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1. Map of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, showing the four provinces, Ulster, Connacht, Leinster, and Munster, counties, and major cities, and highlighting County Tipperary and the capitals of its North and South Ridings, Nenagh and Clonmel. The map was adapted by Thad Garrett from "County Tipperary in Ireland" by O'Dea (Own work) [CC-BY-SA-3.0], via Wikimedia Commons. Available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:County_Tipperary_in_Ireland.svg.

Introduction

Three Hundred Years in Ireland, but not Irish Enough

> History forgets the losers.
> —Roy Foster, *The Irish Story* (2002).[1]

> My experience of Irish landlords is entirely the opposite of the picture that is usually painted of them…The Irish land agitation was a perfectly natural, though hardly moral, struggle on the part of the tenants to get possession of their land, and an equally natural endeavour by the landlords to retain their property. The champions of the tenants' side, with their own ends in view, placed no limit on the defamation they poured on the heads of the landlords; the latter had only the rights of property and Parliamentary sanction as their blunt and almost worn-out defensive weapons. But as a class they deserve rescue from the infamy with which they have been overwhelmed.
> —Lt. Col. Charles O. Head, *No Great Shakes* (1943).[2]

Of the many stories my father told me about growing up with his family in County Tipperary, Ireland, the one that made the deepest impression was of the night the IRA burned Derrylahan Park, his family's home. The IRA's real target, however, was my grandfather, Charles Head, a twice retired British army officer, local justice of the peace, and outspoken Unionist—for Ireland's continued inclusion in the United Kingdom—whom they had failed to assassinate two weeks earlier and who had already wisely departed for England. The burning of Derrylahan occurred just days before a truce ended the Anglo-Irish War on July 11, 1921. During those last weeks, a number of others in the area of Birr—six miles away in Co. Offaly,

then known as King's County—were murdered, or executed as spies and informers by the IRA, and other houses belonging to Anglo-Irish landlords were torched.

My grandparents obviously thought that the best chance for saving their property was for my grandfather to leave Ireland until peace was restored. Women and children were generally not targeted during this conflict or the civil war which followed. About seventy-six such houses were burned during what the Irish termed the War of Independence (1919-1921), mostly in Munster, the conflict's heartland; approximately 199 more were reduced to smoldering ruins during the subsequent Irish Civil War (1922-1923), including many of outstanding architectural merit, along with priceless collections of paintings, furniture, *objets d'art*, and family and estate documents. Many of the owners, like my grandparents, had fled to England before or after the Free State of Ireland was inaugurated in 1922.

My grandfather left a vivid account of those final years in Ireland in his memoir published in 1943—which he self-deprecatingly titled *No Great Shakes*! It was one of the few family accounts that were available when I became curious about my family history. By then, my father was long dead, as was an older sister, who would have had her own fascinating story to tell about the dramatic conclusion to her Irish childhood (the oldest sister was away at boarding school). However, forty years after the burning, she and her sister wrote accounts of their childhoods at Derrylahan. Most family documents were lost—either due to family problems in the late nineteenth-century, in the Derrylahan fire, or in a later, accidental one in England. So over the years I read my grandfather's book repeatedly until I found I had more questions than answers. What had my father's family done to deserve being burned out of their home?

My grandfather lived a good part of his youth serving the British Empire overseas, an extended absence from his very troubled birthplace that may have sheltered him from the realities of political changes there. While he devoted a final chapter to his view of Irish history, including the long fight for the right to self-government from a parliament in Dublin, I found it to be inadequate and judgmental. He was a talented writer (this was not his only

book), and a man of upright character and strong opinions who had endured embittering experiences in the country he loved. Were his opinions fair or merely reflective of his prejudices? Sometimes I suspected that he chose to generalize and explain away the realities of Ireland's nineteenth-century agrarian unrest and terrorism, most of which he did not experience directly (he was born in 1869). Irish lawyer and prolific author Terence de Vere White, in an entire chapter, "The Unknown Unionist," of his 1972 book *The Anglo-Irish*, roundly mocked Charles Head as a regular Colonel Blimp for his particular view of Irish history, quoting him so copiously that I couldn't help wondering if he had acquired permission from the publisher: "The gods he [Colonel Head] worshipped were not the gods of Ireland," declared White. "Patriotism meant love of England. Duty meant duty to England; loyalty, loyalty to the King of England."[3] The reality was, as he made clear in his autobiography, my grandfather felt both British and Irish, a sentiment shared by a great many of his Anglo-Irish tribe.

Certain that White had his own prejudices and detecting inaccuracies in his account of my grandfather and his antecedents, I decided to pursue my own research into the three hundred years during which the Head family flourished or floundered in Ireland. In doing so, while sometimes sympathizing with my grandfather's strong views, I came to understand his selective memory or "convenient amnesia," as I termed it. He was indeed a man of his time, tribe, politics, and class, a thorough-going Tory. My quest became far more than family history: the family was no longer the sole subject but a device to shed light on a comparatively neglected aspect of Irish history, the experience of the Anglo-Irish lesser landlords, rather than the more chronicled aristocrats.

My father died in 1970 when I was only twenty-six, but I never forgot the colorful and humorous stories he told me of his childhood in Northern Tipperary. With early retirement from the Library of Congress in Washington, DC—where I had honed my research and writing skills on many historical projects resulting in books and exhibitions—my opportunity came to measure his stories and my grandfather's published memoir against my own research into a broader history. They say that every author writes in an effort to discover, understand, and come to terms with something they need

to know, and I am no exception. The Anglo-Irish side of my ancestral history (and that of my husband) obsesses me. Not surprisingly, I find myself viewing it with an ambivalence born of family pride, loyalty, honor, and love—countered by the terrible history of invasion, land grabbing, abuse, murder, famine, and poverty that have marked Irish history for the last millennium.

County Tipperary has been called Ireland's "premier county" because of its fiercely nationalist history: "where Tipperary leads, Ireland follows," so the saying went, and, following independence, Ireland's history was more often told from a nationalist point of view. In his iconoclastic book *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It Up in Ireland*, historian Roy Foster examines how and why the key moments of Ireland's past—the 1798 Rising, the Famine, the Celtic Revival, the Easter 1916 Rising, and the 1960s-1990s Troubles—have been worked into a shifting, politicized, and sentimentalized narrative, a "story of Ireland" which often demonizes Anglo-Irish Protestant landowners, such as the Head family, as Unionists who remained loyal to the United Kingdom as well as, perhaps more deservedly, the British government. He explains that the function of studying and teaching this "specifically oriented" version of Irish history in the predominantly Catholic school system "was to stress the continuity of the separatist tradition…as well as implicitly (or indeed explicitly) to stress the fact that British rule in Ireland was always an undesirable and undesired imposition, taking the form of oppression and exploitation of a people struggling to be free." Professional historians at both the historically Catholic University College Dublin, and the historically Protestant Trinity College began rejecting the nationalist bias from about 1940 onward.[4]

Some contemporary historians have thrown down a gauntlet to the descendants of those who were marginalized in Ireland following its independence to recount and analyze their stories and add them to the general historical pool.[5] The challenge for scions of these families, among whom I belong, is not to forge an alienating body of self-justifications but to provide well-researched and reasoned counterweights to many one-sided histories. While books that present a more balanced or nuanced history have been welcomed by professional and academic historians, they have too often been dismissed as revisionist by those wedded to the

"everything British was bad" mantra—again, a convenient amnesia. Apparently, "revisionist" first became a term of abuse during the sectarian and political terrorism in Northern Ireland, when historians who rejected physical force republicanism were accused of being part of a political movement. I have been astonished and somewhat intimidated by the fury with which some of the so-called revisionist histories have been attacked on certain Irish websites. But the Anglo-Irish are "no petty people," as William Butler Yeats argued in the Senate of the Dáil (Irish Parliament) in 1925, and their lesser-known stories deserve to emerge to enrich the complicated tapestry of Irish history.

Ironically, my first voyage of discovery to Ireland in search of the Head family of Waterford City and Co. Tipperary began just three weeks after the terrors of 9/11. I came close to postponing plans that had involved months of work and years of anticipation. I flew out of an almost deserted Washington Dulles airport on an almost empty plane, away from my adopted country, which was now shocked and devastated by vicious terrorist acts, to the country of my father's birth, where terrorism had driven him from his home. In Waterford, I searched for records of the Heads, who were shipping merchants, aldermen, and mayors there before acquiring land in Co. Tipperary at the end of the seventeenth century. In North Tipperary, I visited the ruins and remaining houses built or occupied in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by various branches of this once and still respected and prolific family. Despite the touchiness of my topic, I encountered extraordinary generosity and warmth from area residents, particularly from local historians, who led me to several priceless family stories and documents.

On a subsequent trip to North Tipperary, and probably resulting from the questions I was asking, I found that, for the first time, my grandfather's memoir was being read by local historians (probably in photocopied form since it is hard to find an original copy). These historians have taken on the task of unearthing and publishing segments of the history of the mostly long-departed Anglo-Irish Protestant landowning families of the region. The much-published local historian Daniel Grace, who has been extraordinarily helpful to me for twenty years, has written that "Land League propaganda

appears to have tarred all landlords with the same brush. Recent studies have shown that only a minority of landlords actively exploited their tenantry."[6] Such local research has contributed to the Connacht Landed Estates Project, a database hosted by University College, Galway, and funded by the Irish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences, containing brief descriptions of estates and the families associated with them in the provinces of Munster and Connacht. Historian Terence Dooley, director of the Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates at Maynooth University, Co. Kildare, and the author of numerous studies on the subject, has been a major resource for this book.

Most of the records of over seven hundred years of British involvement in Ireland and of documents important for genealogical research were destroyed in the 1922 firebombing of the Irish Public Record Office in Dublin during the Irish Civil War. Historians and genealogists are thus faced with an extraordinary challenge. But, gradually, supplementary source material, including the papers of some of the landed families, has been entering the archives. These and the rich reserves of newspapers, memoirs, and fiction are being mined by historians and literary scholars. During two further trips to Ireland, I spent time in Dublin at the National Library, the National Archives, and the Registry of Deeds, in all of which I found considerable documentary evidence of the Heads' trajectory in Ireland. However, a major roadblock and frustration is that the voluminous and essential records of the Irish Land Commission remain closed to historians and researchers.

Our family's tenure in North Tipperary began in 1696 when shipping merchant John Head, the oldest son of a two-time Protestant mayor of Waterford during an extremely troubled period in English and Irish history and soon to be mayor himself, acquired the nearly 1,200-acre land grant on scenic Lough Derg on the Shannon River through marriage to the daughter and sole heir of one of the Cromwellian officers compensated with land forfeited from Irish rebels. Thus began the Head tradition of marrying advantageously—for land, money, or social and political connection—benefiting as did so many others of the eighteenth-century Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland after penal laws ensured land ownership, political power, and religious domination for members of the An-

glican Church of Ireland. He and the next two generations of Heads at Derry Castle on Lough Derg increased the acreage and worked hard to improve the productivity of what had been largely marginal land.[7] Over time, the estate became seriously encumbered with the cost of dowries for numerous daughters and setting up younger sons in professions while incomes fell dramatically with the drop in the market for agricultural products to feed vast standing armies following the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Added to the general malaise were all too frequent failed harvests due to bad weather, poor land, the population explosion among the already impoverished small farmers and laborers, and insidious violence by agrarian protestors, particularly in Munster. The 3,000-acre Derry Castle estate was one of thousands that foundered in bankruptcy around the time of Ireland's Great Potato Famine in the mid-nineteenth century. Many thousands of desperately poor laborers and tenant farmers and their families were evicted from these failed estates, and many of those who were evicted starved or were forced to emigrate.

As with many such landlord families, some of the Heads and their relations, unable to adapt to their changed circumstances, descended into poverty and obscurity. Yet, throughout these troubled times, the more enterprising persisted and succeeded in Ireland, as professionals, through more advantageous marriages, or by adjusting to changes in land ownership and national politics. The sale of thousands of bankrupt estates in the wake of the Famine through the Encumbered Estates Court, for example, allowed my great-grandfather, a descendant of a junior branch of the family, to rise phoenix-like with a far larger estate—the ill-fated Derrylahan Park—a large family, and some prominence in county affairs before the tide of history turned against him and his ilk.

In 1902, some fourteen years after his father's death, my grandfather, along with his younger brother, secured a mortgage to buy back from the Court of Chancery what remained of the estate, control of which their feckless, alcoholic, and bankrupt oldest brother had been forced to relinquish by his father's trustees and in the face of the Gladstonian land acts. Despite the angry invective and the reality of the land wars, the many years that Charles Head spent overseas with the British army in India, China, and South Africa

had filled him with nostalgia for his childhood home. By the time he was called back into active service in 1914, he had turned his eight hundred neglected acres into a successful working farm. Indeed, Charles Head's was another short-lived and ill-fated attempt to hold on to a share of that most disputed commodity, Irish land.

I have many friends and acquaintances, as well as a beloved daughter-in-law, in America who are proud of and curious about their descent from Irish Catholic immigrants. I'm well aware of the deep animosity that endures in some quarters in Ireland and the United States toward Britain and the former Anglo-Irish Protestant landlords, particularly during the potato famine of 1845-1849, the suppression of various patriotic rebellions against British rule, and mass evictions for nonpayment of rent. This has often given me pause, but my own curiosity has spurred me on in pursuing my family's Irish story as part of the fabric of the Anglo-Irish tribe. The Heads were never more than what academics refer to as "minor gentry," denoting the size of their estates, but they or their kin seemed to make enough colorful appearances in local and national history that their experiences and perspectives are revealing of an alternative or lesser-known aspect of Ascendancy life and its demise. I hope my account will provide further links of understanding across a long and bitter divide, humanizing those for whom those halcyon years in Ireland did not end well.

Sara Day
Washington, D.C.
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Chapter 1

Derrylahan: The Big House Burns, but Memories Endure

> Is it height—in this country of otherwise low buildings—that got these Anglo-Irish houses their 'big' name? Or have they been called 'big' with a slight inflection—that of hostility, irony? One may call a man 'big' with just that inflection because he seems to think the hell of himself.
>
> —Elizabeth Bowen, "The Big House" in *The Mulberry Tree* (1986).[1]

> When the big curtains caught fire and the flames climbed into the sky, it was a glorious sight.
>
> —Anonymous IRA participant in the burning of Derrylahan

"ANOTHER MANSION BURNED. Derrylahan Reduced to Ashes. Col. Head "Too Friendly with the English." So ran the headline of the *King's County Chronicle*, a Unionist newspaper, on July 7, 1921. It was the only announcement of that atrocity in the press. Five days earlier, at 2 a.m. on Saturday, July 2, 1921, Margery Head, two of the young Head children, and the few women servants who lived in the house were rudely awakened by loud banging on the doors. With Colonel Head away in England—after narrowly escaping an IRA assassination squad on his land in mid-June—eight-year-old Michael was the only male in the house that night. Ten-year-old Grace was there but the elder daughter Betty was away at boarding school.

It must have occurred to my grandparents that failure to execute the Colonel might result in further attempts on their safety. However, the couple presumed, or perhaps hoped, that calm would be restored once the truce ending the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) was signed, which appeared to be imminent. Margery

Head, a strong and courageous woman, could have joined her husband with the children but she did not want to leave their only home unoccupied, which would have left it vulnerable to pillage or arson. The remote Victorian stone house had no telephone and the family car had been left in nearby Birr for repairs, leaving just a pony and trap for transportation. Considering its remoteness and the constant threat of terrorist acts, it is surprising that one of the male staff was not asked to spend nights in the house. There had been at least three nighttime raids of the house by the IRA looking for arms, armed men were seen drilling in the park, and two young Protestants had just been executed by the IRA on their family farm on the other side of Birr before their farmhouse was burned. The Heads' Protestant chauffeur and the Catholic gamekeeper shared a cottage about half a mile from the house. However, if either of these men had been in the house, it would have made no difference to the outcome and might have resulted in more murders.

"About twenty men, it seemed, arrived at about 2 a.m. and ordered everybody in the house to get out, as their intention was to burn it," my grandfather wrote some twenty years later. Betty described what she had been told: The men "had already stolen thirty gallons of petrol from a neighbour which they poured everywhere and when they struck a match it virtually exploded. There was no time to save anything much and those in the house had to sit outside in their nightclothes." "My wife besought, implored and finally offered to purchase at high price the salvation of the house, but without the slightest effect," my grandfather continued. "She then asked time to pack some clothes, and was given five minutes, but on their expiry, nobody would carry down her trunk, and she could not do it herself, so she lost all her clothing except the night attire she wore." When one of the men appeared from the house with a small Minimax fire extinguisher wondering what it was for, she snatched it from him, crashed it into action, and turned it full in the leader's face. It is surprising he didn't shoot her. One of the men grabbed the extinguisher, and she was thrown to the ground with such force that she suffered a fractured rib, all this while her terrified children, who were being held under armed guard, watched. Finally, with the house ablaze, the arsonists left. The kitchen wing of the house was the only part left relatively intact.

The flames were seen as far away as Birr, but there was no real hope of dousing the fire. In the wake of a two-month-long drought that unusually hot summer, there was no water close enough for a chain of buckets. The gamekeeper and chauffeur smashed the windows furthest away from the fire and threw out as much of the remaining furniture as they could. Forty years later, my grandmother penned some very brief notes about the burning of their house to her daughter Grace: "Keeper and chauffeur save all possible. Kindly cook removes our food! And kindly parlour maid saves the silver. These brave deeds happen whilst the house is flaming and floors crashing…the house becomes a shell." "Some proportion of these articles were not collected by us again," reported my grandfather. "In a very few hours the home we all loved was a pitiful ruin. The feelings of the waifs on that lovely summer morning cannot be described, nor the exhaustion they endured before they found another roof to shelter them. A few days later my wife and children joined me in England."[2] According to local folklore, they tried to seek shelter with another "Big House" family in the area but, fearing they would meet the same fate, the owners refused to take them in.[3] Instead, a horse and cart carried them slowly into Birr where they could stay with relatives.

2. Derrylahan Park. Lorrha, County Tipperary after the burning by the IRA during the night of July 1-2, 1921. Offaly History, Tullamore, Co. Offaly.

Derrylahan Park was the scene of the happy, carefree childhood of just two generations of Head family children before its burning in July 1921. Formerly Walshpark, the estate of a branch of the Walshes, the prolific and widespread Old English Catholic family, it was purchased through the Encumbered Estates Court in 1859 by my great-grandfather William Henry Head, the descendant of a numerous family resident in North Tipperary since the late seventeenth century. He proceeded to tear down the Walsh's undistinguished and, in his eyes, old-fashioned Georgian house and commission the renowned Dublin architect Sir Thomas Newenham Deane to design the high Victorian mansion with the most modern of amenities, along with farm buildings, gatehouse, and smaller but well-appointed stone houses for his staff. The house, built of brick and faced with cut stone, was deliberately located at the end of a mile-long drive from the nearest road.

My grandfather, Charles Head, born in 1869, spent the first eight years of his life at Derrylahan, along with numerous brothers and sisters, before leaving for boarding school.[4] Charles remembered the estate as a delightful place for children: "A large variety of wild life abounded in it, especially wild-fowl and butterflies," he wrote years after leaving Ireland. "Wild fruits such as strawberries, raspberries, gooseberries, barberries and blackberries grew in abundance in their season, and could be made the objects of short expeditions for their gathering. Old bits of ruins cropped up all over the place, useful for exploring and picnics. All sorts of tree-freaks lent themselves to the construction of miniature cabins in the Swiss Family Robinson style. The cottages on the estate could always be drawn for a glass of milk or slice of home-made bread."

When Charles was a child, the prosperous Derrylahan estate comprised the demesne and "Pleasure Ground" surrounding the house and, beyond that, extensive lands let to tenant farmers, a total of 2,300 acres.[5] Charles's oldest brother, William (Willie) Edward Head inherited Derrylahan on the death of their father in 1888. The estate was to be held in trust until he turned twenty-five in April 1889. Charles, the third son, had left Ireland for military training in England at age sixteen and was now a young officer with the Royal Horse Artillery, stationed in Devon. As a result of Willie's profligacy and bankruptcy and the Irish land wars and land acts of the late

nineteenth century, most of the farms were sold to the tenants and the house was rented. Years of living abroad heightened Charles's nostalgia for his childhood at Derrylahan and, in 1901, he decided to buy back, with a mortgage from his mother and bachelor younger brother, the neglected mansion and what was left of the equally neglected land. The estate on which Charles Head's children spent the early part of their childhood was greatly reduced from their grandfather's time. Yet 800 acres seemed vast to them.[6] Following his early retirement from the British Army, Charles Head turned his acreage into a working farm. His English wife, an heiress to a fine brewery fortune, was able to provide the funds needed to return the house and gardens to the show place they had been.

The Heads' three children, Betty, Grace, and Mike, were born in 1909, 1911, and 1912, so that the memories that Betty and Grace wrote down forty years after they left Ireland ran from about midway through WWI up to, but not including, the burning of their home in July 1921. Both women echoed their father in writing lyrically about the flora and fauna and natural beauty of the Derrylahan grounds and the nearby bog. The "Pleasure Ground," as it was called in Ireland, contained the shrubberies and rare trees that W. H. Head had planted. There was a wide gravel sweep to the front door on the north side of the house with rough grass beyond it that became a golden mass of daffodils in the spring. On the south and east sides of the house were lawns, flower beds, and a tennis court, and on the west end was the kitchen with its backyard. Like other Irish houses, the stables or farmyards were about half a mile from the house. About a quarter of a mile from the house, there was a walled two-acre kitchen garden with numerous varieties of fruit and vegetables. Both black and white grapes grew in the greenhouse and, on both sides of the center path were beds of St. Brigid anemones which made a multi-colored carpet in the spring.

Derrylahan had two large and beautiful oak woods as well as the bog, so it was a veritable paradise for wildlife. The bog was a favorite place for dragonflies, moths, and butterflies and such beautiful birds as the curlew, nightjar, and yellow wagtail. The whole estate was a paradise of wildflowers. There were bee orchids beside the avenue, and primroses, violets, bluebells, and wood anemones grew everywhere. Near the ruins of the old house was an avenue

of beech trees with a carpet of snowdrops, and there were yet more snowdrops under a chestnut tree near the house. In Victorian times, a railway briefly ran through the Park and a large patch of columbines grew where the track had been removed. "Anyone who has ever been to Ireland in the spring must remember the gorse which is more golden than anywhere else and smells so sweet," noted Betty.

"In the soft fruit season," Betty recalled, "the garden was kept locked and we were only allowed in for ten minutes a day. We would rush to get a rhubarb leaf and then fill it as full of fruit as we could in the time. However, it didn't really matter as we could climb over the wall—much to the gardener's wrath. There were so many apples that sheets were tied to the trees and the apples were shaken into them. The apple loft was up a back staircase out of the scullery and the gardener slept next door." Fruit was the equivalent of today's children's passion for sweets (candy). "My brother once had a very bad tummy ache in the middle of the night," Betty

3. Two Edwardian fairies, Betty and Grace, among the daffodils at Derrylahan, ca. 1914. Head family.

remembered, "and when asked if he had eaten much fruit replied, 'Not so much as usual—only 7 apples and 6 pears.' Of course we had no telephone and, as the avenue was a mile long and we were five miles from Birr, getting help in an emergency was very difficult. The groom was roused out of bed and sent post haste in the dogcart to Birr for the doctor, who came and dealt with the crisis."

All was perfection for those adventurous, outdoors-loving sisters except for one fly in the ointment, their difficult and grimly authoritarian English nurses; in fact, Grace, who was a free-spirited, taxing child, was reputed to have had one nurse who drank methylated spirits and drugged her "so that she had peace for her drunken orgies." Things improved greatly, recalled Grace, when their brother Michael was born in 1912. "He had a wonderful Irish nursery maid called Susie who was only sixteen when she came to us. She took over from the trained nurses and made our nursery world heaven." My father told me many stories about Susie whom he loved dearly and would not forget. I would see her influence in endearing habits such as leaving a small square of toast on the side of his plate "for the starving Irish." I'm sure he knew that Susie was memorializing the terrible potato famine but I don't remember him explaining that to me. Perhaps my father also inherited Susie's love of singing favorite Irish songs like "It's a long way to Tipperary" (remembered today as a World War I song) and the traditional Irish song "With a shillelagh under me arm and a twinkle in me eye, I'll be off to Tipperary in the morning." As a young man, he would accompany himself with his squeezebox (concertina) but he was forced to leave that on the beach at Dunkirk during the 1940 evacuation.

Most of Grace and Betty's memories began after their father was recalled into the British Army at the outbreak of the Great War. He was away for almost the entire four years so that their mother was left to run the farm and household (see Chapter 18). Betty remembered that her mother had "very little help in the house and the farm to run" during the war, and thus allowed the children "a glorious amount of freedom." Betty and Grace played most often with the children of the older groom, Tommy and Sissie Rathwell, "but my brother was too young for our games," at least at first. Immediately after breakfast, they waited outside their friends' cottage

in the farmyard, intrigued to hear the whole family saying their prayers together. In the meantime, the sisters kept a wary eye on a large and threatening tom turkey in the yard. In April, they discarded shoes and stockings like all the village children and went barefoot until the autumn. "After a time, the soles of our feet hardened like leather and we could even cross stubble fields if we ran. On cold days, we would paddle in mud as it seemed to make our legs warmer when it dried." Their favorite place to play was in the hayloft, even though they were forbidden to do so because "the animals did not like the taste of the hay afterward!" Sometimes they put blocks of wood across the loft and laid hay over them so that they could crawl around in the tunnels they made. It was extremely hot and, as Betty wrote, "…if the roof had fallen in, we could have suffocated."

As the girls got older, governesses came and went in rapid succession and only one of them had any control over them: "…much to their wrath, we spent most of our free time with the maids or workmen." They did lessons in the morning and were taken for walks after lunch. "At one period," presumably after the war, "my sister and I did French and music with a tutor. We were so frightened of him that we persuaded our governess to sit in the room throughout the lessons and then he didn't hit our knuckles with the ruler." Their younger brother Mike also provided some relief. He had turned the housemaid's pantry upstairs into a workshop where he hammered away all day, singing at the top of his voice: "[E]very time Mike passed the door he banged on it with a hammer. The tutor always rushed out but by then Mike was well out of reach."

"Mike and Grace were great tree climbers," Betty remembered. "There were some big fir trees in the pleasure grounds and they would climb up…and then slide down on the outside of the branches." Grace was a tomboy from an early age. "You, Grace," her mother wrote her formidable middle-aged daughter in 1961, "were an independent character, indifferent to nurses or elder sister when, aged four, striding across a large bush-covered park, half a mile between you and the pram [in which the nursemaid was pushing baby Michael], equally adventurous doing heroic climbing stunts, which you teach the groom's young boy (much against his

parents' wishes). The garden wall is only 1 foot wide and quite 14 feet in height and this you run along, regardless."

"Haymaking in the summer was the best time of all," remembered Betty. "Sometimes I sat on the driver's lap while the hay cutter went round and round, pulled by a white pony and a black horse." Betty also loved the month of June when the turf was being cut by men using long-handled spades. This was a lengthy process. In addition to the turf cut for Derrylahan, each of the men on the farm was allocated a patch of bog where they cut their own turf, and some of the neighboring farmers had the right to part of the Heads' turf bank. "There is nothing so glorious as the bog," Betty recalled with enthusiasm. "I went there a lot. The wildness of it and the lovely peaty smell to which is added that of bog myrtle and heather. It is covered with a little plant called Sundew which catches flies on its sticky leaves and there is also pretty, multi-colored bog cotton or sphagnum moss."

There was always great merriment when the corn was being threshed. "We had our own machine in a barn. It was run by a petrol engine which also worked the circular saw. The circular saw was a horrible thing and a spaniel was very badly cut from going under it when it was running. However, she was none the worse once the wound healed." Everyone rushed about carrying full sacks of corn, pushing sheaves into the machine, and removing straw. Dust everywhere got into eyes and throat, and the dogs had great sport chasing rats and mice. The children roasted apples on the threshing machine, which they thoroughly enjoyed despite the oily taste. "This was an even more hilarious time," remembered Betty, "as the maids brought the men's dinners from the house and everyone had a romp. I remember the laundry maid being rolled in the heap of barley chaff which must have been most painful." When the harvest was in, they had a harvest home dance, just one of a succession of neighborhood harvest dances attended by everyone from miles around. "The dances were all 'sets'—rather like Scottish Dancing—and the music came from a piano accordion. We were only allowed to remain until midnight and the evening did not really warm up until later. No one went to bed and the dancing went on until it was time for the maids to get the early morning tea." Another festive marker was the big Christmas tree that was erected for the children on the estate.

"No place in Ireland could exist without horses and, as my father had been a Royal Horse Gunner, we had various horses beside the work horses," Betty explained. "There was a racehorse called Enniscorthy who produced a foal each year. She was practically impossible to catch and I think her foals all went to the army in the war." They had a pony that was too big and difficult to stop and two donkeys "we bought from the tinkers for ten shillings each," which refused to move at all. They gave up their Model T Ford during World War I after the chauffeur joined the army and bought a smart new trap and a pony called Rose. "Horses in those days were completely terrified of traffic," Betty remembered. "Once my mother and I left Birr at a gallop and once I went to a point-to-point with the maids and, when leaving, the pony reared, the shafts broke and we all landed in the mud." As Betty was at the back of the trap, she was squashed by the cook and was the muddiest of all. They borrowed a trap for the journey home. "When shopping in Birr, we stayed in the pony trap or dogcart and shouted for the shop keepers to come out to take the orders. The horses or ponies were much too wild to leave unattended."

"In Ireland," remembered Betty, "fairs were held in the streets of the market towns, and the filth and confusion were unbelievable. The streets were jammed solid with donkey carts and cattle. Although the actual buying and selling took place early, everyone adjourned to the pubs afterwards. As there were no cattle trucks, the poor animals were not led or driven to stables or fields until all hours. I could never understand how they could wait in the street all day without getting mixed up or wandering off. There never seemed to be anyone looking after them. We kept mostly bullocks with a few thoroughbred Herefords and enough cows to provide milk for the house and farmhands. We made our own butter and had delicious soda bread and scones made from the buttermilk." There was always great excitement if the "extremely bad tempered" Hereford bull escaped from the paddock of which he was the sole occupant. The paddock was the old walled garden where the old house used to be. The children loved throwing a ball into the bull's paddock and running to retrieve it before they were chased! One day, Betty went to Birr station with her mother to collect a new young bull she had bought. "When we got to the station we

found he'd broken out of the railway truck and all the porters had shut themselves into the goods shed. It was left to my indomitable Mother to deal with the bull. She and one of our men cornered him in the end but he was always very savage."

Margery's children shared her dislike of parties: "at children's parties we stood together and refused to join in at first, though things improved somewhat after tea," Betty remembered. Unlike his reserved wife, however, Colonel Head enjoyed social life and sporting before the war and during the brief period after he returned home in January 1919, especially bridge, polo, foxhunting, and tennis. He bought ponies very cheaply from farmers, trained them to play polo, and sold them in Dublin, where he often played himself. He had always loved hunting but the local fox hunt tended to avoid Derrylahan, because the foxes always charged straight across the bog, where horses and riders would get bogged down. When their parents gave tennis parties, the children were sent to have tea with the gamekeeper and chauffeur—two bachelors who "did for themselves" in their little cottage: "They certainly made very good soda bread!"

Picnics were popular. Sometimes they picnicked on the shores of Lough Derg. "On one occasion, my sister and I were paddling and we both fell in so our return journey was very cold and clammy." Sometimes they picnicked on Knockshegowna, otherwise known as Fairy Hill, which they could see from the house and is supposedly haunted. In summer, they usually went to the seaside at Bray, just south of Dublin in Co. Wicklow. Once, when returning from the beach, they found their boarding house had burned to the ground with all their belongings. Seaside resorts were not crowded in those days, however, so they found another boarding house quite easily.

Betty explained that their grandparents lived in London so they thought London *was* England as that was the only English place they ever visited. "Their London house had a garden at the back where we met the children from surrounding houses. We soon took possession of their dolls' prams and expensive toys. Their nannies were quite amazed at meeting such savages from the bog, speaking with such pronounced brogues." Grace recalled a particularly naughty episode when Margery brought several of her Irish

servants with them to London. "They were completely off the bog and had never even seen a large town, much less a city like London. They were much more trouble to Mummy, I should imagine, than we were. We took them out for a walk one day, or perhaps they took us. There was a dense fog. We said we knew the way home and promptly left them. I think a kindly London policeman came to the rescue."

As World War I was drawing to an end in 1918, the IRA "became troublesome," Betty recalled, among other things, raiding the big houses to secure arms—and the Head house was not spared. My grandfather described in his memoir the repeated acts of terrorism in the neighborhood in the final months before he was forced to flee to safety after a failed attempt to assassinate him. My grandmother was told that a dozen militant IRA members, who were holed up in a former priest's house rented to sympathizers, were seen drilling at dusk in the parkland. It must have been terrifying. Aware of the increasing danger, Margery Head had sent the best furniture, household wares, and clothing for storage in Birr. Even the children felt the rising tension. Grace remembered that she and her brother buried their favorite toys in a metal box. However, they grew so bored that they dug them up the day before the burning—only to lose them all.

It was Grace who placed these frightening encounters with the IRA in proportion to what they all recalled as an enchanted childhood. "Children have a way of accepting whatever comes their way as far more ordinary than their elders ever imagine. Therefore the fact that for two years or more of our lives we lived in an atmosphere of what today might be called gangsterism and revolutionism [terrorism] was only part of our daily existence—combined with highly entertaining Irish servants, gorgeous places to play, trees to climb, the farm to wander over and acres and acres of bog to explore. No television could ever replace the servants' hall tales of hounds that attacked children and combs that were dropped on the bog by banshees and must not be touched. A little old woman we knew of, who lived under a railway bridge in a house of sacks, came out on moonlit nights and danced on the gravel before our windows. We'd look out and see her in her tatters with her hair flying."

The stories my father told me before his early death were largely focused on his eccentric relations rather than the details and context for the burning of his Irish home. If he told me more, it was only those stories that remained with me, but they were colorful enough to fuel my passion to learn more. He must have been aware of the accounts that his older sisters wrote about their childhood forty years after the family left Ireland but, if he wrote anything himself, it did not survive. It was an experience in New York in early 1965, described at the beginning of the next chapter, that began to raise my consciousness of the enduring Irish Catholic bitterness against the usurpers who became known as the Anglo-Irish Protestants.