

The Story of a House

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Everything we know about Nathaniel Clements suggests that he was an archetypal Ascendancy man. Eighteenth century Dublin was a good place in which to be young, rich and of the ruling class.

The Treaty of Limerick - the event that marked the beginning of the century as definitively as the Act of Union ended it - provided a minority of the population, the Ascendancy, with status, influence and power. Penal Laws, imposed upon Roman Catholics and Dissenters, made it impossible for them to play an active part in Government or to hold an office under the Crown.

Deprived of access to education and burdened with rigorous property restrictions, they lived at, or below, subsistence level, alienated from the ruling class and supporting any agitation that held hope of improving their lot. Visitors to the country were appalled by what they saw: "The poverty of the people as I passed through the country has made my heart ache", wrote Mrs. Delaney, the English wife of an Irish Dean. "I never saw greater appearance of misery." Jonathan Swift provided an even more graphic witness: "There is not an acre of land in Ireland turned to half its advantage", he wrote in 1732, "yet it is better improved than the people Whoever travels this country and observes the face of nature, or the faces and habits and dwellings of the natives, will hardly think himself in a land where law, religion or common humanity is professed."

For someone like Nathaniel Clements, however, the century offered an amalgam of power and pleasure. Dublin was a small and prosperous city. The cost of living was low, servants were plentiful and the income from tenants on country estates ensured a life of entertainment and of leisure. Some observers compared Dublin to a large English market town where everyone knew everyone. Life followed sanctioned rituals. Most mornings were spent out riding or surveying the scene from a coach. In poor weather, men visited each others houses. Nothing in the style of life suggested the poverty and hunger that supported it. Dinner, which was usually served at five o'clock tended towards the lavishness that one encounters in the pages of the eighteenth century English novel.

Mrs. Delaney describes a not untypical menu at one of her own dinner parties. The first course consisted of fish, beefsteaks, rabbits and onions, soup, fillet of veal, blancmange, cherries and Dutch cheese. The main course was Turkey pout, grilled salmon, quails, little terrene peas, mushrooms, apple-pie, crab, levret and cheese-cakes. For dessert there was a choice of currants, gooseberries, strawberries and raspberries with cream, sweetmeats and jelly, almond cream and orange butter. Burgundy and Champagne were always served. After dinner, "routs" - meetings for dancing and card-playing - were held in private houses and the city was famous for the high quality of its theatrical and musical performances. Amongst younger men, duels were still fought for traditional reasons. The raffishness of their life-style was often viewed with disapproval by English visitors who thought that far too much interest was taken in drinking, gambling, dogs and horses. It is easy to fit Nathaniel Clements into this picture of a confident community within a fractured Ireland. Born in 1705, he was more

serious and even more dedicated to making money, than many of his contemporaries. At the age of twenty two he became the Member of Parliament for Duleek.

The friendship and patronage of Luke Gardiner were crucial in the growth of his career. Gardiner, a man of considerable power and influence, was Deputy Vice-Treasurer and Deputy Paymaster-General of Ireland. Clements succeeded to both of these posts when Gardiner retired from them in 1755.

The two men shared a deep interest in architecture. Gardiner was closely involved in building developments on the north side of the city and encouraged Clements to join him in this enterprise. Confident in the essential worth and permanence of their values, the wealthy citizens of Dublin were commemorating themselves and their age with town-houses and public-buildings of impressive proportions. Clement's interest was much more than entrepreneurial; he became, in effect, an amateur architect of some distinction. He worked on the design of an imposing house for himself in Henrietta Street and co-operated on the development of a number of important buildings with both Sir Edward Lovett Pearce, the most distinguished Burlingtonian architect in Ireland and with his successor, Richard Castle.

In April 1751, Clements was appointed Chief Ranger of the Phoenix Park and Master of the Game. The appointment was to last for his lifetime and for the lifetimes of his three sons. This sinecure added to his influence and made him an even more formidable figure in a city that appreciated titles.

The history of the Phoenix Park begins in the sixteenth century when, after the suppression of the monasteries, the hospital and lands at Kilmainham that were owned by the Knights Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem, passed into the ownership of the Crown. Later, these lands, together with another large tract, were sold to Sir Edward Fisher, who built a country residence that he called "The Phoenix.". The name appears to have derived from the Irish, *fionnuisge*, a spring that enjoyed some fame for the beneficial properties of its waters. In 1616 the Government repurchased the lands and Fisher's house became the official residence of the Irish Viceroy. Additional land was acquired to add to the privacy and prestige of the residence and in 1660 the grounds were enclosed within boundary walls. The Viceroy moved to Chapelizod House in 1670 and that remained their residence for the next one hundred years. Most spent so little time in Ireland that the building fell into decay but the Phoenix Park flourished and became fashionable.

It is not surprising that Clements decided to build himself a house that would symbolise his titles. He chose the site of an earlier building, Newtown Lodge, a perfect setting with a fine view of the Dublin mountains. It consisted of ninety two acres, "enclosed by a stone wall, formerly enclosed by a hedge and kept separate from the Park." A stream on its northern boundary had been dammed to form a small lake. On the west, the site derived great benefit from an area of formal tree planting inaugurated by the Earl of Chesterfield in 1746. Chesterfield was a resourceful man and the development of the Phoenix Park owes much to his influence. He had a large column erected near to the grounds, with a phoenix on top, a memorial that owes more to myth than to etymology.

The house that Clements designed and built was completed in 1754. It was a plain brick structure. Thomas Milton, in his "View of Seats" described it as: "... . nothing more than a

neat, plain brick building and the Rooms within are conveniently disposed. The offices project on either side, and are joined to the House by circular sweeps."

A contemporary authority, the Knight of Glin, provides this description of the house: ". . . a central block of five bays and two floors with a mezzanine storey surmounted by a row of urns. Its most significant feature is a large therme, or Diocleian, window over the front door; this is obviously based on a plate in Gibbs which, in turn, was taken from Palladio's Villa Pisani at Bagnolo.

On either side of the house are the curved Palladian curtain walls decorated with rusticated balls leading to L-shaped pavilions of three bays each, and the whole block concludes with gateways and further walls at either end enclosing offices. In fact, the complex is a simplified version of the sort of country-house designed by Richard Castle; the somewhat amateurish handling can undoubtedly be put down to its being Clement's first essay in country-house architecture.

The interior, however, is a much more professional arrangement. The hall is top lit at the entrance end by the therme window in the tympanum of a coffered barrel vault, recalling a similar feature in Pearce's House of Lords in Dublin, its obvious source. A large saloon, with an elaborate compartmented ceiling and floral plaster and heated by twin chimney pieces, lies beyond. At each end of the hall, a small vestibule leads off into a further reception room, the one to the east containing a superb coved ceiling with finely modelled plasterwork depicting Aesop's fables. A very small stair leads to the bedrooms. Some offices complete the plan, which is also clearly adapted from Palladio's Villa Pisani."

Having presided over the construction of this house, Clements devoted time and attention to the grounds. The site had a natural grace that was further enhanced by tree planting and by the positioning of many statues that he imported from Europe. The result was probably all that he could have hoped for. In a letter to the Chief Secretary dated June 1746, Patrick Donnellan, Under Secretary to the Second Secretary, wrote: ". . . what he has done before his house has a most agreeable effect, as it presents to the view of those within, the people, coaches, horses, etc., etc., that pass in the road, which has the appearance of a living picture, or camera obscura, always changing and variegating the scene." Clements and his family occupied the house until his death in 1777. His wife continued to live there for four more years. When she died, their son Robert, the first Earl of Leitrim, sold it to the Government for 10,000. A circle was completed when it was decided that the house should become the official residence of the Viceroys.

The Viceroy, the Crown's representative in Ireland, had a titular yet sensitive and important role in eighteenth century Ireland. The radically varying degrees of success with which various incumbents carried out their office bear testimony to the extent to which it depended as much on individual skill as on statutory powers. The country was administered by the Chief Secretary and his staff in Dublin Castle but the Viceroy's influence and authority could by-pass this bureaucracy and stretch into many areas of Irish life.

He had many powers that were open to abuse and that were often abused. He appointed all Civil Officers, with the exception of the Chancellor, the Treasurer, the Vice-Treasurer, Judges, Attorney-General, Marshals and Masters of the Ordinance. He could appoint all

benefices in the donation of the Crown with the exception of Archbishoprics, Bishoprics and Deaneries. He could compel all revenue officers, with the exception of the Treasurer and the Vice-Treasurer, to account to the Exchequer. He also had it in his power to pardon every crime except treason. He could remit fines and issue proclamations with the advice and consent of the Privy Council.

These powers of patronage ensured that successive Viceroys were kept in touch with a wide section of the Ascendancy. Despite continual strains between the office of the Viceroy and that of the Chief Secretary and of the Government in London, the occupant of Vice Regal Lodge could depend on a host of hopefuls to let him know about everything of importance.

The first Viceroy to move into the Lodge was Lord Carlisle. He immediately commissioned a Dublin master builder, Michael Stapleton, to create elaborate stuccowork. Despite these improvements his successor, the Duke of Portland, disliked the house intensely. In a letter to the Countess of Granard dated 11 May 1782, Lady Moira wrote: "The Duke dislikes the house in the Park excessively, calls it a cake-house and the purchase a shameful job, says it will not lodge his family, and if he stays will take some place 15 or 16 miles from town, and will attend Council but once a week. Everybody likes him." Portland remained unwavering in his opinion of the house. He hatched a plan to rid himself of it, suggesting that it should be offered to Henry Grattan as a tribute to his achievement in winning legislative freedom for the Irish parliament. Grattan was too astute a politician not to recognise that such a gift could be seen as compromising his independence of thought. He refused to accept the tribute and Portland had to soldier on, reluctantly.

From the long procession of Viceroys who were to occupy the house it is possible, in a survey of this length, to spotlight only the most notable or the more notorious. Some were resourceful; others compromising. Some had a sensitivity for the politics of the country and others scarcely cared. The Duke of Rutland was, perhaps, the most gifted of the late eighteenth century Viceroys but his promise was left largely unfulfilled when he contracted a fever while travelling in the provinces and died in 1787.

Charles Cornwallis, a man with a formidable military reputation, was appointed Viceroy in 1798. The Rebellion of that year was still raging so Cornwallis was also named as Commander in Chief. He adopted a more conciliatory military policy, restraining the bloody reprisals and attempting to bring about some reconciliation. Before long he was entrusted with an even more sensitive task. He had to work with the Chief Secretary, Viscount Castlereagh, to implement a policy that the Prime Minister, Pitt, was determined to pursue; the bringing about of a union between the two Kingdoms.

The terms of the Act of Union, which came into force on January 1st, 1801 were arrived at after much bitter argument and confrontation. Cornwallis and Castlereagh were authorised to buy the votes of the major borough holders, with peerages and pensions. Pitt's initial intention of linking the Union with Catholic Emancipation had been bitterly opposed by Unionists, like the Lord Chancellor, Lord Clare, To them, the Union was the only possible protection that the Ascendancy had against the dangers of "popish democracy."

The betrayal aroused great bitterness amongst supporters of the Irish parliament but both Cornwallis and Castlereagh displayed consummate skill in dividing the various forces of

opposition. The ordinary people of Ireland did not, in Cornwallis' phrase, "care one farthing about the union." Agreeing with this assessment the historian J. C. Beckett wrote; "They had, indeed, little enough cause to love the Irish parliament, nor any reason to suppose that the laws under which they lived would be more or less oppressive if made in London instead of Dublin. The enemies that they feared were the landlord and the tithe-proctor, whom they readily identified with the whole system of protestant government; and their only notion of a political programme was to abolish rent and tithe, to put down the established church, and to set up their own in place of it."

These were the forces at work as Ireland entered into the turbulences of the nineteenth century. The first Viceroy to serve in that century was Earl Hardwick. Unlike Cornwallis, he was not appointed Commander in Chief, a decision that he bitterly resented. This led to a long standing division between Vice Regal Lodge and the Cabinet in London. The title was finally restored but the relationship between Hardwick and members of the government remained poor. In particular, the Home Secretary, Henry Pelham, frequently ignored him and dealt directly with members of the Irish administration. Perhaps Hardwick's greatest legacy are the two wings, each of three bays, that were added to Vice Regal Lodge during his term of office.

The Duke of Bedford, a member of a prominent Whig family, served as Viceroy for two years. He appears to have been popular but his term of office was too short to have permitted much impact.

The Duke of Richmond and Lennox served for six years. Throughout these years he was more the object of society gossip than of admiration. A cheerful and bibulous man, his open flirtation with the ladies of Dublin was a rich source of dinner-table conversation. Society was particularly amused when, on one occasion, the long suffering Duchess received a love letter that had been intended for his mistress, Lady Augusta Everitt. During his administration, the architect, Francis Johnston, designed the fine Doric portico at the North entrance of the house. The same architect designed the Ionic portico which was added to the South entrance in 1815.

The next two Viceroys, Whitworth and Talbot made little impact on Irish life although Talbot's administrative incompetence seems to have transcended the expected. Richard Wellesley was much more skilled and experienced. He had been born in Grafton Street, Dublin, in 1760. A member of the Irish Parliament and a supporter of Pitt at Westminster, he was appointed Governor General of India in 1797. Later, he became Secretary of State for the Foreign Department. In 1812, having failed in two efforts to become Prime Minister, he turned down the offer to serve as Viceroy in Ireland and retired. In 1821 he agreed to accept the office and came to an Ireland in which the demand for Catholic Emancipation had become, under the leadership of Daniel O'Connell, a cause of great popularity.

It was a demanding time but it seems to be generally agreed that Wellesley played an important role in dealing with both the administration and the Government. The Marquis of Anglesea succeeded Wellesley. He arrived in 1828 and quickly became so sympathetic to the Catholic cause that he alarmed the Ascendancy and angered the Prime Minister, the Duke of Wellington, who ordered him to be recalled. When the Whig government came to power in 1830, they re-appointed him but his second term was without any great success.

The third Duke of Northumberland, characterised by Greville as "an eternal talker and a prodigious bore" served as Viceroy during the time that the full implications of Catholic Emancipation were being experienced and Daniel O'Connell began his major campaign for the Repeal of the Union. It has been suggested that 1829 - the year in which the Emancipation Act was passed through parliament- marked the beginning of the end of the power of the Ascendancy. Their economic situation changed radically; the Land Wars devalued their properties and a growing demand for an end to the Union isolated them and threatened their safety. Despite his reputation as an interminable monologist, Northumberland was open to all of these issues and he was described by Peel as the best Viceroy of the era.

The Marquis of Anglesea, who served as Viceroy during the Tithe War had an enthusiasm for reform that was not complemented by administrative skill. He had a poor relationship with Edward Stanley, the Chief Secretary, who was impatient of his blundering approach.

Lord Mulgrave was appointed by the government of Viscount Melbourne. Because this government had the support of Daniel O'Connell, a new policy of winning the support of Roman Catholics and liberals was implemented in Ireland. Mulgrave was fortunate enough to have the support of two skilled administrators; Lord Morpeth, the Chief Secretary and Thomas Drummond, the Under Secretary. Drummond, in particular, was a man of outstanding ability and his energetic efforts to establish popular confidence in the administration added considerable lustre to the Mulgrave years.

De Grey, the first Viscount appointed by Peel failed to understand or, at least to sympathise with, the Irish policy of the new government. As O'Connell's influence declined Peel was particularly aware of the violence that could be unleashed in Ireland. He also feared the dangers of the new Roman Catholic middle class becoming permanently disaffected so, while he was determined to preserve the Union, he wanted measures devised and patronage's initiated to win their loyalty. De Grey would have none of this. The grounds of Vice Regal Lodge were being wonderfully improved by gardens designed by Decimus Burton and by the addition of new gate-lodges and coach-houses, but De Grey wrote from there with the mentality of a man under siege, arguing that Roman Catholics were so strongly united against the existing order of things that nothing could ever win their support.

Peel could not accept such defeatism . He had De Grey removed from office in 1844 and replaced by Lord Heytesbury, a more liberal thinker with a more assured grasp of the possible. Heytesbury had to resist the pressures of the Ascendancy while judging the sincerity of the class that was slowly replacing them. Landlords' incomes were dropping, tenants were being evicted from unprofitable holdings, the potato crop was beginning to fail. Conditions in the country were appalling. The Young Ireland movement, under the leadership of Thomas Davis, broke away from sympathy towards O'Connell and brought a less sectarian attitude into Irish politics.

The failure of the potato crop in 1846 was a major challenge to the administration. Although partial failures, throughout the years, had suggested that such a catastrophe could occur, successive Governments had not put together a procedure to meet such an emergency. The

speed with which the crops were affected was dramatic. Early in August Father Theobald Matthew wrote; "On the 27th of last month I passed from Cork to Dublin, and this doomed plant bloomed in all the luxuriance of an abundant harvest. Returning on the 3 instant, I beheld with horror one wide waste of putrefying vegetation. In many places the wretched people were sitting on the fences of their decaying gardens, wringing their hands and wailing bitterly the destruction that had left them foodless."

Heytesbury had recognised the dangers and had warned the Government, in 1845, in letters to both the Home Secretary, Sir James Graham and to the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel . Graham was agitated by this letter. Peel found the news very alarming but wondered if there weren't some Irish exaggeration in the report.

Nevertheless, after the volcanic events in English politics that concerned the attempted repeal of the Corn Laws, a Relief Commission was set up in 1845. It was unprepared to deal with the extent of the failure of the crop in 1846. Pitt's government had fallen in June; it was succeeded by a Whig government under Lord John Russell, the son of the Duke of Bedford who had served for a brief term as Viceroy. Russell had spent some time with his father at the Vice-Regal Lodge, so it was hoped that his local knowledge, added to his impressive liberal record, would lead to a sympathetic understanding of the plight of the country.

Heytesbury was replaced by Lord Bessborough, the first resident landlord to be appointed since the passing of the Act of Union. The appointment was very popular. Bessborough's estates were ably administered and he was rightly regarded as a progressive landlord. Bessborough took office just before the failure of the 1846 potato crop. Charles Trevelyan, who had been appointed head of the Relief Commission, worked energetically to prepare schemes to alleviate suffering but the disaster was so great that the administrative plans buckled beneath its weight.

Bessborough arranged for a new programme of public works; the small cash income that the participants received was of limited value to a people more accustomed to a barter economy. Typhus and relapsing fever raged through the countryside. Only emigration seemed to hold some hope for a devastated people. The failure of the administration to tackle the problem with courage and imagination can not be attributed, even in part, to Bessborough. Much of the failure lay in the refusal, years before, to prepare for the inevitable. Throughout his term of office he used his influence in any way that he could, but the power that Trevelyan exercised limited the role of the Viceroy.

In 1847, it was announced that all of the destitute would come under the mandate of the Poor Law and would be maintained by the rates paid by local property owners. This was very bad news for landlords, many of whom were already experiencing serious financial difficulties. Their fiscal well-being now depended on having fewer tenants. The result was more evictions and a huge rise in emigration. Despite all of this, the social life of Dublin continued as if nothing important had changed, with all of the usual State occasions, levees and balls. Bessborough died suddenly in the middle of this social season. "No man ever quitted the world more surrounded by sympathy, approbation and respect than he did", Greville wrote.

Daniel O'Connell had died on the previous day, exiled in Italy, his constitutional ideas rejected by young Irish intellectuals who believed in the legitimacy of physical force. The

two men had been warm friends; the coincidence of their deaths must have seemed significant to many of their contemporaries.

William Frederick Villiers, the Earl of Clarendon, was offered the post by Lord John Russell. Clarendon accepted, although he was disconcerted by the manner in which the offer was made: "J. R. sent for me yesterday afternoon and proposed to me to go to Ireland, but it was done in his most cold, short, abrupt, indifferent manner. Much as if he was disposing of a tide waiter's place to an applicant." When Clarendon arrived in Dublin, in the summer of 1847, the potato crop appeared to be flourishing but he was very well aware of the difficulties ahead. He realised that it was: ". . . almost impossible to do good when all machinery for that purpose is absolutely wanting. Moreover, I fear that the distress next autumn and winter will be greater than the last."

The acreage devoted to potatoes had been drastically reduced, so even a totally successful harvest would not have been sufficient to feed all of the people. At the same time, the work of the Relief Commission was being reduced. The Government was becoming impatient at the amount of money that was being drained from central resources to assist what they increasingly regarded as reckless landlords and improvident tenants. Clarendon sought financial help from Charles Wood, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but this was refused. The antipathy that Wood felt towards the Irish was evident in his tone: ". . . they have hardly been decent while they have had their bellies full of our corn and their pockets of our money."

As in the previous year, the problems of fever and starvation were largely left unanswered. Clarendon again appealed to Wood and to Lord John Russell, in terms of the utmost urgency, but he was met with little sympathy. "Distress, discontent and hatred of English rule are increasing everywhere", he warned Lord John Russell. His judgement was shown to be correct when six landlords were murdered in a period of two months.

Convinced that there was about to be a national Rebellion, fuelled by the abuse that John Mitchell launched against him in the pages of "The Nation" he looked for additional powers in the fight against terrorism. Russell, who was, at best, lukewarm in his opinion of the landlords, refused. Clarendon threatened to resign. The threat had some effect for he would have been difficult to replace. He was given power to draft large numbers of police into any district and to require that district to pay immediately for the cost of the action. This had little effect; in the following year he was again warning about the effects of destitution and the growth of outrage. The failure of the Young Ireland Rebellion in 1848 and the subsequent trial of its leaders added to civil unrest.

When it was evident that the potato crop was again about to fail, Clarendon's request for aid were met by angry refusals. Russell told him that "thye course of English benevolence is frozen by insult, calumny and rebellion." Clarendon then suggested that a visit from Queen Victoria would be good for the morale of the alienated population. The political situation ruled out the possibility of a full State visit but in June 1849 he was informed that the Queen would visit Dublin: "She will live at Vice-Regal Lodge for a week in some splendour and hold a levee and a drawing-room."

To prepare for the visit, work was immediately commenced on a Dining Room and official Reception Room. Clarendon wrote to Charles Wood that the furniture at Vice Regal Lodge:

"is not handsome but it is clean and good, and I am sure the Queen and Prince will be as comfortable as if the Board of Works were allowed to run-up an enormous bill... Our children will be sent away but Lady Clarendon and I shall probably remain in some corner or other; for I should not think things were properly superintended if I were living in another house."

Having visited Cork, the Queen arrived in Dublin and admired the view of the mountains from Vice Regal Lodge, the view that had appealed to Clements. She was pleased with her quarters: ". . . we are most comfortably lodged and have very nice rooms." For the next few days she participated, with enthusiasm, in a series of receptions, dinners and visitations, all of which she seems to have enjoyed. A levee was held in the Throne Room in Dublin Castle and, on the following day, a Drawing Room where, at her own estimate, one thousand seven hundred guests were presented to her. She left Ireland with real regret; the visit was a triumph for Clarendon, one of the most interesting men to have served as Viceroy.

None of his successors was of the same high calibre; they lacked his judgement, his conviction and, above all, his passionate commitment to the post. The remainder of the nineteenth century saw the growth of Fenianism, the search for Home Rule and the waging of the Land War, with figures as diverse as James Stephens, Isaac Butt, Charles Stewart Parnell and Michael Davitt grasping the imaginations of large sections of the Irish people with their formulae for freedom.

Clarendon left Ireland in 1852 and was succeeded by men of differing talent: Earl Cowper, the Earl of Carlisle, Earl Spencer' Lord Houghton, the Earl of Carnarvan, Earl Cadogan and the Earl of Dudley. Carlisle was the first Viceroy to become concerned about Fenianism, noting in his diary, after a reception in Vice-Regal Lodge, in June 1863 that Lord Shannon: "was uneasy about drilling in the neighbourhood."

This unease spread quickly amongst the Ascendancy, many of whom felt more threatened in their homes than at any time in the past. Earl Spencer, known as the Red Earl because of the colour of his beard, was Viceroy when violence came very close to the Vice-Regal Lodge. He arrived in Ireland in May 1882, accompanied by a new Chief Secretary, Lord Frederick Cavendish, a Former Financial Secretary to the Cabinet.

After a meeting with officials in Dublin Castle, Spencer left for Vice-Regal Lodge accompanied by a mounted escort. Cavendish, who knew Dublin well, decided to walk to Phoenix Park. The Viceroy had invited him to dinner later that evening. As he walked in the Park a cab pulled up behind him and the Under-Secretary, T.H. Burke, got out to join him.

Spencer had arrived at Vice-Regal Lodge and was just about to settle down with some papers at a window overlooking the main road when he heard a terrible shriek. "I seem to hear it now; it is always in my ears. This shriek was repeated again and again." He got up and saw a man coming over the railings of the Lodge. He was shouting that "Mr. Burke and Lord Frederick Cavendish are killed".

The two men had been brutally murdered with surgical knives by members of a small secret society known as the Irish National Invincibles. The murders provoked horror and outrage. They were directly responsible for preventing collaboration between Irish nationalists and the

Liberal Government, a development that had been envisaged and desired by both Parnell and Gladstone.

Security for the Viceroy was notably increased both at Vice-Regal Lodge and at any of the country houses in which the gregarious Spencers were invited to stay.

In April 1900 Queen Victoria paid another visit to Dublin. By then she was an old woman, devoid of the verve and enthusiasm that had characterised her first visit. She stayed at Vice Regal Lodge for more than three weeks. Earl Cadogan was Viceroy; he played his part in arranging a crowded schedule for her, Contemporary newspaper accounts detail an endless round of drives in the park and visits to public and private buildings as diverse as the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, Dublin Castle and many convent schools.

The Earl and Countess of Aberdeen had a greater impact on Dublin society than any Vice Regal couple since the Clarendons - but for very different reasons. They inspired some affection and a great deal of ridicule in the nine years that they spent in Vice-Regal Lodge. There was something faintly ridiculous about their appearance, described by Leon O'Broin as: "he bearded and small and polite, she disproportionately large, matronly and masterful."

Lady Aberdeen had a genius for getting things a little wrong, for meddling in matters that had nothing whatsoever to do with her and for an apparent inability to recognise rebuff.

They had bad luck, in 1907, when King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra visited Dublin. Some days before the visit, the diamond star and badge worn by the Viceroy as Master of the Order of St. Patrick, and other pieces of insignia, were stolen from a safe in Dublin Castle. These were valued at 40,000 and the King was furious. "I don't want theories", he told officials who were attempting to reassure him. "I want my jewels!" The incident overshadowed the entire Royal Visit.

The Aberdeens had more luck when King George V and Queen Mary visited Dublin in 1911. The West Wing of Vice-Regal Lodge was extended for the visit. It was probably Lady Aberdeen's finest hour and she relished it. Almost everything that preceded and followed it was characterised by a lack of tact.

Dining in Dublin Castle, at the time of Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill, she remarked to Lord Chief Justice Morris: "I suppose everyone but yourself is a Home Ruler here tonight." "Not at all, Your Excellency", he replied frostily. "Barring yourself and the waiters there's not a Home Ruler in the room."

Birrell, the powerful Chief Secretary became increasingly weary of the Aberdeens and longed for their removal. When Asquith wrote to the Viceroy, tactfully seeking a letter of resignation, it was not forthcoming. Instead, both of the Aberdeens orchestrated a campaign for their retention at Vice-Regal Lodge. They even wrote to the King, suggesting that their removal would look like a deliberate affront to the wishes of the people. This caused a short postponement of their departure. When they finally left in February 1915, an editorial in "The Leader" said that they had opened everything in Dublin "except the Parliament House in College Green and the safe containing the Crown Jewels."

Even their departure aroused ridicule in the streets of Dublin. A large crowd gathered, out of curiosity or, perhaps, some affection, to witness their leaving. Spectators first saw a mounted escort, then the Viceroy and his staff who were also mounted. When Lady Aberdeen's carriage came into view it provoked outbursts of laughter for she was holding a camera above her head which she operated with the aid of a long tube and a rubber bulb, and taking photographs of nothing in particular.

The Aberdeens, whose style of hospitality was described by F.S.L. Lyons as "parsimonious and bourgeois" were succeeded by the Wimbornes. No contrast could have been greater.

Wimborne, a cousin of Winston Churchill was a very wealthy man. The style of life that they brought to Vice-Regal Lodge seemed, to many, to be inappropriate in a time of war. Lady Diana Cooper described visiting there. "I went straight up to dinner at the Vice Regal Lodge in the grandest tenue and alone. Perfect, I thought - don't believe a word said against it. Forty to dinner, Convention men, Labour ones and Peers - red ties, diamond studs and stars. The Laverys, McEvoy, Leonie Leslie, A.E. - in fact a court as we would choose one. Her Excellency clotted and weighed down with jewels. Ivor flashy but very graceful - flashy from being unlike the King but not unlike a King. The tables and its pleasures a treat - all gold and wine and choicest fruit. One Conventioneer said he had never tasted a peach before. (I didn't believe him.) The footmen too, such beauties, battling with their silver cords, blinded by powder."

Wimborne served until May 1918, exonerated of responsibility for any of the considerable administrative incompetence that had surrounded the handling of the Easter Rising of 1916.

Lord French, who succeeded him, brought a military style to Vice-Regal Lodge. The gold plate and the footmen had departed with the Wimbornes. There was a much greater awareness of military reality; the ADC's wore khaki and there was heavy security. Despite this, his official car was shot at near to the gates of Phoenix Park.

French accepted that Home Rule was inevitable but this view did not make him unpopular with the Ascendancy who regarded his military career as a proof of essential soundness. Unfortunately, he had little influence with the Government. Irish public opinion was being farther and farther alienated by increased repression and by the activities of the Black and Tans. This was finally recognised and French was replaced by Viscount FitzAlan of Derwent, a Catholic. He was quick to condemn the Black and Tans but scarcely had time to make much of an impression before leaving Ireland. He was the last of the Irish Viceroys.

The future of Vice-Regal Lodge was then in some doubt. The new Irish Free State was established with Dominion status and with a Governor General representing the interest of the Crown. When Tim Healy was appointed as Governor General, it was decided that the house should be his official residence.

Healy was a controversial figure in a highly controversial post. A former member of the Irish Parliamentary party at Westminster, it was generally accepted that he was one of the most able parliamentarians of his time. Many people, however, regarded him with deep suspicion and even with hostility, because of the key role that he had played in the downfall of Parnell.

The recollections of those who knew him suggest that he was a kindly and avuncular man, quite different from the bitter and vindictive figure of his public image. It is the private figure that Lady Gregory remembers when she recalls his response to W.B. Yeats who had written to him seeking a meeting: "My dear Boy", Healy wrote, "come and see me whenever you like in the bee-loud glade".

Personifying the new role of Governor General with all of the old associations that it retained, can not have been easy. Inevitably, there were tensions between Healy and the Government on the precise nature of the office but, for most of the time, he was adept enough to steer his way through difficult times. He was a collector of silver and Waterford glass and particularly disliked two dark utilitarian fireplaces in the dining room. He replaced them with two graceful Georgian fireplaces that he acquired from Mountjoy Square. When his five years term of office was complete he retired to private life and was succeeded by James McNeill.

McNeill, who was born in Antrim in 1869, had a most distinguished career in the Indian Civil Service. He then acted as High Commissioner in London for the Irish Free State between 1923 and 1926 when he was appointed Governor General.

McNeill did everything possible to bring together those large groupings in Irish society who were profoundly suspicious of each other. The guest-lists at his parts was diverse and eclectic. Lady Gregory described a not untypical occasion: "I had asked the Governor General to invite Gogarty and he asked him and Mrs.G. to his Saturday dinner list, a big dinner. Sterlinh and his wife, from U.S.A., very cordial. Blythe talked to me about his prisons and the poverty of the books he was given. He had at last a surfeit in, I think, Portland, of Mrs. Henry Wood and wrote on his cell wall 'Give me no more women's books'. He had been in nine different gaols. Cosgrave sat next to me at dinner, the first time I had met him outside business and he came and sat with me after dinner also, tells me poor Lord O'Neill - who was so kind long ago I used to say I hoped he would go on being re-elected until he became automatically President of the Irish Republic - is very much broken in health. Mrs. Cosgrave told Lady Buxton of the agony she had gone through when her husband was in the U.S.A. One of their boys had an illness and was in some danger and she knew if she cabled this to Cosgrave it would upset him terribly, but if the boy should die without his having heard of the illness, it would kill him."

As one eavesdrops on these conversations there is a sense of McNeill making it possible for an old and a new Ireland to talk to each other. Some days later, Lady Gregory was also a witness to the last visit of a member of the British Royal family to the house. Lord Lascelles and Princess Mary came to breakfast as they passed through Dublin on their way to Portumna.

"At breakfast he, (Lascelles), and Lady Buxton chatted about his relations, but the Princess sat silent between the Governor-General and Lord Buxton, each making some remark to her at intervals to which she listened without moving her head, barely opening her lips. Lady Buxton walked with her in the garden afterwards and they went to see a beech tree she had planted there on the King's visit, and it had grown more than the foreign specimens she had planted, and that pleased her, perhaps even elated her - for Lady Burton said 'She talked intelligently about gardening'. So then they went, the papers say, in an 'armoured car, bullet-

proof, the windows non-splintering'. But Mrs. McNeill says 'Such nonsense, our old car, just the same as any other. But it's just as well they think it's bullet-proof, they won't trouble to fire at us whenever we go out in it!' So the visit passed off well to the Governor General's great relief." <

The "they" to whom Mrs McNeill referred was the broad spectrum of the Republican movement, most of whom were sceptical about and many of whom were hostile to, the office of Governor General.

When Eamon de Valera's Fianna Fail party was elected in the 1932 General Election, McNeill would have been well aware that the tensions between himself and the new Government would be greater than any of those previously experienced. It was quite obvious that Eamon de Valera would have an essential difficulty in accepting the King's representative. Sensitive to the fact that Vice Regal Lodge was, to Republicans, an unacceptable symbol of Ascendancy days and monarchical authority, McNeill was constructive enough to go to Leinster House to appoint de Valera as President of the Executive Council or, in effect, Prime Minister.

While disliking the office, de Valera had, in Lord Longford's phrase, "no personal animus against him." Acting through the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, he advised the Governor General of the need for tact. He especially suggested that it would be prudent to avoid inviting members of the Government to official functions.

This degree of ambiguity was certain to lead to misunderstanding. Lord Longford, in the official biography of de Valera that he co-wrote with Thomas P. O'Neill, describes the outcome: "When McNeill arrived at a dance at the French legation, the Government ministers who were present left - a fact that did not pass unnoticed in the press. McNeill wrote a letter of protest to de Valera who, in reply, admitted the 'justifiable annoyance ' which the Governor General felt at the snub. He assured McNeill that it was not 'Part of a considered policy that the Governor General should be treated with deliberate discourtesy.' 'The whole affair', he wrote, ' was unfortunate and regrettable, and should never have been allowed to occur.' For the future, he suggested, it would be well if the Government were kept informed of the Governor General's public social engagements, as prior knowledge would avoid embarrassment."

McNeill, however, pressed for an apology which he did not receive. He was already piqued at the delay in receiving the Government's permission to invite guests to the Eucharistic Congress which was to take place in Dublin early in June. Without the Government's consent, and indeed against their direct advice, he sent out invitations. There is something inexorable about the drama that followed, which was to see the office of Governor General fade from public life and Vice Regal Lodge left empty. After the Eucharistic Congress, McNeill, still smarting from the affronts to his office, decided to publish the correspondence that had passed between himself and de Valera. He did this despite the fact that the Government formally warned him against doing so. In this blatant challenge of wills, de Valera felt obliged to exert executive authority and requested King George V to terminate McNeill's appointment.

Determined to undermine the office, de Valera requested that Domhnall O'Buachalla should succeed McNeill. O'Buachalla, a veteran of the 1916 Rising, had already agreed to do the minimum necessary, to be a signatory when a signature was required. He did not move into Vice Regal Lodge and never appeared formally at any public occasion. In this manner, the office and all that it stood for, literally disappeared from view. Vice Regal Lodge became a hollow and empty symbol, hidden behind trees.

For a number of years it must have seemed certain that it would never be occupied again, that Nathaniel Clement's house would be demolished or become yet another of the decaying country mansions that stood empty in every county. However, when a new Constitution was framed in 1936, it contained provision for a new office, that of an elected President, to replace that of Governor General. Douglas Hyde was unanimously chosen as the first President of Ireland and was inaugurated in 1938.

There was major resistance to the use of Vice Regal Lodge as the official residence of the President. The power of the old associations still resonated throughout Irish society. Various houses were considered but found wanting. Particular attention was devoted to St. Anne's in Clontarf, the former residence of Lady Ardilaun then occupied by Bishop Plunkett but when it was found that Dublin Corporation were negotiating with him for the acquisition of its gardens as a public park, the search continued elsewhere "Ashton" in Castleknock was considered and "South Hill" at Milltown but there was always some difficulty.

Finally, and with enormous reluctance, it was decided that Vice Regal Lodge would have to be used probably on a temporary basis. Its name was changed to Aras an Uachtaráin and, in 1939, President Hyde planted a tree in the grounds, a symbolic act that initiated the new era that the house was about to experience as it became the permanent official residence of the Presidents of Ireland.

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