



LOUGH MASK HOUSE

Detached three-bay two-storey over part raised basement land agent's house, under construction 1838, on a T-shaped plan centred on single-bay full-height breakfront; single-bay (west) or two-bay (east) full-height side elevations. Sold, 1886. Leased, 1901. Occupied, 1911. (www.buildingsofireland.ie)

LOUGH MASK HOUSE and its connection to the infamous **Captain Boycott**

(image www.landedstates.ie)

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Charles Boycott 1832-1897

A ruthless English land agent by the name of Charles Cunningham Boycott inspired the term 'Boycott' due to his heartless campaign of evicting people from their homes. This article delves into the story behind the term and its historical context.

In 1876 the government commissioned an enquiry to find out who owned the land in Ireland. It revealed that just 10,000 people owned almost all the land and most were absentee landlords. Landlords generally divided their land into estates rented to smaller tenant farmers.

50% of all tenant farmers occupied holdings of less than 15 acres. Agrarian conflict between landlords and tenants was very common in the decades after the Famine.

The Land League was formed in 1879 to try and fight for the rights of tenants. Its aims were the 3 Fs: Fair Rent, Fixity of Tenure, and Free Sale. In 1873 Charles Cunningham Boycott had agreed to become the land agent for Lord Erne, who had 2000 acres of land near the Neale in south Mayo. Boycott himself took a lease on Lough Mask House and farm for 31 years at £402 per annum. As Lord Erne's agent he had the duty to look after the estate and to collect the rent from the other 35 tenants.

On the 19th September 1880, Charles Stewart Parnell gave a speech in Ennis which set out the response to how a farmer should be treated if he bids for the land on which a tenant has been evicted. It set out the Land Leagues weapon of social isolation or exclusion.

Sources:

www.mayo.ie

www.historyireland.com/captain-boycott-man-and-myth/

www.mayo.ie/discover/history-heritage/great-battles-conflicts/

www.irishcentral.com/roots/history/irish-invented-boycott

Also, at this time, the tenants on Lord Erne's estate were seeking a reduction of 25% in their rents due to a bad harvest. Charles Boycott had refused and offered 10%. He then began eviction proceedings against eleven of the tenants.

On the 22nd of September an attempt was made to serve the eviction notices, but after the third notice was served a group of women attacked the eviction party and they had to seek refuge in Lough Mask House.

News of this had made its way to Ballinrobe, and a group of people descended on Boycott's house. They demanded that the servants leave, to try and force Boycott into running the estate on his own. The Mayo branch of the Land League began a campaign of isolation against Boycott in the local community. Within days the blacksmith, postman and others had been encouraged to stop serving Boycott. Shopkeepers in Ballinrobe would no longer serve him, and he was forced to get provisions by boat from Cong.

In October of 1880 Boycott wrote a letter to the Times newspaper outlining how he was being treated in Co. Mayo. A fund was launched to help pay for men in Ulster to go and harvest his crops.

This was feared to be an armed expedition to Mayo, largely made up of Ulster Loyalists.

Many nationalists saw this as an invasion, and James Daly wrote about it in the Connacht Telegraph under the heading 'Our Invaders'. It was estimated that it cost £10,000 to harvest Boycott's crops which were worth just £500.

By November 1880, Boycott and his family had left Lough Mask House under the guard of the 19th Hussars. Nobody could be found to drive his carriage, so an army ambulance driver had to be used. On December 1st Boycott left Dublin for Holyhead. The following year he visited the U.S. By 1886 he was back in England as a land agent for Hugh Adair, in Suffolk, after selling his interest in Lough Mask House. On the 19th June 1897 he died at the age of 65, his name forever remembered and attached to a campaign to bring down tyrants. Boycotting had strengthened the power of the tenants, and was one of the most successful tactics used in the land war in Ireland.

According to the journalist James Redpath, who was given credit for coining the verb 'to boycott', he had used the word as a substitute for 'ostracism' to enable the peasantry to understand the meaning behind the word. "*How would it do to call it, to Boycott him?*".

The word was first used in print by Redpath in the *Chicago Inter Ocean*, on the 12th October 1880. (Marlowe, J, 1973, *Captain Boycott and the Irish*).



Captain Boycott

(www.worldhistories.net)



When Captain Charles Boycott fled, the lease of his home Lough Mask House on the shores of Lough Mask was taken over by the Daly family in the mid-1880s.

Captain Boycott, the man whose name entered the language as a synonym for organised social and economic isolation was the subject of one of the first films made in Ireland after World War 2. Entitled *Captain Boycott* and shot c.1947 in Wicklow, Westmeath and Mayo it featured a host of Abbey Theatre actors.

Captain Charles Boycott had lived on Achill Island for seventeen years prior to 1871.



Captain Boycott in London in 1863. The military title was an affectation: in fact his military career was limited. (Seán Sexton/Getty Images)