Power, Resistance and Ritual: Paternalism on the Clonbrock Estates 1826-1908


Abstract

Until now works on big houses and landed estates have been published in two separate and specific genres. On the one hand there are the familiar coffee table books with glossy photographs depicting architectural splendour, lavish interiors, or ghostly ruins, and on the other there are the academic histories of the wider land question and to a lesser extent estate management. There has, in fact, been a considerable evolution in the historiography of landlord-tenant relations since John E. Pomfret's The struggle for the land in Ireland, 1800-1923 (1930). It portrayed Irish landlords as capricious rackrenters that squeezed tenant farmers for as much as they could and evicted indiscriminately. The struggle, in his opinion, was one in which a homogenous group of oppressed Catholic tenants farmers challenged the might of the pro-British landowning elite and won. Pomfret's thesis was very much the accepted orthodoxy until the 1970s when a new generation of scholars began to make extensive use of estate records and discovered that his conclusions were considerably flawed. The first person to present this evidence was Barbara Lewis Solow in The land question and the Irish economy, 1870-1903 (1971). Solow presented evidence that rents in the post-Famine period were low and evictions rare illustrating that the capricious evicting landlord was the exception rather than the rule.

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