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THE EXTERMINATOR The Third Earl of Lucan

Image: George Bingham, the Third Earl of Lucan
(wikipedia)



Lawn House, the residence of the Earl in Castlebar

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The Exterminator - The Third Earl of Lucan

George Charles Bingham, the third Earl of Lucan, was born in London on the 16th April 1800, the eldest son of Richard, Earl of Lucan and his wife Elizabeth.

He was educated at Westminster School and joined the army. By 1826 he had become lieutenant colonel of the 17th Lancers. He became a Tory MP for Mayo in 1826 and in 1829 he married Anne Brudenell, daughter of the Earl of Cardigan.

Lucan, finding peace-time army life boring, retired on half-pay and in 1837 he moved to Castlebar to take over the family estate. The estate of 60,000 acres was unprofitable but he was determined to change that. He declared that he 'would not breed paupers to pay priests' and fired his popular land agent St. Clair O'Malley so he could begin a systematic clearing of people from the land. In 1842 he summoned O'Malley, who was a fellow magistrate, for poaching, and had a violent argument with him in court, for which he was dismissed from the magistracy.

Furious with the decision he appealed to the House of Lords and was reinstated. He also forced the commander of the army barracks in Castlebar to block up all the windows because they overlooked his demesne. The 3rd Earl was a feared landlord in Mayo and was given the nickname 'the exterminator' by his tenants.



A model of the farmyard - the entrance was around where the old Bacon Factory was located (weebly.com)

One time when it was thought he was in London an effigy of him was burned in Castlebar. The tenants scattered in fear when he rode his horse into the middle of them shouting 'I'll evict the lot of you'.

The Famine gave Lucan an opportunity to evict his tenants on a wholesale basis, and he did this with complete disregard for public opinion. He believed it was necessary to clear land that could not support people, so the people must go.

Lucan claimed he was receiving nothing from his estates, all his rents and a good deal more was being put into the land. Eviction became common on the Earl of Lucan's estates. Thousands of people were evicted from around Ballinrobe where 15,000 acres were cleared.

The destitution caused by the evictions was immense. He cleared villages such as Drumconlon near Castlebar to facilitate grass farms and built sheds from the stones of the tenants houses.

In Aughadrina he built a racecourse following the clearances. In Castlebar in the densely populated area of Staball, (nowadays the Thomas Street area), all the houses were demolished. Several populous villages were cleared of people and farms established in their place. In part of the demolished villages Lucan constructed a dairy farm, with the yard and buildings covering three acres, all built from the stones of peoples' cabins.

The starving tenants in Mayo were in terror and they clung to their land for refuge.

They would often return to the houses they had been evicted from. To stop this Lucan organised crowbar brigades to pull down the houses over the tenant's heads and make them flee the land.

In the House of Lords in 1847 Lucan was attacked for his treatment of tenants in Mayo, claiming that 6000 evictions had been carried out. Lucan reacted angrily saying that he had only sought to improve his Irish estates, and that he spent far more on them than the income from his rents. As Chairman of the board of guardians of the Castlebar Poor Law Union he refused to pay his full poor law rates and insisted that the workhouse be closed down at the height of the Famine.

Lucan served in the Crimean War where he was involved with ordering the Charge of the Light Brigade, which resulted in heavy British casualties. He returned to England where he died in London on 10th November 1888.

When the Third Earl of Lucan died, aged 88 years, he was not a rich man. High living, drinking and gambling had whittled away his vast fortune.

Sources
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Left: The scene of an eviction 1848 (www.rte.ie)