

Knockrath House, Little Knockrath, Co. Wicklow

“Detached three-bay two-storey picturesque worker's house built c.1865. The front elevation has a full height projecting gabled bay to one side with two gabled half-dormers next to this. The walls are constructed in semi-coursed squared rubble with dressed granite quoins and window surrounds. There is a moulded crest to the gable of the projecting bay. The slated pitched roof has decorative ridge tiles, an overhang with decorative bargeboards, and tall chimneystacks in brick with stone bases. The entrance consists of a panelled timber door with rectangular fanlight, and is covered by a slated hood supported of a timber bracket. The window openings are flat-headed and have stone mullions and one over one sash frames. There is a single-storey canted bay window to the projecting bay. The worker's house is surrounded by a large garden with a carriage gateway with simple wrought-iron gates and granite piers.....An attractive, well preserved example of mid Victorian picturesque estate-built worker's house. (Buildings of Ireland/NBHS)

Knockrath was one of a large number of estate houses built by the Earl of Meath of Kilruddery on the family's extensive holdings in Wicklow, including those of the Manor of Knockrath, located near the Vale of Clara and the market town of Rathdrum. The townland name of Knockrath derives from the stone-built castle close by, now in ruins, which was a stronghold of the O'Byrne Clan until their defeat in the early 1600's. In 1789 the Manor of Knockrath was held by Lord Meath, and consisted of about 4,797 acres, the principal parts being the 800 acres of the divisions of Knockrath. In that year all of the lands were being offered to let on leases 'renewable for ever', with the stipulation that only applicants intending to build on the land and reside there should apply. Other lands held by the Earl of Meath in Wicklow included those adjoining the estate villages of Aughrim and Ballinaclash, and those at Bray and Delgany. In total, the Earl of Meath had about 24,000 acres in Wicklow in the 1830's and was one of the largest landowners in the county, although he had considerably less than Earl of Fitzwilliam of Coolattin, who was one of the largest landowners in Britain or Ireland.

From around the mid-nineteenth century William Brabazon the 11th Earl of Meath, and later his son Viscount Brabazon, carried out extensive improvements on their estates and to the houses and lands of their tenants in Wicklow. These included a large hunting lodge known as the Coppice on the old road from Rathdrum to Glendalough, (now in the ground of a pharmaceutical plant), and a new gate lodge dating from 1881. The gate lodge was designed by the architect Henry Richard Newton (1848-1886), and he also designed the forge, smith's house and traveller's rest on the same road, and perhaps some of the other stone cottages arrayed along it (see the Meath Cottages and other posts on this page for more information). Knockrath could have been intended as a residence for someone like Lord Meath's land agent (the Knockrath land agent from 1860- 1890 was Frederick Hamilton J.P) or some other important personage, but it is too

large and expensive for the needs of the average estate worker. More accurately, it could be said to represent a type of house generally intended for members of the gentry or as a gentleman farmer's residence. In the 1870's it formed part of a complex known as 'Little Knockrath Farm', which included an adjacent two-storey stewards house with cut stone buildings, located at one side of the private farm road running past the house.

In 1879 the house was put up to let, and the advertisement read: "To Gentlemen Farmers and Others. To be let, Little Knockrath Farm, the property of Lord Brabazon, situate on the River Avonmore, in the beautiful Vale of Clara. Midway between Rathdrum and the Seven Churches, consisting of about 65 Irish acres of land. Lately drained, thoroughly fenced with wire, and all in perfect order, with newly erected Farm Buildings, Workmen's Dwelling, and House, the latter a charming ornamental residence, consisting of Sitting-room, Drawing-room, Four Bedrooms, W.C.s/ Kitchen, with modern range and Scullery, supplied with a constant supply of pure filtered water from a private reservoir on the Hill, is worthy the attention of any gentleman fond of farming and sport. Shooting over 125 acres. In all probability a greater extent could be obtained if desired. Offers, accompanied by references, to be sent to Octavius O'Brien, Esq., 23 Kildare St. Dublin. "(Mr. O'Brien was Lord Meath's solicitor and advisor).

There appears to have been some difficulty in letting the house and the land together, and in 1888 an advertisement for the farm stated: "The house and four acres could be taken separately as a shooting or fishing lodge, or as gentleman's residence if desired". The house having subsequently been let, the adjoining farmhouse or steward's house - with stone-built and slated offices and a large hay shed - was let in separately in 1894. It came with around 40 acres of land, the later having been well-fenced, reclaimed, drained and manured. In 1901 the house was leased from Lord Meath by John Edmund O'Moore B.L, at which time it was known as Knockrath House. O'Moore was a retired solicitor, (mainly working in the Court of Chancery), who in the 1911 Census was recorded as living at the house with his wife Jane and one servant. Born in Co. Dublin, he was likely related to the O'Moore family of Clogan Castle in Co. Offaly; a Church of Ireland family who in the mid-nineteenth century owned thousands of acres of land in the West of Ireland. His father, John O'Moore Snr, had a solicitor's office at 9 Holles street in the 1830's, and acted as a legal advisor to some of the Young Irelanders in 1848.

On his retirement, John O'Moore Jnr. reported that he was living on income from an annuity, likely derived from land he formerly held in Co. Dublin, and government bonds. He died in 1920 at Valetta, Lower Georges St, Kingstown (Dun Laoghaire), aged 74. In 1927, a Mrs Hasset was living on the property. (Photo NBHS & Google)