit.¹⁴ Since the local people traditionally distrusted both the police and the political establishment any person who informed or

⁷ *Parliamentary Gazetteer*, p. 466. Killeedy does not appear on the list of twenty-one Limerick parishes that had received gifts or loans for church building from the Board of First Fruits between 1810 and 1822. (Erck, *Ecclesiastical Register*, p. 161). It is not mentioned in the 1821 or 1822 lists of parishes in arrears of instalments on account of loans advanced by the Trustees of First Fruits, implying that it had never received a loan or that it was up to date with repayments (CSO/RP/1821/774).

⁸ *Limerick Chronicle* (hereafter *L.C.*), 13 February 1822, *Aberdeen Journal*, 27 February 1822.

⁹ Petition for compensation from Edward Geratty to the Lord Lieutenant, Richard Wellesley, 8 June 1822 (CSO/RP/1822/149).

¹⁰ Erck, *Ecclesiastical Register*, p. 83.

¹¹ Liam Kennedy and P.M. Solar, *Irish Agriculture: a price history from the mid-eighteenth century to the eve of the First World War* (Dublin, 2007), Appendix Tables.

¹² The best and most authoritative book on this topic is James S. Donnelly Jr., *Captain Rock: The Irish Agrarian Rebellion of 1821-1824*, (Cork, 2009), I have used it extensively in this article.

¹³ The Rockites were followers of ‘Captain Rock’, the pseudonym of the leader of the secret society. Notices regularly appeared signed with names such as ‘Captain Rock’, ‘John Rock’, ‘Lady Rock’ (Rockites often wore white dresses as a disguise or a uniform). The first ‘Captain Rock’ in west Limerick was Paddy Dillane, a blacksmith from Shanagolden, who lived near Strand and had been apprenticed to Walter (Watty) Fitzmaurice, another Rockite leader.

¹⁴ George Cornewall Lewis, *Local disturbances in Ireland* (Cork, 1977, reprint of original, London, 1836) p. 203.

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indeed co-operated with the authorities in any way was anathema and was almost certain to face brutal reprisals as the Rev Geratty was soon to discover.¹⁵

Robbery and its consequences

Like most of west Limerick Killeedy was seriously disturbed in the second half of 1821. On 24 July 1821 Geratty wrote to William Gregory, the Under Secretary of State, in Dublin Castle:

... matters getting worse every hour, every morning bringing a fresh account of persons flogged the night before, or houses burned, or of other lawless acts, and my own parish being frequently the scene of these illegal proceedings.¹⁶

While there is plenty of evidence of disturbances and crime in and around Killeedy it must be emphasised that there was frequently an element of exaggeration in reports of local outrages and rumours were sometimes categorised as facts. As the economic situation continued to deteriorate a local paper reported in October that:

as the Police from Newcastle ... were patrolling ... they met a large body of men near Killeedy, all mounted, two on each horse, armed and dressed in white, who, on being challenged and ordered to surrender, fled in different directions.

One man was shot but later escaped and another was captured while a Drumcollogher police party arrested two others the same night.¹⁷

Mr Geratty also informed Gregory about his own trials, incidentally exposing how little he understood the perspectives of the local people and how he seemed to regard them as belonging to a different race:

In the depth of last winter my house was forcibly entered by an armed party who robbed me and proceeded through all the preliminaries of putting me to death. One of them I apprehended in some time after the event and prosecuted at the last assizes in Limerick. He was however acquitted notwithstanding full evidence of his guilt, and is at the moment in my neighbourhood ... Mr Geratty went on to speak of the spirit of ... deep revenge which actuates the whole population ... I have every reason to think myself exposed in an especial manner to the schemes of a deadly animosity. Such is the moral derangement of this people that they look on me with horror for prosecuting capitally, not being very seriously injured in my person... A fresh instance of hostility towards me has induced me to break silence. On Friday last two persons in my employment as process servers were seized in the mountainous part of the parish by a number of men who took from them the processes in their possession...¹⁸

According to Mr Geratty the man he had prosecuted, Timothy Curtin, was a local leader and had been acquitted through the perjury of a witness.¹⁹

¹⁵ 'There is no more ominous sound in Ireland than that of *informer*'. Lewis, *Local disturbances*, p. 215 see also pp 203-23 for examples of the hatred for and fate of informers.

¹⁶ CSO/RP/SC/1821/639, CSO/RP/SC/1821/1054, Letter dated 10 July 1821. George Massy to William Gregory, 7 August 1821 (CSORP/SC/1821/976).

¹⁷ *Dublin Evening Post (hereafter DEP)*, 16 October 1821.

¹⁸ CSO/RP/SC/1821/639, 24 July 1821.

¹⁹ CSO/RP/1822/149.

Retaliation soon commenced. An armed group drove an unpopular neighbour's cattle through his meadows and into his corn.²⁰ Eventually the receipt of a number of threats convinced the Rev. Geratty that it was time to leave Killeedy. Some influential people began a campaign to find him a suitable appointment elsewhere. Lord Norbury, the Lord Chief Justice, contacted William Gregory, the Under Secretary of State at Dublin Castle, about the possibility of Geratty, whom he described as 'a most amiable learned man', being granted a church preferment 'in a distant quarter'. Although the income from Killeedy was around £600 per annum Norbury pointed out that Rev Geratty was prepared, with the approval of his bishop, 'to be removed in exchange for small income'.²¹ A few weeks later Mr Geratty himself wrote directly to Gregory, giving some more details about his situation. Not receiving a reply, he sent another letter to Gregory, eleven days later, renewing his request to be granted a church preferment away from Killeedy and to be appointed a magistrate.²² Shortly afterwards Gregory received another communication in which one of the local magistrates, George Massy, acquainted him with Rev. Geratty's situation.²³ Major Richard Going, chief police magistrate for Co. Limerick, also sent a letter to Charles Grant, Chief Secretary, Dublin Castle, reporting 'midnight attacks' on two homes, including Geratty's. Arms had been stolen from Mr Geratty who had now moved to Rathkeale, afraid to return to Killeedy.²⁴

Nothing resulted from these appeals and Mr Geratty spent some time with his brother, James, a barrister, at 31 Holles St in Dublin. Undeterred by the calamitous economic crisis, the desperate condition of the local people or the frequent local outrages he pressed on with seeking his Killeedy tithes but without much success. Earlier, two of his tithe process servers had been robbed²⁵ and he soon complained to Charles Grant that it was 'impossible to procure persons to undertake the perilous duty of viewing and valuing the tithes...'²⁶ Two months later he communicated once again with Gregory, seeking financial assistance, emphasising that 'we have been prevented from receiving the crops of this year and ... cannot recover an equivalent for the tithes or arrears'.²⁷

Destruction of his Church

Conditions continued to deteriorate in west Limerick. From late August 1821 torrential rain fell for months, causing repeated floods and huge losses of corn crops and hay. Large quantities of potatoes soured in the ground undug, rotted in their pits or were simply swept away by floods.²⁸ The poorer people faced the prospect of famine and death in the spring when their small stock of potatoes had been consumed. A further consequence of the downpours was a fuel famine during that winter and the following spring since it had

²⁰ CSO/RP/SC/1821/1054 and 1054A. Letters dated 6 July and 10 July 1821. Reporting on the disturbed state of County Limerick and on some local atrocities, Norbury also enclosed a letter which had been sent by Rev. Geratty to his brother, James Geraghty.

²¹ CSO/RP/SC/1821/1054, Norbury to Gregory, letter dated 10 July 1821.

²² CSO/RP/SC/1821/646, Letter dated 4 August 1821.

²³ CSO/RP/SC/1821/976, Letter dated 7 August 1821.

²⁴ CSO/RP/SC/1821/649, Letter dated 7 August 1821.

²⁵ Intimidation of process servers was not confined to Killeedy. Rev Thomas Locke, rector of Newcastle West and Mahoonagh, informed Charles Grant, the Chief Secretary, that his tithe valuers had been attacked by about 12 armed men, threatened and their books taken from them. They were now afraid to work. Letter dated 4 September 1821. CSO/RP/SC/1821/884. Some other Limerick tithe proctors and valuers were actually murdered (CSO/RP/SC/1821/416, 1570).

²⁶ CSO/RP/SC/1821/658. 30 August 1821.

²⁷ CSO/RP/SC/1821/687. 2 November 1821.

²⁸ Major Croker to Chief Secretary, 31 December 1821. CSO/RP/SC/1821/361.

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been almost impossible to save turf. Desperate conditions led to desperate action. The Rockite rebellion gathered momentum, reaching a peak in the spring of 1822.

Meanwhile Mr Geratty who had returned from Dublin had incurred even more local obloquy. Apart altogether from having wrongly, or at least unsuccessfully, accused a local person of robbing him he was soon believed to have given information to the authorities resulting in the hanging of one man and the conviction and flogging of another.²⁹ Whether or not this was true is immaterial; perception in this case seems to have been as important as fact. Revenge was just around the corner and Killeedy soon witnessed the first instance of church burning in Co. Limerick. On the night of 7 February 1822 its church, constructed only five years earlier, was set on fire and destroyed.³⁰ According to an informer, William Connell, this was not a spur of the moment decision but rather a planned local operation. He claimed that meetings attended by Edward Roche, the main Rockite local leader, had been held at Maurice Leahy's house in Glenquin and a few days later at Daniel and David Cahill's house.³¹ Another local Rockite, Patrick Mulcahy,³² who turned informer the following year, added his own account. He swore that he had been called on by James Ambrose of Killeedy to join a group to burn the church.³³

Why was the church burned? A number of entangled reasons were involved. Sectarianism is the first motive that comes to mind. In the eyes of many Catholics, Protestantism and the oppressive governing classes were inextricably linked. The owners of their rented farms or plots were Protestant as were many of the police, magistrates, army, yeomen and government officials and each of these groups was distrusted and feared. Protestant clergymen were frequently appointed as magistrates - Edward Geratty appears on the bench early in 1823. Furthermore the Protestant church was the collector and recipient of the hated tithe exactions that all were obliged to pay. Tithes, when added to rent and other obligations, were for many simply the last straw. Traditional sectarian animosity had been greatly accentuated in the late 1810s and early 1820s by the widespread diffusion throughout west Limerick, as elsewhere, of the prophecies of Pastorini which predicted the imminent demise of the Protestant church.³⁴ In previous violent agrarian outbreaks Protestants as such and their churches had not been targeted. The ferment of the time and the likelihood of economic meltdown and imminent famine due

²⁹ Rev. Locke to Rev. Geratty SOCPI, 1822/2350/60, Letter dated 11 February 1822.

³⁰ Richard Willcocks, chief inspector of police for County Limerick, to William Gregory, 9 February 1822. SOC/2350/60; *L.C.*, 9 February 1822; *Cork Morning Intelligencer* (hereafter *C.M.I.*), 12 February 1822.

³¹ Maurice Leahy, according to Connell, was heavily involved in the Rockite movement. After the burning of Killeedy church 20 men gathered at Leahy's, spent two hours there drinking whiskey and went on to attack Abbeyfeale church. Information of William Connell, 21 April 1822. SOC/2345/62.

³² He later became a private in the 1st Rifle Brigade. Some ex-Rockites joined the army as a way of escaping from the authorities. Donnelly, *Captain Rock*, p. 325.

³³ SOC/2517/64. A letter from Godfrey Massy, to Henry Goulburn, 8 August 1822 contains a copy of Mulcahy's statement. He identified other group members - John Hays, John Quishin (Cussen?), Daniel Doody, William Wolf, Connor Mahony, Edward Egan, Maurice Kiely, John O'Brien, Timothy and Patrick Cagney, Patrick Coghlan, David Maly, John Flin, William Dillane, Daniel Geary, Jeremiah Mulcahy and John Murphy. Doody and Cussen were believed to be Rockite leaders. John Cussen, who had broken out of the jail in Rathkeale, had been accused of attacking Maurice Hartnett's house in Ballygeale and flogging him for not giving up his land but a jury had found him not guilty, *C.M.I.*, 1 August 1822. Daniel Doody and John Cussen were also convicted of involvement in the abduction of an heiress, Hanora Goold. *D.E.P.*, 6 August 1822, 27 August 1822. Cussen, Doody and others escaped from Limerick Jail in December 1822, *Cork Advertiser and Morning Intelligencer*, 26 December 1822; *L.C.*, 4 January 1823.

³⁴ Pastorini was the pen-name of an English Catholic bishop, Charles Walmesley, O.S.B. (1722-97) whose *General history of the Christian Church* appeared in 1790 and went through many editions. Thousands of printed papers entitled '*Signior Pastorini's Prophecy*' circulated throughout Munster, according to Major George Warburton. SOC, 1825 (20), pp 143-5. These prophecies, in which many of the poorer Irish people believed, made a major contribution to contemporary sectarianism which was exacerbated by the widespread dissatisfaction with the unfair burden of tithes.

to the atrocious weather and crop failures caused many traditional values to fall by the wayside. Since Pastorini had predicted the imminent end of the Protestant establishment and the punishment of heretics, inhibitions about desecrating or even destroying their churches must have diminished.³⁵ Opportunity had now appeared since police and the 40th Regiment had just been withdrawn from the neighbourhood due to the disturbances in County Cork and so the church was an accessible target.³⁶

While undoubtedly many Rockites were virulently anti-Protestant the burning of Killeedy church cannot be attributed solely, or even principally, to sectarianism. Local grievances provide a much more likely explanation for the 1822 Limerick church burnings.³⁷ Rev Geratty himself considered it to be an act of vengeance by the lower orders.³⁸ Geratty's neighbouring colleague and friend, Rev. Thomas Locke, rector of Newcastle West, Monegay and Mahoonagh, was of a similar mind, ascribing the burning to personal retaliation rather than to anti-Protestant animus:

I heard two reasons to day for the rage against you. Percy said that they took it into their heads that you informed against that unfortunate Shea who was hanged. Papa said that he heard that they thought you were the cause of this man's being flogged.³⁹

'That unfortunate Shea' was Timothy Shea who had been charged in December 1821 with being a Whiteboy and a member of a group that had stolen a mare in Drumcollogher a few months previously.⁴⁰ Five men, including Shea, were hanged at Newcastle just after Christmas 1821. Considerable local sympathy for Shea intensified the animosity towards anybody involved or suspected of involvement in his apprehension and Mr Geratty was a prime suspect. This anger makes it much more likely that the church was burned not specifically because it was a Protestant church but because it was Rev. Geratty's church and thus provided a convenient way for the community to express its revulsion at his suspected role as informer and also at his unceasing efforts to collect tithes at a time of great hardship.

Rockite leaders must also have been aware that a spectacular operation such as burning Killeedy church would underline both their power and their effective control of the locality while emphasising to the community at large the dangers inherent in

³⁵ Three churches were burned or desecrated in Kerry (Knockane on 23 November 1821, Templehoe on 4 January 1822 and Kilgarvan, 7 January 1822 and four in Limerick (Killeedy and Abbeyfeale, 7/8 February 1822, Ballybrood 20 February 1822, Athlacca 1 March 1822). See SOCP1/1822/2148/3,5,12 and also SOCP1/1822/2350/39,53,54,60,73,93,94. For the influence of Pastorini's doctrines see James S. Donnelly, Jr., 'Pastorini and Millenarianism and Sectarianism in the Rockite Movement of 1821-4', in Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly Jr. (eds), *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest 1780-1914* (Manchester, 1983) pp 107-08.

³⁶ Richard Willcocks to Wm. Gregory, 9 February 1822. SOC/2350/60; Geratty to Wellesley, CSO/RP/1822/149.

³⁷ See Donnelly, *Captain Rock*, pp 269-71.

³⁸ Geratty to Wellesley, CSO/RP/1822/149.

³⁹ Rev. Locke to Rev. Geratty, SOCP1, 1822/2350/60, Letter dated 11 February 1822

⁴⁰ CSO/RP/SC/1821/199. Before his execution, Shea confessed that he had falsely implicated several persons in Rockite activities in the hope of being released and made a sworn statement recanting that evidence, *C.M.I.* 5 January 1822. In a most unusual occurrence Richard Willcocks, the chief police magistrate for County Limerick, wrote to William Gregory, the Under Secretary, on Christmas Day suggesting that a show of mercy from the government for 'the unfortunate men' might be beneficial, particularly as it might lead to the surrender of arms in the possession of the disaffected. His advice was ignored. The mercilessness and obduracy of the government in this case was underlined when the obviously repentant men addressed the crowd gathered at their execution and advised them to surrender arms in their possession (CSO/RP/SC/1821/1737).

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collaborating with the authorities. The church however was not the only item on their agenda. Rockites took immediate advantage of the withdrawal of the army from the neighbourhood and were particularly active in the parish in the days immediately preceding the burning. The destruction of the church was just one of a number of atrocities carried out simultaneously locally on the same night:

... the house of Major Sullivan who owned land in neighbouring Ahawilk was broken into. The farmhouse and outbuildings and some stock of John Parker, a half-pay officer, at Ballyregan near Camas was burned. All the neighbouring gentry are taking shelter in the town of Newcastle.⁴¹

Destruction of Glebe House

Killeedy glebe house was one of the next night's targets.⁴² This was also a planned attack. The informer, Connell, claimed to have been visited earlier by three Rockites and asked to join a group at some later date to burn Rev. Geratty's house. When the day arrived he pretended to be unwell and stayed at home.⁴³ A newspaper reported that a large party of well-armed Rockites went to the glebe house and:

... after replenishing themselves with plenty of bacon and potatoes, which they boiled, they proceeded to partake of some of the exquisites of the cellar, by drinking several dozen bottles of fine old wine, etc., after which they set fire to the house, exulting with exclamations of triumph, and then departed reeling drunk.⁴⁴

Before burning the house they removed furniture and wine – one raider, John Murphy, had brought a horse and cart – and divided it among themselves.⁴⁵ Geratty later claimed that they had also taken a choice collection of books, a great number of useful ornamental articles, all his farming implements, his iron gates and even the fire grates. Furthermore large groups had visited the site on three successive days and cut down and removed trees.⁴⁶

The next day an army investigation party visited the ruins and pursued and fired at some persons who were on the scene when they arrived. When the soldiers eventually left:

... the Peasantry collected from all directions to the house, ... and did not leave a single article of any description whatsoever, but they tore away and laid waste. A quantity of bacon, meal, potatoes and wool, which were then not consumed, were all carried off by them, also such portion of furniture as they were able to rescue from the flames, and even the potatoes that were in pits in the garden were taken away, and the bees in their hives destroyed or carried off. All this was the labour of Sunday, and on Monday, five cows and a horse of great value, were publicly

⁴¹ *L.C.*, 9 February 1822; *C.M.I.*; 12 February 1822; *Caledonian Mercury*, 16 February 1822.

⁴² A farmhouse at Dorrery on Mr Maunsell's estate was also set on fire, *C.M.I.*, 16 February 1822.

⁴³ Information of William Connell, 21 April 1822 (SOC/2345/62). Some of Connell's testimony seems almost incredible and must be treated with extreme caution.

⁴⁴ *C. M. I.*, 14 February 1822.

⁴⁵ SOC/2517/64, a copy of Mulcahy's statement was enclosed with a letter from Godfrey Massy, Jr. to Henry Goulburn, 8 August 1822.

⁴⁶ Geratty to Wellesley, CSO/RP/1822/149.

carried off by an armed party of these savages, to the mountains; also a large stack of hay, of some tons, was regularly distributed among the insurgents or their friends.⁴⁷

Rev. Thomas Locke, rector of Newcastle West, communicated the bad news of the burning to the Rev. Geratty: •

Your house as I told you in my last was burnt except the stable and potato house and not contented with that they seem determined to erase every vestige of the improvements ... 4 cows and a yearling were stolen ... all the potatoes in the lofts of the houses which escaped the conflagration were stolen and already they have cut down almost all the plantations.⁴⁸

Why was the glebe house burned? Rockites did not usually attack glebe houses. Killeedy glebe was an exceptional case for a number of reasons. Firstly it was an easy target. It was 'remote from any defences and a great distance from the house of any gentleman'.⁴⁹ The bulk of the large army presence in Newcastle West district had been transferred to Cork a few days before the attack and so the coast was clear.⁵⁰ Glebe houses in other parishes were protected by soldiers.⁵¹ Not only was Killeedy unguarded by the military and police but it was vacant - its rector had moved to the safety of Newcastle. Moreover some of those employed to look after it were prepared to collaborate or at least co-operate with the raiders.⁵² Emboldened by the previous night's successful burning of the church the raiders were prepared to cook meals and have a drinking party on the spot, underlining their lack of fear of detection or of intervention by the authorities. Secondly the contents of the house, out-offices and gardens would have been well-known and must have been an obvious temptation for people facing the prospect of famine.

Thirdly there was the strong possibility that some of the additional replacement troops due to arrive in west Limerick would be billeted in Killeedy. Since the local gentry were obliged to find accommodation for any army reinforcements, the destruction of a vacant well-furnished substantial glebe house which was an obvious location for a barracks was a logical pre-emptive strike. Rockites recognised the limitations that an army presence in the district placed on their activities and posted a notice on Killeedy Catholic church door, ordering the levelling of any slated house that might be occupied by the army.⁵³ Fourthly as in the case of the church burning it highlighted the power of the local Rockites. Fifthly looting and then burning the fine dwelling house of a detested suspected informer and collaborator was a telling act of public revenge.

⁴⁷ *L.C.*, 13 February 1822; *C. M. I.*, 14 February 1822; *D. E. P.*, 16 February 1822; *Aberdeen Journal*, 27 February 1822.

⁴⁸ SOCP1, 1822/2350/60, letter dated 11 February 1822.

⁴⁹ CSO/RP/SC/1821/639, 24 July 1821.

⁵⁰ Geratty to Wellesley, CSO/RP/1822/149.

⁵¹ The rector, Rev George Madder believed that the presence of two soldiers, assigned to guard his house, had prevented the destruction of his glebe house on the night his church at Ballybrood near Cahirconlish was burned in an act of revenge, less than two weeks after the Killeedy burnings (SOC/2350/73).

⁵² *D.E.P.*, 4 December 1823.

⁵³ *Freeman's Journal*, 23 February 1822. James Newlams' new slated house near Shanagolden was burned at practically the same time, *C.M.I.*, 16 February 1822. A short time later, an empty barracks in Abbeyfeale was destroyed, *C.M.I.*, 26 February 1822; *Morning Chronicle*, 26 February 1822. A few weeks later Rockites burned the house of John Pigott near Kilfinny 'as the house had been fitted up and used as a barrack, they were obliged by their laws to burn it, as well as every other building that should be converted to the same purpose.' *L.C.*, 2 March 1822.

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Aftermath of the burnings

The authorities began an investigation and, following house searches, soon apprehended five men with some of the property taken from the glebe and committed them to the County jail.⁵⁴ Two months later the same five men 'William Harrigan, Michael Harrigan, Thomas Anglim, Bryan Sweeny, and John Connors were prosecuted for taking three beech trees and twenty stone of oats, the property of the Rev. Mr. Geraghty'.⁵⁵

The following year Godfrey Massy successfully prosecuted a party of seventeen men who had been involved in various illegal actions including both of the Killeedy burnings. The group included six named in Mulcahy's original information – John and Patrick O'Brien, Patrick and Timothy Cagney, David Maly and James Ambrose.⁵⁶

On 8 June 1822 Mr Geratty who had moved to Dublin sent a petition to the Lord Lieutenant, Wellesley, for compensation due to loss of his dwelling and other property. He stated that due to an understandable mistake on the part of a magistrate he had been unable to receive any recompense from the County Limerick Grand Jury. Losses sustained by the burning of his house and furniture and offices as well as stock losses and damage to his lands amounted in his opinion to £2,900. He also pointed out that although he was unable to collect tithes due to the state of the country he still had to repay the First Fruits loan and was legally obliged to restore the glebe house.⁵⁷ Wellesley passed on the appeal to William Gregory, the Under Secretary of State, so presumably some compensation was paid.

Some time later Mr Geratty secured an appointment as a magistrate and returned to west Limerick from Dublin.⁵⁸ On 30 November 1823 he accompanied a party of police and military to Killeedy where they apprehended several persons who were subsequently charged in connection with the plunder and burning of his glebe house. He was amazed to find that the principal individuals arrested had actually worked for him and had had his complete confidence.⁵⁹

Rev Geratty's subsequent dealings with Killeedy

It is difficult not to conclude that Mr Geratty's principal focus for long periods of his life was on areas other than religion. None of his extant communications with the authorities make any reference to the needs of his congregation who had been deprived of their church. We find no requests for assistance in providing an alternative church venue or a police guard for religious services. His concerns seem to have been mainly for his personal safety and particularly his financial wellbeing.⁶⁰ When seeking reparation from the government he emphasised that he was legally obliged to restore the glebe house and this presumably was an element in any compensation award. However during his next thirty years as rector this obligation seems to have slipped his mind. Even when the

⁵⁴ *L.C.*, 16 February 1822; *Limerick News (hereafter L.N.)*, 21 February 1822; *C.M.I.*, 21 February 1822. None of the men arrested at this time appear in either of Mulcahy's church or glebe burning lists.

⁵⁵ *L.N.*, 18 April 1822. 'Harrigan' should really be 'Hannigan'.

⁵⁶ SOCP 1, 2517/64, 65, letter from Massy to Henry Goulburn, 14 August 1823; *L.C.*, 13 August 1823.

⁵⁷ CSO/RP/1822/149.

⁵⁸ He acted as magistrate in February 1823, *L.C.*, 26 February 1823. He appears in a Newcastle list of nobility, gentry and clergy in Pigot's *Directory*, published in 1824 (p. 303).

⁵⁹ *D.E.P.*, 4 December 1823.

⁶⁰ He seems to have been well off throughout most of his clerical life. Almost half the cost of his substantial glebe house came from his own resources. After his move to Killeedy he managed to acquire some land – his 1822 compensation claim refers to 61 acres, 34 acres more than his glebe land area. In the 1851 Griffith Valuation Mr Geratty is listed as the immediate lessor of 44 acres of Killeedy glebe land and of a house and small garden in Killeedy North.

climate had become peaceful and the frequency of local outrages had diminished considerably he made no effort to reconstruct either the church or glebe house in Killeedy and he showed no inclination to return to live there despite an Act requiring incumbents to reside in their benefices for nine months of the year.⁶¹ His absence was underlined in 1830 when a petition for assistance from seventy-year-old James Stanley was presented and read in the House of Commons. Stanley stated that he had been for more than fifty years Parish Clerk of Killeedy Church with a salary of £9 per annum. Because the church had been burned and not rebuilt and since the Rev. Geratty had ceased to perform any duty in the parish he had been deprived of his only means of support and was now reduced to beggary.⁶²

Despite not providing any spiritual service to the parish the Rev. Geratty was still legally entitled to Killeedy tithes.⁶³ Entitlement, however, did not necessarily mean payment in full or anything like it and by 1833 tithe arrears due to him for the previous four years amounted to £845-13-6, roughly one seventh of the total arrears due for the whole diocese of Limerick.⁶⁴ Some of these arrears were pursued and at the Court of King's Bench at Easter 1835 Mr Geratty obtained a judgment for £22-3-6 against Darby Murphy.⁶⁵ In 1852 he resigned from his Killeedy parish.⁶⁶ During the following year he moved from Newcastle West to Leeson St in Dublin where he died a rich man on 6 April 1858.⁶⁷

Conclusion

During his first seventeen years in Killeedy Mr Geratty and his neighbours had managed to co-exist peacefully. The construction, running, supplying and maintenance of his church and house had provided badly needed employment for some local workers. Godfrey Massy, a Protestant magistrate who lived at Glenwilliam, Ballingarry, claimed that Rev Geratty had been 'a most valuable benefactor to his parishioners'.⁶⁸ Whatever the accuracy of Massy's judgment good works would not save a person perceived to be a collaborator with the oppressive authorities. Edward Geratty was unfortunate in as much as an action that seemed perfectly reasonable to him, the prosecution of a leader of a gang that had broken into his house and robbed him, was so much at variance with the perspective of the local people. Above all the widespread belief that he bore major responsibility for the execution of Timothy Shea contributed greatly to the burning of his church and glebe house. Throughout his long life his total inability or unwillingness to understand or empathise with the mindset of his Catholic neighbours at a time of severe distress, his

⁶¹ 48 Geo 111 c.66.

⁶² *House of Commons Journal*, vol. 85 1830 363-376. The Tithes Applotment book of 1832 stated that Stanley occupied a mere 3 roods with a tithe valuation of 1-3³/₄d. He does not seem to have been one of the trusted employees accused of involvement in the destruction of either church or glebe.

⁶³ The composition of all tithes within the parish of Killeedy 6 September 1824, *Tithe Applotment Books 1824*. Ten years later it was £529, *Second Report of His Majesty's Commissioners of Inquiry into Ecclesiastical Revenues and Patronage in Ireland*, 1834, p. 92.

⁶⁴ *Report from Tithe Commissioners*, ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 3 July 1833.

⁶⁵ *Returns relating to Tithe Suits (Ireland)* R. 159, ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 17 August 1836.

⁶⁶ Leslie, *The clergy of Limerick*, p. 118.

⁶⁷ *Freeman's Journal*, 14 April 1858, 16 February 1859. He left substantial assets, some of which he had inherited from his father. Leslie, *The clergy of Limerick*, p. 118 states that his effects amounted to £14,000 while the *Nenagh Guardian* of 19 February 1859 reckoned them at £16,000.

⁶⁸ 'Having some knowledge of medicine he had helped the sick poor of his neighbourhood at his own expense and had always been alive to their needs', Massy to William Gregory, 18 February 1822 (SOC/2355/31).

unawareness of or disregard for the Pastorini-fuelled increase in sectarianism and his strong identification with the ruling establishment at a time of extreme violence made him an obvious target. Rockites, for their own survival, were ready to wreak vengeance on anybody who transgressed their code, reserving a particular hatred for any known or suspected informer or collaborator. Unfortunately for himself Rev. Geratty fell into this category and suffered the loss of his church and glebe house as a consequence.

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