
The Abduction of Honora Goold

by Pat Feeley



uring the eighteenth century and in the early part of the nineteenth, the abduction of unmarried women, the daughters of well-to-do parents, was an established feature of life in the Irish countryside. Many of these arose from situations where the girl, who under the match-making system was being forced to marry someone against her will, connived with her lover to have herself spirited away - their aim being to force the objecting parents to agree to their getting married. The abduction usually achieved this for the following reason: it was generally assumed that sexual intimacy took place during the period that the girl was away from home and, such being the case, the value of the young woman in the rural marriage market would be greatly reduced and the parents would have little option but to allow her to marry the man of her choice.

An abduction of this kind took place in the Newcastle West area in the 1820s. The daughter of a rich widow, named Moore, was taken off by her boyfriend, or, more correctly, went off with him, when the mother was pressuring her to marry someone else. Although such an incident was termed an abduction, it was in fact little more than a form of elopement. This was the romantic type of abduction.

There was another type which was cruel, calculating and callous. This was where a young man, often the son of a farmer or one of the squires, who had little money and no great prospects, decided to kidnap and ravish the daughter of some wealthy man in the belief that the girl would then be obliged to marry him and that there would, as a result of this, be an improvement in his financial state. The abduction of Honora Goold belonged to this second category.

This took place in the townland of Aughrim, near Liscarrol in County Cork, in 1822, at a time when County

Limerick and the adjoining border districts of counties Cork and Kerry were experiencing the worst agrarian disturbances that that part of the country had ever seen. This was the outbreak that was triggered off by the activities of Alexander Hoskins, a new, tactless and provocative agent of the Courtenay estate, who drove the peasantry into a violent and savage revolt. It was known as the Rockite uprising because the name commonly signed to proclamations, threats and notices was Captain Rock.

The abduction took place on the night of March 4th, when a number of men entered the house of Richard Goold, the son of a prosperous farmer, and burst into a bedroom where one of his sisters was sleeping. The kidnapers, who had orders to take the eldest daughter, asked the girl in the bed if she were the eldest. She replied that she wasn't but they didn't believe her and ordered her to get up and dress. When she had done this, they carried her forcibly from the house. The girl, who was only sixteen, was Honora Goold.

When she was brought outside, she was placed on a horse in front of John Brown, a farmer's son, and taken to his father's house where a pillion was put on the horse for her. Then the party, numbering twelve men, set off with the crying girl in the direction of Freemount. Here they stopped for drinks at a pub called Forrest's and they were joined by six others. Amongst these was Walter Fitzmaurice, who was a blacksmith and kept a forge at Barnagh Gap, on the western side of Newcastle where the land rises and the hill country begins. Fitzmaurice was one of the leaders of the Rockite campaign in that part of the country and was wanted in connection with a number of crimes, including the murder of Thomas Hoskins, the agent's son. It was said that he was the original Capt. Rock. While in the pub, the girl saw Brown handing Fitzmaurice a banknote.

From Freemount, they headed off through rough country into the West Limerick hills. The girl fell from her

horse a number of times and was still crying and very distraught. At one point, Fitzmaurice threatened that he would take her life if she did not stop crying. Eventually, around eight o'clock in the morning, they arrived at the house of David Leahy, a comfortable farmer, in the Tournafulla area where they were obviously expected.

In the house with Leahy were his wife, their two sons, Mary Cahill, a niece of Leahy's wife, and a maid. Mary Cahill was a young woman, a few years older than Honora, and in the circumstances one would have expected her to have shown some sympathy for the girl. But the opposite in fact was the case and she was to play an active role in what was to follow.

Soon after they arrived at the house, Brown, who did not seem to be unduly put out by the fact that they had taken the wrong daughter, proposed marriage to the girl. She refused his proposal and he then told her that he would, in her phrase, 'violate her person'. One of the Leahy boys advised her to marry Brown saying that he was a well-to-do farmer and a man of education. But she again refused.

After breakfast, Brown took the young girl into a bedroom where he took her by force on the bed. This happened again that night and at various other times in the weeks that followed.

The abduction of Miss Goold led to a great furore. This was partly on account of her youth and the callousness of her kidnapers but also because it was seen as yet another manifestation of the naked contempt of the Rockites for all forms of law and order. A great hue and cry went up. Parties of military were sent in to comb the hills for her. So intensive was the search, that she had to be moved from house to house and cabin to cabin to escape detection. At one time, she was taken to a glen where she was hidden until the soldiers had departed.

During all this time, continual pressure was put on her to marry Brown. At one stage, a clergyman named Ashe was brought to marry them but he

refused when he discovered what the actual situation was. The girl showed considerable courage and toughness. In spite of threats and inducements, she remained steadfast in her determination not to marry Brown.

In fact, as it transpired, it was the abductors who began to bend under the strain. With no resolution of the situation in sight, David Leahy came to the girl and told her that they would release her if she signed a dictated statement saying that she was in the house of her own free will with Brown. She agreed to do this and, soon after-

for the authorities who had been trying, with little success, to get information and evidence about those involved in the agrarian disturbances. They now found that they had solid evidence against a number of men on a serious charge and that these men had not only taken part in the abduction but were also deeply involved in agrarian crimes.

The Leahys and a few more were soon in custody and an intensive search was undertaken for the others. In July, the man described as 'the noted delinquent Wat Fitzmaurice' surren-

The exception was Brown. He was never arrested. It was said that he had fled the country and taken a boat to America. He was never again seen in the Cork-Limerick border area.

The trial of the Leahys' and two others began at the Limerick Assizes at the end of July 1822. The Leahys' counsel described them as the first class of farmers in that part of the country and pleaded for leniency, saying that they had done what they had done through fear. The court was told that 'a great terror prevailed in the mountains against any who did not obey the insurgents'. But pleas for leniency fell on deaf ears. Four of the Leahys and the two others were convicted and sentenced to long terms in gaol.

The trial of Fitzmaurice and seven others opened in Limerick towards the end of August. It was a dramatic opening, Fitzmaurice, widely regarded as a violent and dangerous man, entered a plea of guilty to the abduction charge and threw himself at the mercy of the court. All the evidence suggests that a deal had been done, although the judge and the prosecution counsel, in effect, denied this.

Richard Goold identified one of the accused, William Costello, as one of the men who had broken into his house and kidnapped his sister. Costello, who spoke in Irish, denied this and claimed that he was in bed that night and that he had witnesses to prove this. A witness identified all those charged as being in the party that had Miss Goold in the pub in Freemount. At the end of the trial, five of the accused were sentenced to long terms in gaol. Costello was sentenced to death and Fitzmaurice was pardoned.

The sentence was carried out on Costello in September and on the morning that he was hanged, Fitzmaurice visited him in his cell and shook hands with him. It was not for nothing that Fitzmaurice was described as 'a ready instrument for any purpose.'

The fall-out from the Goold kidnapping was important in the campaign against the agrarian secret societies in County Limerick. It led to the capture, trial and conviction of a number of active participants in that campaign. And Fitzmaurice's role in the trial and his subsequent pardon, sowed distrust, suspicion and fear amongst the Rockites, just as the authorities intended.

SOURCES

The Limerick News, August 1st 1822.

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Police conducting a house search.

wards, on the twentieth day of the kidnapping, she was taken to a place near Abbeyfeale where she was released. A magistrate, William Allen, found her, some time after, in a 'most pitiable condition', not being able to walk, sit or stand.

However, when she had recovered sufficiently, she swore informations against her abductors, most of whom she was able to name and identify. This turned out to be a major breakthrough

dered to a magistrate, Gerald Blennerhasset. He was said to be tired and depressed from sleeping out and living rough in the hills. Thomas P. Vokes, a Limerick magistrate and a most determined opponent of the Rockites, informed the authorities in Dublin that he could obtain evidence against Fitzmaurice for the murder of a man named Hartnett.

Within a few months, most of those involved had been taken and charged.