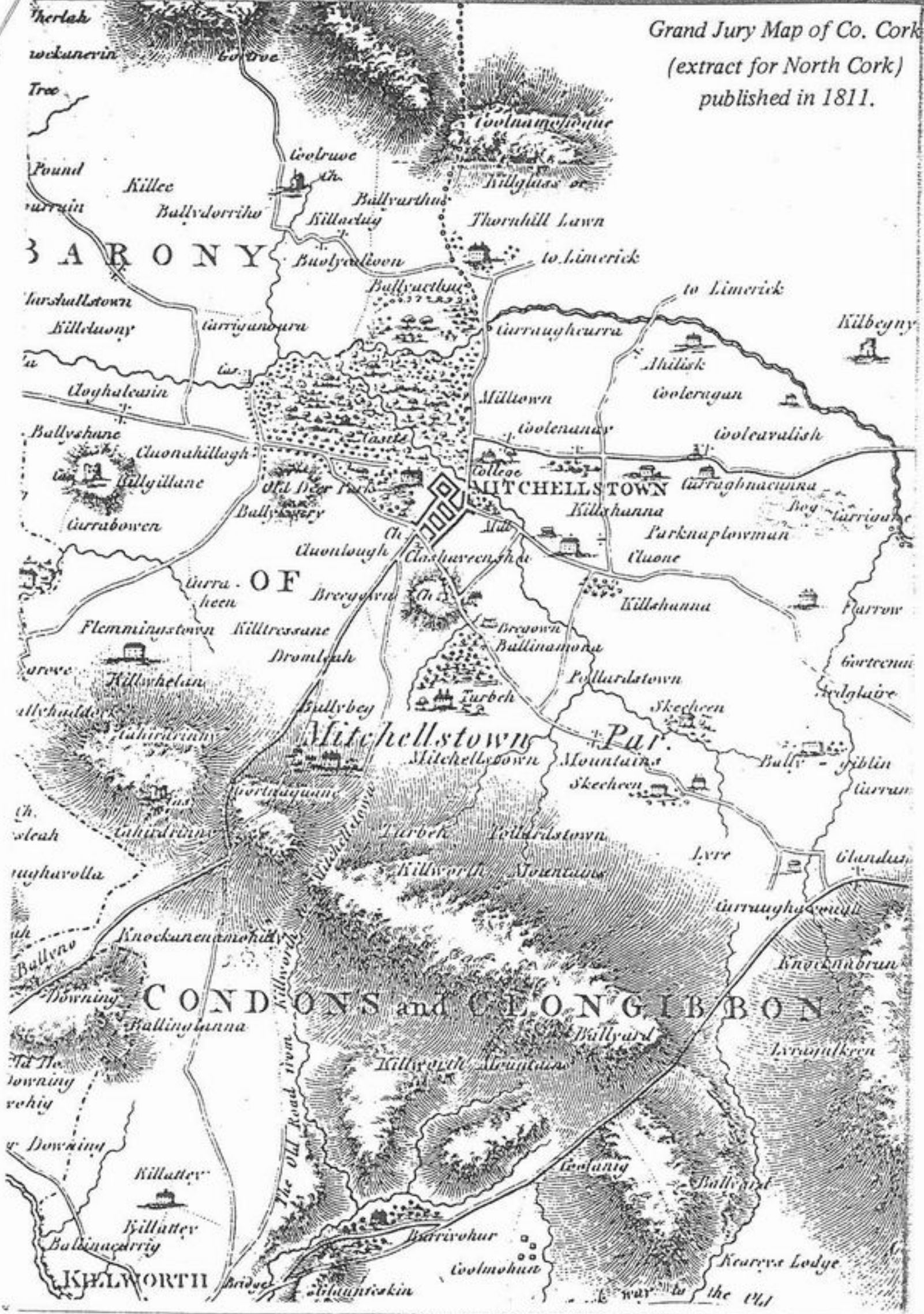


Grand Jury Map of Co. Cork
 (extract for North Cork)
 published in 1811.

(2)



Mitchelstown

through seven centuries

Being a Concise History of
 Mitchelstown, County Cork.



Bill Power



Colonel John O'Mahony founder and head-centre of the Fenian Brotherhood.

VII Remember Mitchelstown

Farming methods around Mitchelstown, as in the rest of the country, changed considerably after the Great Famine. People still relied on the potato for food, but now there was a strong emphasis on grain-growing and dairying. Many farms became much larger owing to the decline in population and a continuing growth in emigration. People married at a much older age and marriages were fewer in number towards the end of the century. Together with emigration, this caused a 32 per cent drop in the population of County Cork between 1851 and 1891.¹ By the census of 1891 the total population of Brigown (alias Mitchelstown) parish was down to 4,566 of which 2,312 lived in the town.² By 1901, the population of Mitchelstown was at its lowest since records began in 1821. The town had 2,146 living in 438 houses. The remainder of the parish had 1,861 living in 336 houses.³

As far as Mitchelstown was concerned the 1870s were relatively uneventful years. Anna, Dowager Countess of Kingston, ran the Mitchelstown estate with the help of William Downes Webber, whom she knew since childhood and to whom she was married on 29 July 1873. She negotiated a £236,000 loan from the Representative Church Body to pay off and consolidate all the charges on the estate. The interest on the loan was 4.5 per cent annually. Henry Ernest Newcomen King, eighth Earl of Kingston, challenged the disentailing deeds in the Court of Chancery. The total value of the estate was estimated by him to be £300,000. His claim to ownership failed but cost Anna £6,000 in legal proceedings.⁴

In 1879 the total acreage of the estate was 24,421 acres in County Cork and a further 250 acres in County Limerick — with a total valuation of £17,951. Webber owned 3,810 acres valued at £1,699 in the counties of Leitrim, Kildare, Laois and Sligo.⁵ Farrar, the agent appointed by the fifth earl to manage the Mitchelstown estate, continued in management until he went bankrupt in 1877. For the next seven years Webber conducted the affairs of the estate. The only mark of construction in the demesne during those years was the erection of a new main-gateway to the castle from King Square. This gateway was designed by the Pain brothers when the castle was built in the 1820s.⁶

Landlord-tenant relations on the estate took a serious turn for the worse when large-scale evictions were enforced in 1881. Prior to this, relations between the owners of Mitchelstown and their tenants had been quite harmonious. Fixity

of tenure, fair rent and free sale had been granted, though not in a legally-binding way, to the Kingston tenants. The production and sale of butter provided a major part of most tenants' rents in the years after the famine. Butter prices dropped considerably in 1878 and 1879. Tenants demanded a 10 per cent reduction in rents to offset the drop in butter prices. This sparked off a spate of events which were not finally resolved for nearly 30 years.

In December 1880, 1,600 tenants paraded through the town to the castle. A group of tenants offered what they considered to be a fair amount in payment for their September gale of rent. When this was refused they 'went directly for the shops, where they paid for the provisions that sustained their families the past summer'. The tenants fully realised that the debt on the estate placed its owner in the position of not being able to grant even the smallest reductions in rents.

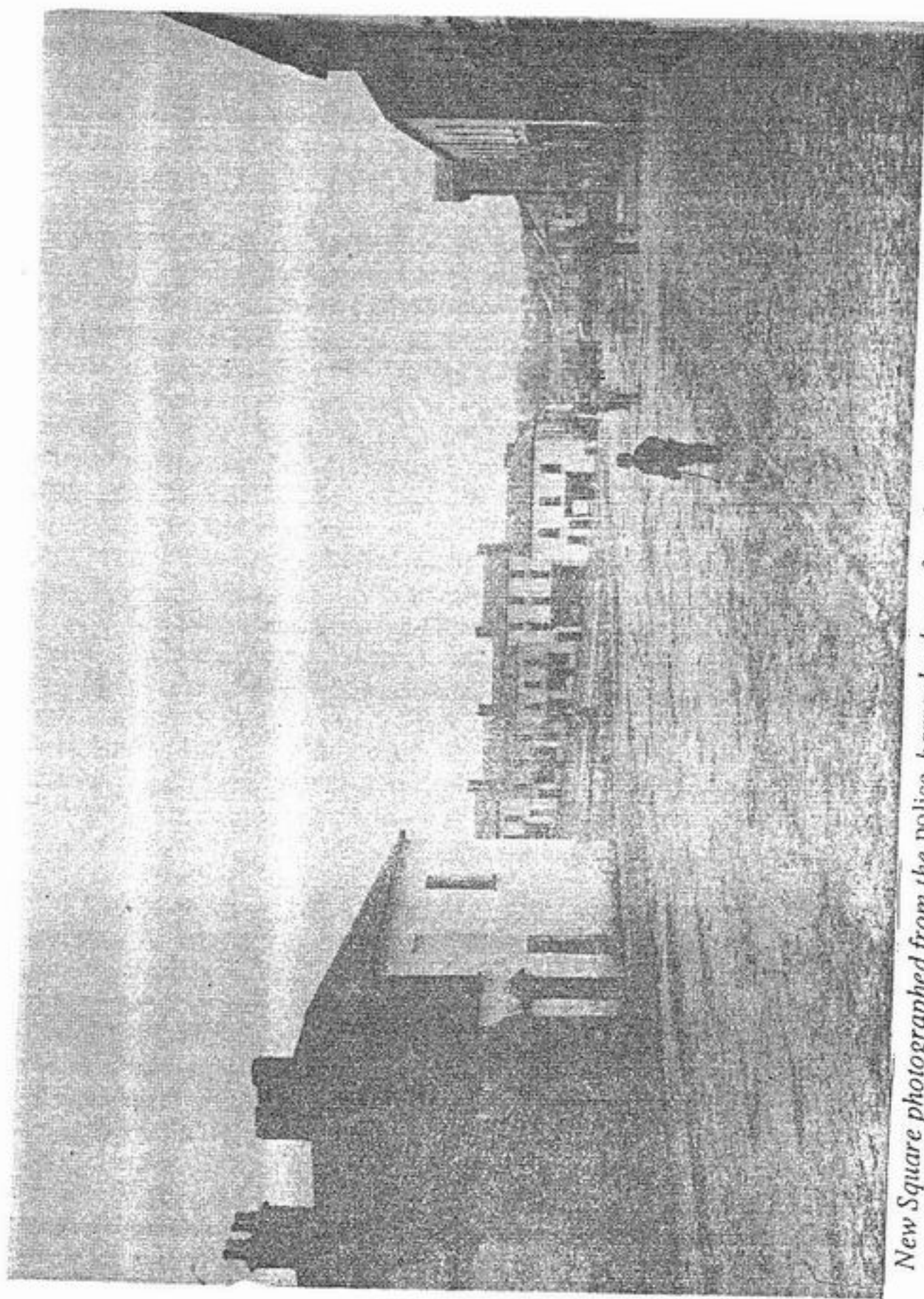
Reduced rents were again refused by Anna when the March 1881 gale fell due. The estate was now behind in loan repayments and pressure was mounting from the Representative Church Body.⁷ Matters were made worse when Henry Lindsey Young, the owner of an estate in the townland of Croughvoe, accepted a 22.5 per cent rent reduction on his property, negotiated by the Mitchelstown branch of the National Land League. The League had been set up by the tenant-farmers to fight for the rights of its members who sought the 'three fs' – fair rent, free sale and fixity of tenure. Over the next six years, the Mitchelstown branch would play a very significant role in what became known as 'The Irish Land War'.

The victory over Young led to a demonstration on 27 March. 'All the streets of the town and the avenue to Mitchelstown castle entrance were paraded by a torchlight procession the local band playing the national airs throughout' – reported the *Cork Examiner*. This time Anna decided to proceed with legal action and ejection orders were obtained. Some tenants paid their rents but those who did not began organising themselves through the Land League in order to resist eviction.⁸

On 27 May, the bailiffs backed by 150 police, soldiers and cavalry set off to carry out the first five evictions. As they gathered in Mitchelstown at 9am, the Catholic church bells began to ring summoning the tenants to put on a show of resistance. As the evictors, followed by a crowd, proceeded to evict John Donoghue from his house and 25 acres farm in Pollardstown the people shouted abuse and threw stones at the bailiffs. The county sheriff, in customary fashion, had the door of the dwelling house burst in and five chairs were removed to the yard. Donoghue emerged to pay his year's rent of £35-9s and the sheriff and his men proceeded to leave. One of the bailiffs named Kelly was stoned by the crowd, only to be rescued by the dragoons. They all then proceeded to Thomas Casey's farm at Kilshanny. This time rotten eggs and dirty water were thrown at the bailiffs. Casey paid the rent on his 27 acre holding before the would-be evictors left. Kelly once again had to endure some stone-throwing and in the fracas a lance-corporal was injured.



Anna, Countess of Kingston, inherited the Kingston Estate from her husband, the fifth earl. She came under venomous attack from the Land League in the 1880s.



New Square photographed from the police barracks door after the riot of 1887 in which three civilians were fatally wounded by police gunfire.

With the echo of church bells in the background and after the resident magistrate read the Riot Act — which ordered the people to disperse — the crowd was charged by police and a number injured. Fr Timothy O'Connell and the coroner John Sarsfield Casey arrived on the scene and pleaded with the crowd to control themselves. However, stone-throwing resumed as the police and military proceeded to the next eviction at Thomas Donovan's in Coolnanave. At the junction of Lower Cork Street with the road to Kilshanny the Riot Act was read again and the magistrate this time gave a clear warning that he would order his men to fire at the crowd if it would not disperse. When they didn't go away the police made a charge with fixed-bayonets at a section of the crowd in the brewery yard near Lower Cork Street. Several were injured and one man had a bayonet driven through his lower jaw. At the sight of blood the people became more incensed and but for the pleadings of Fr O'Connell a full-scale riot would have ensued. By now, 5,000 people led by the local band and other bands from nearby villages followed the evictors to Coolnanave. There the bailiffs seized the lands of Thomas Donovan and his neighbour John Hanrahan. While at Hanrahan's a trooper's horse was killed. The evictors returned to town and all that evening crowds swarmed the streets. A patrol was stoned in Lower Cork Street until the constable-in-charge ordered his men to load and present their carbines. The pealing of the church bells did not stop until 7pm.

The next morning a new and rather amusing incident took place which displayed some sarcasm and wry wit from the tenantry. 'The head of the dragoon's horse which was killed yesterday was cut off and mounted on top of a long pole which was fixed on the earth at the corner of Upper Cork Street and the Pollardstown road', reported the *Cork Examiner*. 'In the mouth was placed a piece of paper, having the following words printed on it: "Webber, here's your rent"'. The horse's head was 'surrounded by a crowd of women and children who responded to the call of an old fellow for "cheers for an English head on an Irish stick"'. The 'head-constable' arrived soon afterwards and removed the horse's head to the police barracks.⁹

Evictions ceased for a time because the police could not cope with the disturbances. Then in June, 700 soldiers and 300 police under the command of General Thomas Steele camped outside the castle. A few more evictions took place, but they only strengthened the resolve of the tenants. On Sunday 25 July, 200 mowers and about 400 helpers gathered to save the crops and hay on two farms owned by John Mannix and his son Maurice (secretary of the Mitchelstown Land League) at Coolanave. Both had been arrested and sentenced to prison for their parts in the 27 May riots. On 25 July 'A procession was formed Each man carried his own scythe, the handles of which were decorated with green branches, and the men marched in military order' to Mannix's farm, to sow and plant his crops'.

Tenants prepared to resist as best they could, the new spate of evictions in August by blocking the entrances to their homes with furze and other thorny bushes, boulders and anything else at hand. Stone-throwing mobs were deterred

only by bayonet – and baton-charging police cavalry. The tenants had other preparations up their sleeves. The Land League in Dublin offered the Mitchelstown League chairman, Fr O'Connell, defrayment of up to £7 per individual of any legal expenses incurred by the tenants. In early September they gave him £1,000 to pay the costs of decrees and writs executed to then. By the end of the first phase of the Land War nearly 200 evictions had occurred, but as most tenants paid their rents when the sheriff came to carry out evictions only 20 were not reinstated. More than anything else, the Kingston tenants showed an unprecedented unity during the campaign. Their magnificent moral victory over landlord 'tyranny' inspired others to stand united against their landlords. But they did not get the rent decreases demanded.¹⁰

In 1883 a more experienced man, James Fitzgerald, was appointed estate agent. Then in 1886 Henry Frend was appointed to the position just as a new phase in the Land War was about to begin. After the arrival of Frend to the estate, Webber went galivanting on a world tour leaving his wife and new agent to handle things in his absence.¹¹ The seeds of a new wave of bad feeling between Anna and her tenants were sown in 1885. Prices generally had begun to fall again two years earlier, but it was another big drop in the price of butter in 1855 that led to more problems.¹² The *(Cork Examiner)* reported on 22 May that 'the almost unparalleled decline in the prices of butter in our local [Mitchelstown] market has given rise to the gravest anxiety among producers.'¹³

Landlordism came in for praise from an unusual source on 14 July. A Land League meeting in the town hall in Mitchelstown was broken up by a large crowd of farm-labourers who surrounded the hall, shouting 'down with machines' and cheering for landlordism. 'A score entered the hall and began using strong language about some farmers who were using machines for cutting the harvest, instead of employing men'. Their spokesman stated their demands. 'We want nothing but a bit to eat, enough of work and down with machines'. After the meeting disbanded the labourers marched through the streets shouting 'God save Ireland'.¹⁴

By December 1886 the tenants were once again seeking rent reductions, this time to the tune of 20 per cent. The reduction, if granted would leave Anna with very little to live on, but sympathy for her plight had long since been thrown to the winds. After all, if she were forced to sell off her land the tenants would have been in a position to purchase their holdings at very low prices. Proud memories of the 1881 campaign spurred the tenants to institute the 'Plan of Campaign' on the Kingston estate (*see box, page 87*). As January 1887 came to a close, the scene was set for a new and more frightening series of events in Mitchelstown. Arthur O'Connor MP told a crowd in New Square – 'Today you are at war for your homes and your children. Then steel your hearts and go to war, in the name of God and with the blessing of the Church'.¹⁵

To thwart seizure-of-property writs issued in February tenants simply sold off their stock and goods. Then on 28 February a most unusual auction was held when the premises of six local shopkeepers were sold. These were all held by

leaseholders who had farms in the countryside along with property in the town. The first property put up for sale that morning was the dwelling house, shop and houses held by Mrs Joanna Hyland, Lower Cork Street. Standish O'Grady, solicitor (secretly acting for the Dowager Countess of Kingston), made the first bid of £2. An Edward Finn then bid £7. At this stage a Mrs Ellen Sheily informed the sheriff that she held the property as security for a £200 loan she had advanced to Mrs Hyland. The sheriff took note and the sale proceeded. Bidding went on between O'Grady and Finn until the property was knocked to O'Grady for £42. The other properties sold were: Thomas Delarue's four houses in Upper Cork Street for £5; Maurice O'Sullivan's three houses in the same street for £3; John Hanrahan's 17.75 acre farm at Coolenave and his 3.25 acres at Brigown for £3; Julia Crotty's licenced premises in Lower Cork Street and a dwelling house for £1. All the properties were purchased by O'Grady and were worth much more than the prices at which he bought them.¹⁶

As Spring went on, members of the neighbouring Land League branches showed support for the cause in Mitchelstown. Hundreds of them poured into the area to plough the land and sow seed for the coming season. Committees were organised to keep watch on the movements of the land agent, Henry Frend, and his employees. The tenants' efforts went as far as boycotting anyone associated with the castle. In response, the Property Defence Association opened a special store in Mitchelstown to provide the 290 or more boycotted persons with supplies. Attempts at midnight seizures by bailiffs in April proved fruitless. Henry L Young made another 20 per cent reduction in his rents in April, thus undermining the efforts of Anna to defeat the Land League. Webber returned in May to find that the debt on the estate was £15,000 in arrears of repayments.

Another land act was passed in mid-August and it gave all the tenants on the Kingston estate the option of filing their causes before the Land Commissioners for arbitration, and pending their verdict no evictions were expected in Mitchelstown. But since the commissioners had previously succumbed to Land League pressure the leaders of the campaign in Mitchelstown decided to continue their efforts against Anna.¹⁷

On 11 August the scene was set for the worst event in the history of the Land War. On that day John Mandeville (*see box, page 89*), the owner of a 200 acre farm at Clonkilla, spoke to a crowd in New Square in his capacity as 'Director of the Plan of Campaign in the Mitchelstown District'.

'Now, I ask every man who has a house to defend to get his house in order, at all events not to be caught by those false prophets who say that evictions will not take place. Remember what I tell you, that evictions will take place if they see that there is a way for evictions to be carried on, and the only way to prevent them is for you to be prepared to defend your houses whenever these people get it into their heads.'

The Mallow MP, William O'Brien, also urged the tenants to resist evictions at all costs. He expected the Land Act would benefit the tenants and that the Dowager Countess would be branded a rack-renter when their cases were examined by the



Land Commission.¹⁸

Both Mandeville and O'Brien clearly committed offences under the new Crimes Act, for inciting people to resist eviction. They were summoned to appear on 9 September before the magistrates court in Mitchelstown.¹⁹ Their cases would be the first to be tried under the act. A crowd of about 8,000 gathered in Mitchelstown on the morning of the court hearings to show support for their leaders. But none of the accused appeared in court, as a peaceful demonstration of their contempt for the Crimes Act. The exhaustive hearing lasted until about 4.15pm when warrants were issued for the arrest of O'Brien and Mandeville.

The throng of tenants gathered at the top of New Square, overlooking the courthouse, after the hearing, to hear John Dillon MP and a number of radical English and Irish MPs speak to them. As the meeting began, the mood of the people changed dramatically when a body of about 15 police tried to get a police notetaker to the speakers' wagonette. The police escort chose to go through the bulk of the crowd and this was resisted fiercely. As a clear warning to the police, the farmers raised their blackthorn sticks in a threatening manner.

The police made a retreat before returning in a force numbering about 35, all armed with carbines and batons. By now, many people had misunderstood their intentions and thought they were trying to break up the meeting. Farmers on horse-back were drawn across the outskirts of the crowd. Matters were aggravated further by the shouts of Thomas Condon MP to 'stand together boys; don't let them through, they're near enough'. Others left the stand and tried to restrain the people from further confrontation with the police. But batons were already drawn and the police made further attempts to get to the wagonette. 'One tall fellow in particular, armed with a long stout bludgeon [probably a shillelagh, something like a hurley, tackled the front line of constables', wrote an English reporter at the scene. He dealt out 'some terrible knocks as he "wheeled" his huge stick round and round his head, receiving in return three or four blows from the butt ends of rifles'.

The police were forced to make a hasty disorganised retreat to their barracks in Upper Cork Street, which overlooked some of the square. In the retreat several policemen were injured, one seriously. Panic gripped the police. Shots were fired into the square from the second-storey windows of the barracks. One policeman discharged his rifle at the *Cork Examiner* reporter, while others fired along the street and at the buildings opposite. A 17 year old Mitchelstown youth named John Casey was hit as he stood opposite the barracks with his hands in his pockets; he died a week later. Michael Lonergan, an old man from Galbally, was struck by buckshot in the skull, staggered a few paces and dropped dead. A third man, John Shinnick – a Crimean War veteran from Fermoy, who had that day refused to bring police to Mitchelstown – was hit by a ricochet while standing in the square and died three days later. Afterwards, limestone slabs, each having a cross in relief, were placed on the spots where they fell.

Another detachment of police arrived on the scene from the direction of Lower Cork Street under the command of Captain Seagrave. He read the Riot Act from the upstairs window of a hotel in the square. His men chased the occupants of the speakers' wagonette into the priest's house at the top of the square. During the course of the chase Ambrose Mandeville, a solicitor and brother of John Mandeville, was struck by a police rifle on the head while others were hit with batons. An English newspaper reporter wrote, 'The police were under no visible command, except that of a couple of head constables, who, after a brief struggle in the house, withdrew the whole of the men and formed them up outside'. At the end of the fracas, which lasted less than an hour, 54 police and about 40 civilians complained of injuries. The fatalities totalled three and the whole tragedy went for debate before the House of Commons.²⁰

William Gladstone, leader of the Liberal Party, condemned the Government for its policies towards Ireland and called on the British people in subsequent speeches to 'Remember Mitchelstown'. Arthur J Balfour, Chief Secretary for Ireland, was criticised for his instructions to police which encouraged their behaviour in such situations as Mitchelstown, and he was thereafter known in Ireland as 'Bloody Balfour'. The prosecutor at Mitchelstown on 9 September had walked unmolested through the crowd when the riot was in full swing. He was a young solicitor named Edward Carson, later to become Sir Edward Carson and leader of the Irish Unionist Party. He said it was the events he saw during the riot in Mitchelstown which shaped his views on how the Irish Catholics should be treated by the authorities.

Several inquiries were held into the shootings by the police, including a coroner's inquiry before a jury and a Government investigation. It would seem that most of the blame for the circumstances which caused the riot must fall on the police, but the organisers of the meeting must take some of the blame. Certainly a more sensible attitude by the police when they first approached the crowd to get their notetaker through so many people might have ended in more peaceful circumstances. For its part in the fracas the Mitchelstown Land League was suppressed.

Mandeville and O'Brien were arrested a few days later. On 22 September they were convicted at the petty sessions in Mitchelstown; Mandeville was sentenced to two months and O'Brien to three months in prison. They decided to seek special status in prison in Tullamore and in consequence, Mandeville experienced very severe treatment while in prison²¹ (see box, page 89).

In September three gales of rent remained unpaid by the Kingston tenants. The following month the estate agent made a half-hearted offer to reduce the third gale by the abatement recommended by the land court, provided the first two gales were paid in full. His offer was emphatically rejected and 540 applications were made to the court seeking the fixing of fair rents on the estate. The first court decisions were announced in December to reduce rents for 100 tenants by an average 22.5 per cent. This was rejected by the tenants.

On New Year's Day 1888, a huge gathering of tenants in the town hall

decided to continue with the agitation. Thomas Condon MP said the rent reductions recommended by the court 'were anything at all but adequate reductions'. Later in the month, the Representative Church Body executed a receiver deed on the Kingston estate which empowered it to hold all rents of the estate. Webber was appointed receiver. He issued 120 tenants with civil bill decrees for a year's rent. Cracks began to show in the unity of the tenantry and by 1 February settlement of the long dispute was at last achieved.²² On that date, Webber wrote to the parish priest Very Rev. Patrick Dean O'Regan -

'Mitchelstown: terms of settlement:-

1. 20 per cent reduction on all agricultural holdings up to 25th March '87.
2. Restoration of all tenants evicted since 1st Decr., 1886.
3. Householders to be restored without liability to costs.
4. All ejection proceedings to be abandoned.
5. Permission to tenants to appeal to Commissioners sitting under Land Act, 1887.

*Very Rev. Sir, Finding that the above terms practically coincide with those I conveyed to you in my letter this morning, I hereby assent to same.
Signed W.D. Webber, Mitchelstown Castle, 1st February, 1888.'*²³

The Land League agreed that tenants would pay a year's rent before 25 March 1888, but leniency would be extended to those suffering special hardship.²⁴ The income on the estate was reduced to £14,500 and for some years (except for a £900 allowance to Anna) it was used to pay off the debt under the receivership deed. Anna was also allowed retain the demesne for her personal use.²⁵

On 8 July 1888, John Mandeville died at his home in Clonkilla. His death immediately caused a public outcry for it seemed obvious to Land Leaguers that his prison treatment was to blame for his untimely death. On 17 July an inquest was held into his death in the Market House at Mitchelstown. Three days later, the episode assumed greater scandal value when Dr Ridley, Mandeville's physician in jail, committed suicide in a Fermoy hotel. The fact that other pressures caused him to take his own life, did not deter Mandeville's supporters from linking the suicide to boost their version of the causes of Mandeville's death.

The verdict of the jury was that Mandeville had died from the effects of the 'brutal and unjustifiable' treatment meted to him while a prisoner in Tullamore. Balfour dismissed the verdict as prejudiced and complained about the 'notoriously corrupt' jurors. When the English newspaper *The Star* described the death as murder, Balfour considered a libel action against the paper in an attempt to show the Government's case in a favourable light to the British people. But he got a cool response to the idea from the cabinet and the idea was dropped. He accused the Opposition leaders of turning the death into a 'sham tragedy' and annoyed the Irish Home Rule Party by not expressing regret for Mandeville's death. 'The whole prison episode, though a storm in a teacup, is amusingly characteristic of Irish damistration', he told his uncle, the Prime Minister.

Nonetheless, Balfour introduced reforms into the prison system. An inquiry into the Irish prison system followed Mandeville's death and changed the operations of prisons. The rules on the wearing of prison uniform were relaxed and special treatment was accorded priests and Land League leaders sentenced to prison. Based on the events of 9 September 1887, Balfour changed the instructions to police who might be faced with riot situations. It was a change which probably saved many Irish lives during the remaining years of the Land War.²⁶

In 1903 one of the last of the land acts, the Wyndham Land Act, passed through Parliament. In January of the following year the Kingston tenants indicated their interest in purchasing their holdings at a price of 20 years' rental. Anna offered sale at 23 years' rent and in the end Henry Frennd negotiated a compromise which included a remission of all arrears. In October the first agreements were lodged with the Land Commissioners and the last were lodged in February 1905. There was a long delay before the sales were concluded, thus increasing the debt on the estate. A total of £300,000 was received by Anna from the sales which were completed in 1907, and she obtained a further £36,000 in incentive payments under the act. She retained ownership of the 1,300 acre demesne and some houses in the town. Debt repayments amounted to £293,000, which left her with very little indeed when the estate's finances were sorted out.²⁷

Just as the land question in Mitchelstown was reaching a final solution, there was another milestone in the campaign for tenant rights and independence. In 1906 a bronze statue of John Mandeville was unveiled in New Square, facing the same building where his prison ordeal had begun. Money to erect the statue came from as far away as Boston and New York. It bore the names of Casey, Shinnick and Lonergan in testimony to their needless deaths in 1887.²⁸

On 29 October 1909 Anna, Dowager Countess of Kingston, died at Mitchelstown Castle. She had spent 42 years of her life residing there, and before her death had promised to leave the castle and demesne to Wentworth Alexander King-Harman (known to the family as Alec), thereby returning it to the King family. It came as a surprise to many when she left the property to William Downes Webber, her second husband. She had often declared to Alec that she regarded him as the rightful heir to Mitchelstown, although on Webber's death the property was left to Alec.

Anna's remains were buried in the old graveyard beneath the towers and battlements of Mitchelstown Castle. Webber now held sway over Mitchelstown, but he was a man who was greatly disliked by the locals, no doubt as a result of his part in the Land War. The estate he inherited from Anna was one which bore no reflection of its former extensiveness. In the last years of his life, Webber, his cousin Arthur Daniel Moutray Webber and other relatives lived peacefully at the castle until turbulent events in June 1922 would bring about a complete and final about-turn for the future of the estate.²⁹

The Plan of Campaign

In November 1886 the Kingston estate at Mitchelstown became the second great estate in County Cork on which the Plan of Campaign was adopted by the tenantry.

The basis of the Plan was announced in October 1886 by the Land League in the newspaper *United Ireland*. The Plan advised tenants to decide by resolution on each estate the amount of reductions they would demand from their landlords. If the reduction of rent was refused by the landlord, then the tenants were to pay their rents, less the desired reduction, into a local trustee fund. This money could be used to support any evicted tenants and, should it run out, the National Land League guaranteed to support the evicted tenants.

The drop in butter-prices over recent years made the situation of the tenants of the Kingston estate particularly bad by the time their rents fell due in November 1886. There were about 750 tenants on the estate and, with the exception of about 120 yearly tenants, they could not go to the land courts to have their rents determined. Of the 120 who could seek a judicial determination of their rents only about 40 had gone to the courts.

The Dowager Countess of Kingston offered her tenants abatements of between 10 and 25 per cent in proportion to the valuation of their holdings. However, her tenants demanded an all-round reduction of 20 per cent in November and when this was refused they decided to

institute the Plan of Campaign on the Kingston estate.

One of the trustees of the fund was William O'Brien MP, who was one of the foremost national figures of his time. He inspired the tenants of the Kingston estate to carry out one of the most spirited and determined resistances against evictions. Soon after the Kingston tenants adopted the Plan other tenants in estates throughout County Cork followed their example.

A sign of events to come occurred at Ballygiblin Crossroads, east of Mitchelstown, on 23 February 1887. Farmers and labourers from as much as 20 miles away came to Ballygiblin to pay an unusual tribute to the tenants of the Kingston estate. They carried spades and forks, together with ploughing teams and machinery to plough and sow seeds on the farms around Mitchelstown. They would return later in the year to complete the work begun in February.

Present on the day were the organisers of the day's activities including J J Condon MP, John Mandeville who was chairman of the Mitchelstown Board of Guardians and W J Casey, secretary of the local branch of the Land League. After the day's work, the ploughmen and their retinues gathered in New Square to listen to speeches and plan the next move in their campaign.

The "Plan" locally was carried on from Maurice O'Sullivan's pub in Upper Cork Street. At one stage it bore the banner 'Plan of Campaign. No Surrender. Evictors Come On.'