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Roundwood & District

History & Folklore Journal No 6



General Joseph Holt
Extracts Of His Memoirs

Edited By Peter O'Shaughnessy

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(Continued inside back cover)

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From The Chair

Once again it gives me great pleasure to introduce the latest edition of our journal. This year we have devoted the entire journal to Joseph Holt, who is without doubt the most important historical figure to have close connection with our area.

Although the folk memory of Joseph Holt had all but died out during the past number of years interest in his exploits has been rekindled, no doubt due in part to the up-coming Bicentennial of the 1798 rebellion.

By publishing these extracts in their original form for the first time we believe Joseph Holt (warts and all) will be given proper recognition in his own area for his extraordinary part in turbulent times in the history of our country.

The extracts here published amount to only a small part of the entire 'memoirs' and do not include any of the Australian section, however we believe they will be of great interest to all with an interest in history and hope that in the run up to the Bicentenary that other Local History Societies will follow suit and publish articles on 1798.

During his research for his book on Holt - "A Rum Story" - published in Australia in 1988, Peter O'Shaughnessy came to Roundwood and thereby became friendly with many people in the area. We are deeply indebted to him and to Martin and Michael who made it possible. Finally special thanks to all our patrons whose generosity keeps us going, as we receive no grants whatsoever for our work.

Sean Kavanagh
December 1994

To Sean and Annie Holt
of Aughrim, Co. Wicklow.

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for their assistance and encouragement:

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permission to use the manuscript of the 'History' of Joseph Holt.

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Introduction

In 1838 a book entitled *Memoirs of Joseph Holt* was published. It had been 'edited' by Thomas Crofton Croker. In fact, Croker has taken extraordinary liberties with the text, interpolating no less than one hundred passages of his own invention. Holt's affirmations of loyalty to His Majesty, King George III, were made more resounding and were often followed by a moral disquisition, or envoi, tacked on by 'The Editor'. Furthermore, Croker 'dignified' the vernacular of Holt, thus pushing 'The General' a few notches up the social scale to become a man of rank, a poised gentleman, equipped with elegant turns of speech which enabled him to hold his own in the cut and thrust of an argument with his 'betters'.

In effect, Croker had created a fictional character, worthy to figure in a Walter Scott novel. The social transformation, wrought by an editor of considerable literary skill, destroyed the character of Holt.

In 1818, Holt began to write, and partly dictate, his 'History', as he calls it, probably referring to copious notes he had made during his trials and adventures. Some of the text of the manuscript is in his own hand but most of it seems to have been written by 'scribes', one of them probably a professional copyist, working from 'rough copy', or listening to Holt's dictation.

Much of the spelling in the manuscript is erratic, or more precisely phonetic - 'nees' for niece, 'cud' for could, 'cornal' for colonel, 'been' for being, 'vanglish' for evangelist, 'male' for meal, and 'sufference' for suffering, - and there is no punctuation whatever.

I have very rarely altered a word of Holt's text and only occasionally inserted one, when I was convinced that a word had obviously been missed out. From time to time I have retained an erratic spelling, just to remind the reader that the writer is 'speaking', and speaking in an Irish accent. Hence the retention of 'tould' for 'told'.

For more than a hundred and fifty years, historians such as Lecky, Madden and Dickson, have been 'led up the garden path' by accepting the authenticity of Croker's text. In 1988, my book *A Rum Story* - covering Holt's account of his thirteen years in New South Wales (1800-1812) was published in Australia. Here published for the first time, and by courtesy of The Roundwood Historical Society is some of Holt's own account of his days 'in the field' as the most important of all military leaders in The rebellion of 1798.

Peter O'Shaughnessy - December 1994

Roundwood and District
History and Folklore Journal No. 6

General Joseph Holt
Extracts From His Memoirs

Editor: Peter O'Shaughnessy
Production Editor: Martin Timmons
Production Assistant: Michael Larkin

More than forty years after the end of the Rebellion of 1798, Brother Luke Cullen interviewed veterans of the insurrection, many of whom had served under General Joseph Holt. Although Cullen seems to have had a personal bias against Holt, his Memoirs have been an invaluable aid in giving alternative versions of some of the incidents related by Holt. I must also acknowledge the importance of two other 'key' works: The Memoirs of Miles Byrne and Memoirs of Joseph Holt by Thomas Crofton Croker. Although Croker's work on Holt is deeply flawed, many of his notes are of great interest and I have often drawn on them.

All have heard sure of Vinegar Hill,
Likewise of the Battle of Tara,
And of General Holt and his men,
With the drums they call tanta-ra-ra-ra-ra.

Cover Portrait (artist unknown) courtesy of Bernadette Hayden.

General Joseph Holt

The baptismal register at Castlemacadam, Avoca, County Wicklow, shows that Joseph Holt was baptised there on July, 22 1759, but this is no sure index to the approximate date of his birth, since families sometimes delayed the ceremony of baptism until several years after the birth of a child. The Dictionary of National Biography gives his age at the time of death as 70. It is not clear on what authority. If this were the case Holt might have been born in 1756.

Holt is buried with his wife, Hester and their daughter, Marianne (Mrs. William Shaw) in Carrickbrennan Cemetery, Monkstown, County Dublin. Records in Christ Church (Church of Ireland), Monkstown show that he was buried on May 12 1826. The inscription on Holt's tombstone states that he was aged 64 (?) at the time of his death.

According to Thomas Crofton Croker, Holt was descended from Elizabethan and Jacobean planters. Croker gives no authority for this but it is possible that Holt had given the information to Sir William Betham and that Betham passed it on to Croker. A story (in the Luke Cullen papers) has it that, when Holt was threatened with execution because of a report that he had 'informed', one of the men present urged that there was no good reason for sparing Holt's life, since he was 'a descendant of one of Cromwell's soldiers.' One can hardly rely on that as evidence. The belief may have been founded on the fact that the district of Avoca had been 'planted' by English settlers in the seventeenth century.

Thomas Crofton Croker gives this description of Holt. Never having met the man himself, it is no doubt derived from a description given to him by Holt's neighbour in Kingstown, (Dun Laoghaire) Sir William Betham:

His height was about five feet ten inches; he was extremely well made, of compact muscle, and remarkably athletic and vigorous. Holt's hair was black, and his eye-brows heavy and bushy; his eyes were dark and penetrating, but rather small. His nose was of that class usually termed Roman, his forehead was finely developed, and his face well-proportioned and intellectual. He wore his beard under his chin, shaving only the prominent parts, and this fashion appears to have been a distinguishing mark of the fraternity of United Irishmen. Holt had the power of readily assuming a commanding or determined look, but there was nothing ferocious in it or his appearance; and his smile was one beaming with benevolence.'

1798 - Calendar of Events

- | | | |
|-----------|-------|---|
| March | 12 | Arrest of Dublin United Irish Leaders (The Leinster Directory) |
| March | 12 | Arrest of Lord Edward Fitzgerald by Major Sirr. |
| March | 30 | Imposition of Martial Law. |
| May | 10 | Joseph Holt's house burnt down. Joins rebels in Devil's Glen. |
| May | 23-24 | Rebellion breaks out in Leinster. Centres on Wexford. |
| May | 30 | Wexford town captured by rebels. |
| May | 30 | Battle of Newtownmountkennedy |
| June | 5 | Rebels defeated at New Ross. |
| June | 9 | Battle of Arklow. |
| June | 6-13 | Outbreaks in Ulster. |
| June | 21 | Rebels defeated at Vinegar Hill, Enniscorthy. |
| June | 29 | Battle of Ballyellis (Carnew). |
| July | 11 | Battle at Clonard (Midlands campaign). |
| August | 21 | French force (of about 800) under General Humbert lands at Killala Bay. |
| August | 27 | 'Castlebar Races'. Declaration of Connaught Republic. |
| September | 8 | General Humbert surrenders at Ballinamuck. |
| October | 11 | Sir John Warren drives off French squadron off the coast of Donegal. |
| October | 22 | French fleet, with Wolfe Tone aboard the 'Hoche' sighted off Killala Bay. |
| November | 3 | Wolfe Tone arrested in Lough Swilly and landed at Bunclrana. |
| November | 10 | Joseph Holt surrenders to Lord Powerscourt. |
| November | 11 | Trial of Wolfe Tone in Dublin. |
| November | 19 | Death of Wolfe Tone, after suicide attempt. |

Note on the text

In the following pages the extracts from Holt's manuscript are interspersed at regular intervals by Peter O'Shaughnessy's own commentary and interpretations. In order to easily distinguish this for the reader, Peter O'Shaughnessy's comments will be printed in italics.

Joseph Holt *Extracts From His Memoirs*

Known by the title of *General Holt* in *The Irish Rebellion of '98*, who was born in Ballydonnell¹ in the parish of Castlemacadam, County of Wicklow, younger son of John Holt of that parish.

My father² had five sons, namely John³, Thomas, William, Joshua and Jonathan, and one daughter, named Mary. My father held a very comfortable farm of land, at a very low rent, which still remains in the possession of my eldest brother's family to this day. My father gave them all trades in the building way, but me. But I was more inclined for agriculture than building so I went to a friend of my father's, a Mr. John Low, a steward and gardener for Mr. Sweeney in the County of Dublin, near Bray and there continued five years and three months.

Then I went to venture to the north of Ireland to improve my business. I stopped there a little time and at my return, walking from the Phoenix Park⁴, I was accosted by a Gentleman of the name of Fitzgerald - Captain of the 32nd Regiment of Foot destined for the East India Company. He and I had a conversation together and he said he would wish of all things he had the like of me in his Company and he would appoint me, on the first commencement, Paymaster Sergeant, so I complied and remained till I recruited 32 men for the Regiment in the course of twenty one days, but being requested home by my parents I declined to go abroad and left the Regiment.

I remained with my parents till the year 1780, two years after, at which time⁵ I got married to the daughter of Mrs. Long⁶, widow of Roundwood, County Wicklow, who had a very comfortable farm of land under Andrew Price⁷, Esquire. I there remained as farmer and agent over publick works in the

1. Holt's manuscript reads Ballydaniel. Since the opening pages are not written in Holt's own hand, this is one of the many errors that resulted from the use of 'scribes', either copying from a rough draft or taking dictation and trusting to what they thought they heard. Ballydonnell is near Redcross. Holt later lived at Ballymoneen, above Castlemacadam.
2. Holt's father, John Holt, died on March 3, 1785 and is buried in the old churchyard at Castlemacadam.
3. Holt's brothers, William and Jonathan, were enlisted as United Irishmen. William was involved in recruiting for the movement as early as mid June, 1797. Thomas was probably sympathetic to the United Irishman. Some years after the Rebellion his movements were watched closely by agents of Dublin Castle.
4. Phoenix Park. Holt's commission 'under Sir John Blaquiere' may have brought him to the Phoenix Park on this occasion, for Sir John was Bailiff of the park and lived in a lodge there.
5. It is possible, but I think unlikely, that 'at which time' should read as 'at Tigh Linn'.
6. Mrs. Long's maiden name had been Manning and her family reputed to have Orange connections.
7. Holt's landlord, Andrew Price, was a Sheriff and Grant Jury member in 1790. He joined John Verner's Orange Lodge on March 7, 1798. He was also one of the two local magistrates. Major Hardy looked on him as a 'dove.' In a letter dated lay 27, 1797, Hardy wrote that Price was ailing and 'in action' and therefore not able to carry out all of the duties expected of a magistrate in such troubled times.

barony of Ballinacor and parish of Derrelossary. I also held a commission under Sir John Blaquièrre, Knight of the Bath and Chief County Keeper and Billet Master, and held that commission till the year 1798.

Being joined by Mr. Brian Byrne and Mr. Martin Byrne I sealed⁸ the woollen old drapery of the County Wicklow and Wexford and part of the County Dublin.

Among his various occupations and skills, Holt could count his appointment as a Barony sub Constable. It was an occasional occupation. He is commissioned to hunt the notorious Wicklow bandit Pat Rogers. After a long chase, Holt tracks his prey down to Ballycrystal, near Newtown Barry (Bunclody) in County Wexford. Holt takes his captive to Justice James at Ballycrystal House and ask for 'protection.'

In Newtown Barry three Wexford magistrates tell Holt that they mean to commit his prisoner to Wexford Gaol. Holt fiercely resists this seizure and insists that his commission is to deliver Roger to Wicklow Gaol. Having crossed into Wicklow, Holt goes to Major Chamney where the Major summons a Justice of the Peace, Mr. Moreton, from Tinahely, who writes out an official 'committal.'

Holt delivers Rogers to Wicklow Gaol.

Holt's work as an officer enforcing the law certainly must have earned him a great deal of unpopularity and a qualified respect. Some would have called him a 'Tory Hunter' the word 'Tory' deriving from the Irish 'tuirseach', one who tracks down criminals. According to Luke Cullen, Tory hunting was thought to be 'the expiring spark of priest hunting.'

Having often been called to testify in court proceedings, Holt acquired some familiarity with legal terminology. This explains why, in his 'History' he sometimes makes use of terms such as 'the aforementioned', or 'the above mentioned'. Sometimes I have taken the liberty of omitting these when they occur in his text.

For much of his life Holt would be dogged by the suspicion that, at heart, his sympathies were with 'The Establishment' (which indeed they often were). This is why, at the outset of his 'History', he is at pains to define the parameters of such work: He is prepared to capture a criminal, but scorns the idea of catching a man out by sly provocation.

8. Assessed its quality.

In the year 1794 there was a large banditti assembled in Dublin and came up in the neighbourhood of Roundwood in the County of Wicklow, robbed Luke O'Toole of Annamoe, Laughlin Byrne of Ashtown, Christopher Limes of Knockraheen, Mr. Thomas Bell, near Delgany, and several others.

Now, my gentle reader, I am going to give you an account of some of my passages in early days. In August, 1794, when returning from Moneystown, a small village about two miles from Roundwood, I saw Andrew Price, Esq., Francis Eardley, Esq. in company with two men. Higginbotham (one of the two) addressed me, saying 'Did you see Pat Rogers today?' I answered no. 'If ye set⁹ him for me I will give you one hundred pounds.'

I looked at him with scorn and asked him did Rogers deserve to be taken. He answered 'Yes.'

I replied 'I will apprehend him' (and fulfilled my promise) but I told him that I should never become a setter. Mr. Price answered 'Sir, you are mistaken in Mr. Holt, he will do the duty of a man.'

This Higginbotham asked me was I able to take him? I answered 'Him and another like him.'

I soon gave them my direction and proceeded in search of Rogers, and after a chase of 500¹⁰ miles, at the hour of twelve o' night, I took him in a place called Mullawnasmear¹¹ in the corner of a field in the County of Wexford. Having received information of the road which the robber went, and having communicated the matter to Mr. Price, who immediately wrote to Mr. Thomas Bradnor of Tomacork¹², I proceeded on my journey accompanied by two men, who were appointed by Mr. Bradnor to assist me.

We rode on till half after ten at night, we came near Newtown Barry¹³. I bid the two men show me the first shebeen¹⁴ house, where drams was sold. They showed me a house belonging to Mr. Bulger. We dismounted, went in and called for half a pint of whiskey and asked Mr. Bulger if he had seen a young man on such a day in his house. He said he had, and that he was inquiring the way to Mullawnasmear. Said I 'You are very right, that is my friend, he is a shoemaker by trade. He and I were in a dreadful fight. I have reconciled the parties and am going to bring him home.'

9. Setter. One who gains the confidence of his prey by seeming to befriend him.

10. This is obviously a mistake and should almost certainly be 50 miles which is the approximate distance between Roundwood and the Bunclody district.

11. Mullawnasmear or Mullawnasmer. ms. reads Mullawnasmareen. Another instance of a scribe's errors. In this case he was probably copying from an earlier draft which was hard to decipher.

12. Two miles north of Carnew and the site of a barracks (now demolished.)

13. Newtown Barry. Bunclody in Wexford. In the 1930's a local plebiscite resulted in the decision to revert to the Irish name.

14. An unlicensed pub (often tumbledown) selling spirits.

Very well, Sir, I am glad to direct you the right way. You will find him at the Widow Hughes's, or at Tom Neill's near Ballycrystal.¹⁵

We drank the second half pint, being cheerful after hearing this good information. After we paid the Landlord we proceeded on our journey towards the house of Mrs. Hughes. I told my companions to let me know when I was within a half a mile of the house. They did, I dismounted, and having a dark lanthorn and wax candle I went into a house and lit it, placed it in my lanthorn and put it in my pack¹⁵.

In a few minutes after, we reached the house of Mrs. Hughes¹⁶. I leapt from my horse and forced the door; and having turned my lanthorn, I pulled out a double barrel pistol with my other hand. I asked if they had a female lodger in the house. They said no. The whole family was very much alarmed. I searched the entire house to no purpose. To hinder suspicion, I said that the servant maid had robbed my wife and that I had got information she was in that neighbourhood.

When we left the place the girl of the house crossed the fields and repaired to the house of Tom Neill's. I watched her running. She soon gave the alarm, and I saw a door open suddenly. I left my comrades and horse in the field, and seeing light on a precipice and a man running out naked, immediately supposed him to be my object and pursued him to the summit of the hill. I saw the robber putting on his small clothes. I advanced and told him he was my prisoner. He said that he was very glad that a man from his own neighbourhood should have him at his jurisdiction. He accordingly submitted, but instantly took the advantage of me and brought me to the ground. Finding myself in that situation I redoubled my efforts and sprung off my back and cast him under me. During this time he caught my sword. It happened to be by the blade. I instantly took off my garters, compelling him (by force) to dwell on the ground till I tied him. When I had the game secured my comrades comes up asking me how I escaped or got rid of them. I answered them that I was a true sportsman that never mist the game.

This country is very mountainous. Its inhabitants are quite wild and wicked. I cried out to Derman and Dobbs to tell the gentlemen that I had Rogers taken, merely as a prevention of any applying to take the prisoner. These words struck them with such terror¹⁷ that I commanded several of them to fetch me to Justice James, of Ballycrystal, leaving my pistols in a corner of

15. The pack attached to the saddle of his horse?

16. A field in Ballycrystal, quite destitute of habitation, is, to this day, known as Hughes' field - although I was told that the Hughes had long since left the district.

17. Such terror - Perhaps because, lacking an official order, they and Holt might be judged to have taken the law into their own hands.

the field till morning, as in the conflict they dropt from me. Some of these affrighted people says 'Sir, Mr. James is a very wicked man, he will probably fire on us when we call him.' I answered 'I shall compel him to wait on me and company.'

In a very short time I entered the court, or lawn of Mr. James¹⁸ and most vehemently called. He instantly raised his room windows, asking 'Who comes there?' I answered that my name was Holt and that I had in custody 'Patrick Rogers, the noted-robber,' and called to him for protection. He immediately ran downstairs. We all went into his house. He asked me several questions concerning Rogers and when I related to him all the detail of the particulars, he asked Rogers what induced him to come into that neighbourhood. He answered he came on a visit. Mr. James answered him 'Holt unfortunately came to pay you a visit.'

At this time it was about two o'clock in the morning. I told Mr. James that I had dropt my pistols in the field. Mr. James sent a man with me to look for them and we found them in the place expected. During my absence Mr. James took care of the prisoner Roger. At my return it was about five o'clock in the morning so I took leave of Mr. James and proceeded on my journey.

I soon reached Newtown Barry. I went into a tavern. The news immediately transpired through the town that Rogers, the noted criminal, was taken. In a short time three magistrates entered the tavern room. They were accompanied by Henry Gowan, brother of Hunter Gowan¹⁹. Their curiosity led them to see the prisoner and, after some conversation, they told me that they would take the prisoner and commit him to Wexford Gaol. I told them that he was taken and that by a man who was able so to do, and that I would not give up my prisoner as I considered that they gave me an insult, and desired that they might quit the room, and told them if they refused they should receive the contents of my pistol. The aforesaid Henry Gowan told them that I spoke according to law as no person was able to enter a room where a prisoner was in custody without leave from the person who detained him. They immediately quit the room and Rogers, the prisoner, said that he'd lose his life before I should be offended. This expression caused a compassionate feeling to arise in my breast for him. I instantly ordered him the best breakfast the house could afford. This unfortunate man had sprained his leg in the engagement with me so that I had no reason to fear of his effecting an escape.

18. Ballycrystal House, the residence of Mr. James, was about two miles to the east. It no longer stands.

19. John Hunter Gowan, leader of a cavalry corps known as 'The black mob' was notoriously cruel. He liked to go hunting with his hounds. On one such occasion he crossed the path of the elder Garret Byrne, (father of Garret and Billy) of Ballymanus who, outraged at the effrontery of this 'upstart', laid into him with his whip.

I called after the aforesaid magistrates for their assistance to put me out of their county. I told them I was well known in the County of Wicklow. I gave them little or no satisfaction who I was, as I was under no control nor had I even a warrant against the prisoner. Though I showed the leg was sprained, nevertheless the gentlemen caused him to be tied under the horse's belly. A vast number came to the bounds of the County and parted me there. Then I liberated the prisoner from his cords. We proceeded to the house of Major Chamney²⁰, of Ballyrahan, a worthy gentleman who received me in the warmest terms of gratitude. When I entered the Major's yard he ran out and asked me who was the man that had taken Rogers. I stepped up and answered that it was I. He then asked my name, and from whence. I answered 'Holt, from Roundwood, and a near neighbour to the prisoner. He said that I had given proof of being baptised truly, 'as I see you are Holt²¹ by nature.'

He ordered me to walk in. I answered, 'Sir, as soon as I see the prisoner sitting down in safety I shall obey your order.' Then I sat down and got some refreshment. The Major asked what magistrate gave me the warrant. I answered I never had any such thing. Immediately he sent for Henry Moreton²², Esq., who was a Justice of the Peace, and, on my proving (before him) that the prisoner was a Patrick Rogers who was so notorious in reprobacy as to be gazetted, after said declaration Mr. Moreton wrote his committal during this time. Major Chamney sent for two constables, by name Francis Rice and William Hendrick. I was made special in the committal.

We set forward for Tinahely, a market town. I entered the house of Ralph Tounrel[?] and engaged a room. I ordered bed for the prisoner. Those two constables: I heard them say 'If he makes his escape we are not accountable as Holt holds the committal.' I came in and says to Hendrick 'You must go in and sleep with Rogers and Rice shall watch you both when both lying down.' I called the host and handcuffed them both. I said to Hendrick 'I hope you won't endeavour to escape.' So I went to bed, it being the fourth night since I had slept.

I arose next morning early. I being only twenty two miles from the town of Wicklow and six days from home I hurried myself to get rid of my first criminal. On the way Rogers got very solid and serious. I asked him several

20. The house still stands, a few miles south of Tinahely. Opposite the gate is a Croppy monument. Chamney would be later killed before the siege at Ballyrahan House which followed the Battle at Ballyeillys, just to the east of Carnew. He is supposed to have offended Lord Fitzwilliam because he had seduced one of his own servants.

21. 'Holt' taken to mean tenacious or reliable?

22. Mr. Moreton would also figure in the siege at Ballyrahan House. His own house stood only a few hundred yards to the north, towards Tinahely. During the siege the lamps from Moreton's house shone across the fields, thus lighting up the movements of the Rebels who were trying to storm Ballyrahan House.

questions, to which he answered, and from his information it enabled to make out where more of his accomplices dwelt.

When I left him in the gaol of Wicklow I proceeded in pursuit of offenders for the space of three months, which served to amuse me with the same gratification as should glow in the breast of a true sportsman in pursuit of animals of chase, and without fee or reward.

Gentle reader, was I to specify the particulars of each criminal person whom I was instrumental to bring to condign punishment in it would tire even Fabian²³ to relate each case, but I now refer ye to captain Thomas Archer of Mount John to identify my fortunate exertions in taking Robbers, Pickpockets, Coiners and other Disobeyers of the laws. I had such an element in punishing criminals as induced me to go to Dublin where I apprehended a Martin Synnot, a celebrated coiner, in New St., a John Morgan, a Thomas Keenan. In time my name was to the disobeyers of justice a terror. I still continued as Alnager²⁴

Francis Synge, the squire of the Roundwood Park Estate and one of the two local magistrates, employs Holt as overseer for the construction of a stretch of road between Roundwood and Dublin. Later Holt receives another commission: to improve a stretch of the road between Roundwood and Newtownmountkennedy, and repair a bridge over the Vartry river. Holt says that Thomas Hugo, of Drumeen, was 'overseer' with him.

The Welsh Regiment, The Ancient Britons were often stationed at Newtownmountkennedy and, on the completion of this work, Roundwood would have become more accessible to them. Roundwood did not have a corps of Yeomanry and it is possible that Hugo instigated the project with the protection of his own property and person in mind.

Holt pays the workmen out of his own pocket. Hugo refuses to reimburse him. Holt is furious and threatens legal action to recover the money. Why, it might be asked, did he not persist?

Holt's account is disingenuous and acquires another dimension if the reader fills in the interstices: After leaving the 32nd regiment of Foot and returning to Roundwood, Holt had joined the Volunteer Corps in Arklow. In 1793 it had been disbanded because of fears that, far from offering protection

23. Holt probably alludes to "Fabian's Chronicles". Semi-literate Irishmen invariably seize upon all occasions to exhibit the full extent of their knowledge, and the result is a national reputation for oratory.' (Thomas Crofton Croker)

24. Inspector who tested the quality and determined the grade of a cloth.

against a possible French invasion, it might be nurturing 'seditious' elements. It can then be assumed that Holt had acquired a thorough training as a soldier to complement his experience as a 'Tory' hunter.

Since April, 1797 there had been such an acceleration in recruitment to the United Irish cause in Wicklow that, by May, 1798, it had enrolled approximately 14,000 men, each of them assigned to cells of twelve. The cause looked ripe. As a man of high rearing ambition Holt might be expected to have weighed his own prospects carefully. Would he follow what looked to be 'the nearest way' or hold fast to his principles as a law enforcing officer? He would have known that many men were doubly enlisted. Indeed if he had chosen to enlist before the autumn of 1797, there would have been no stigma attaching to this for, until then, although public meetings of The United Irishmen were banned, it was not illegal to enrol. Prior to Lord Camden's proscription many yeomen (among them Garret Byrne) were doubly enrolled. After the edict Byrne chose to resign from his corps. It is an important distinction to bear in mind when it comes to assessing Holt: An early enlistment would not necessarily indicate that it carried with it a commitment to military service. On March 29, 1798, Camden had proclaimed martial law and this had let loose a savage persecution of many Catholic farmers and others suspected of being United Irishmen. Major Hardy of the Antrim Corps and Commander in Chief of all forces in Wicklow and North Wexford, had done little to check the activities of the yeomanry and militia, who had often run riot and burnt down houses, sometimes merely because they bore a personal grudge against their victims. This brutal intimidation actually boosted recruitment by driving hesitant farmers to enlist for the sake of personal protection. There is no reason to doubt Holt's word that he had been shocked at this form of lawlessness. And yet if he enlisted as a United Irishman his record as an occasional officer of the law and his unpopularity in some quarters might have brought him under suspicion as an 'Informer.'

Holt's plea that his house was burnt down as an act of personal vengeance by Hugo will not stand up. At this time 'Information' against Holt had reached Lord Powerscourt, and Daniel Nailor, (who bore a grudge against Holt for initiating a prosecution against him for recovery of money owed by him to Edward Brady), had 'informed' on him.

Holt says that, as Billet Master, he had arranged quarters for some of the Antrim Militia, but omits to mention his efforts to recruit two of that Antrim militia who guarded his landlord, Andrew Price's estate, Fairview, into the ranks of The United Irishmen.

There can be little doubt that Hugo - probably animated by personal vengeance as Holt says - was one of the party who led the Fermanagh Militia

to burn down his farmhouse but he omits to tell us that Major Hardy and Thomas King, who headed the 'Bond men of Cronebane' were directly responsible for burning it down. (Later in his 'History' Holt does implicate King). There is a letter by Hardy claiming that he had refrained from burning down other houses but admitting that he was so 'irritated' by Holt's attempts to subvert his men that 'I burned his house.' Certainly there is circumstantial evidence that Holt's recruiting zeal may have produced a large crop of Antrim Militia men at this time. When interrogated at Dublin Castle, in November, 1798, Holt would depose that 28 of The Antrim Militia had deserted to him.

Holt says that his farmhouse was burnt down on May 10. Before this, the Fermanagh Militia had ransacked his house. No doubt they also searched for evidence of his enlistment, and probably found it. When had Holt enlisted as a United Irishman? It may have been as early as 1797: a document, cited by Sir Richard Musgrave in 'Memoirs of the different Rebellions in Ireland', lists Holt as holding the rank of 'Captain' in that year. Later in his 'History' Holt describing his meeting with Lord Powerscourt, hints that, in November, it was eight months since his enlistment. i.e. he suggests that it may have occurred some time in March.

Some historians have believed that Holt was enlisted, by James Kavanagh the leading United Irishmen in Roundwood and proprietor of an inn and general store there. In his book 'Michael Dwyer' Charles Dickson says that Kavanagh, aware of Holt's brash ways and loose tongue, at first hesitated to swear in his friend but eventually complied. According to Dickson, Kavanagh's fears proved only too well founded when Holt attempted to enlist the aid of an employee of Hugo's in procuring ashplants to make pike handles and the employee 'blabbed' to his master. That story has not been substantiated but Kavanagh's account may be said to be well documented, having been given by him to Luke Cullen in 1818. (See Luke Cullen Papers) By that time Kavanagh felt bitterly about Holt, who had formerly been his friend.

The Rebellion broke out on May 23rd. Against all expectations it soon centred on Wexford, where United Irish enrolment had been relatively low. Marianne Elliott has put the view that, since, in Wexford and elsewhere, the insurrection was sparked off by local grievances and atrocities, it was not therefore a United Irish Rebellion at all. That view is consistent with Holt's account of how he was drawn into the insurrection by circumstances. But then Holt's account is flawed because he does not tell the whole truth.

On May 30 an attack was made on Newtownmountkennedy, but only one of the three columns assigned to the operation actually took part. The Rebels were routed and Major Hardy (Acting Brigadier General Hardy to be precise) licensed, or turned a blind eye to, the massacre of at least twenty two civilians

in the vicinity. Sir Richard Musgrave later reported that Holt did lead a contingent of six hundred men towards the town but that it arrived too late to take part in the action. Holt's forces had probably been put into disarray as a result of Hugo's burning out of the village of Cloghogue, near Luggala which he carried out as a reprisal for the attack on his house at Drumeen.

The defeat for the Rebels must have been the more galling since, aside from the strategic importance of the town as a 'gateway' towards Dublin, they must have been fired by a desire to revenge the massacre there, on March 20, of local civilians, by the Welsh regiment 'The Ancient Britons.' In the New South Wales section of his 'History' Holt refers to that massacre thus: '... The Ancient Britons cutting the haunches and eyes off of the young women in the fair of Newtownmountkennedy for wearing green stuff petticoats of an Easter Tuesday in the year of ninety eight.'

As Holt tells us, Major Hardy did indeed set fire to The Devil's Glen. For years afterwards, the blackened stumps testified to that burning.

After some time, Francis Synge²⁵, Esq. (A gentleman of fame for taking care of roads, bridges, pipes, gulleys, etc.) placed me as Overseer over 84 perches of that road leading from Dublin to Roundwood. My performance pleased him so well that he continued me for many years in that employment.

Mr. Thomas Hugo, of Drumeen, spoke to me to measure a piece of that road leading from Newtownmountkennedy to Roundwood, in the parish of Newcastle. I measured 184 perches²⁶ from a thornbush on John Hodges's field to the corner of Pat Keenan's house. I next estimated for arched coping on Varry²⁷ Bridge, underpinning, butments and paving arches. The whole work amounted to £ 89.12.6 which was presented at March Assizes, agreed to and paid to Abraham Critchley, then Country Treasurer. Mr. Thomas Hugo was Overseer with me.

I carried on the work, and agreeable to estimation, and paid the men whom

25. Francis Synge, Esq. Owner of Roundwood park estate and, with Andrew Price, one of the two local magistrates. The tolerance and liberality of the two Roundwood magistrates appears to have worried Hardy, who proposed that Thomas Hugo be appointed as a magistrate. 'Too many doves as magistrates, not enough hawks' is one of Hardy's themes. If Holt had got wind of the prospect of this appointment it may have been a decisive factor in his decision to throw in his lot with The United Irishmen and take to 'the field' in active command. His 'rival', Hugo, would now have the whip hand.

26. One perch equals five and a half yards.

27. In 1863 this section of the Varry River would be submerged, with the creation of the Varry reservoir, since then a source of Dublin's water supply. The old Varry bridge can still be seen most summers when the level of the reservoir drops.

I employed every Saturday night. Mr. Hugo neither supported me with money nor attention.

Pardon me, Good Reader, the labyrinth I must lead you through to explain that Mr. Hugo's tyranny to me caused me to wade through most innumerable and painful sorrows. After the aforesaid Mr. Hugo received the aforementioned sum from the Treasurer, when I went for the money I was told by the Treasurer that Mr. Hugo received it from him. I said I was very sorry that he done so as Mr. Hugo didn't give me any money to pay the executors of the work, and of course that I now want the money to discharge the debts the work involved me in.

On my return from Mr. Critchley's I called to Mr. Hugo, asked him for the money, which he promised to give me in a few days. I repeated my visits for nine different times. At length, being provoked, I told him that I would take as speedy steps for recovery of the money as the law directs.

I went once more to the Treasurer, letting him know Mr. Hugo's conduct, saying I would immediately have the advice of Counsellor Guinness of Moss Street (?) No. 9, that he would direct me what to do. I mounted my horse and rode off. I was hailed by the Treasurer's brother²⁸ who advised the Treasurer to pay me and deal with Hugo himself. He accordingly did. He (Mr. Hugo) swore that he'd be revenged of me and made good his most ungrateful and wicked designs.

Gentle and impartial reader, on reading my publication you shall see how the spirit of resentment roused me to obtain satisfaction on this cruel and inhuman tyrant Hugo. He was the first man who commenced burning houses in that part of the County Wicklow. One morning he consumed 14 of his poor tenants' houses and came to the house of a Patrick Merrigan²⁹, asking him if he had his rent. Merrigan said he would have it in the course of a week, that he had a piece of flannel and that as soon as he sold he would pay him. 'I shall give you a receipt in full', says Hugo, taking out a pistol and shooting him dead on the spot. You must know that this poor man was called from his bed, which prevented his disconsolate wife having the trouble of stripping him, being naked.

You now shall see that I was at this period employed in various stations where strict honesty and faithfulness was required. I was care keeper, wood

28. James Critchley, who had a reputation for cruelty and had ordered the beheading of two men in Glenmalur, using a large boulder as a 'block.' From time to time the boulder was said to 'weep' blood.

29. According to the Memoirs of Luke Cullen, Patrick Merrigan had been sworn in as a United Irishman, so that Hugo could claim some 'justification.' Hugo was one of the most savage, probably the most savage of the landlords in Wicklow to terrourise their tenants by burning down their houses.

ranger, sales master in Ballycurry for Mrs. Tottenham³⁰, with an unblemished character. I was also receiver and care keeper for Mr. Miles and Bryan Byrne of Ballynabarney, and Kirakee, and in the various situations of life that I filled enabled me to support my family in a decent manner. I was likewise Billet master for all moving militias and army that passed through that part of the country.

In the year 1798 a part of the Militia of the County Antrim came in that part of the country where I then lived³¹. I gave them billets on the different houses where I thought they would be best used and be most useful. I gave a billet on my own house to a sergeant and his wife, having a spare bed and room.³²

I had three presentments passed at March Assizes to repair that season, so I got my work done early in Spring to be ready. I little thought of the following enterprise to have to undertake: On the tenth day of May I was finishing cutting my turf³³. On the morning of that day, about half after five, Thomas Hugo and some of the Fermanagh Militia³⁴ came in my yard enquiring for me. Mrs. Holt told them where I was. They went away and returned about twelve o'clock and made a slight enquiry for me and was told as before. At two o'clock I came to dinner and was sitting in the parlour when the sergeant's wife entered, saying 'God help you, poor man, your life is in danger.' I arose up and asked her the reason. She said 'Your house is condemned and I am ordered out of it.'

So I went out. I went to the door and saw a vast number of military men in company with Thomas Hugo, and from knowing Hugo's heart to me, conveyed to my senses his inhuman designs, which fortunately gave me notice to effect an escape. After some time, despairing of finding me, they disappeared. I returned to my afflicted wife, afflicted with anxiety of mind and said that Hugo was determined to perpetrate his most ungrateful and

30. The Tottenhams possessed many estates, one of them abutting on The Devil's Glen. Mrs. La Touche, who later would play such an important part in Holt's surrender, was a daughter of Mrs. Tottenham.

31. At Mullinaveigue, about one mile to the north of Roundwood.

32. In a deposition given at Dublin Castle after his surrender Holt named 2 men of The Antrim Militia as having deserted to him. It is only too likely that, at this stage, he had already enlisted some of them, as Major Hanly claimed.

33. Holt's obituarist, writing in 'The Courier' newspaper, says that Holt had told him that, at this time, he had been absent in Carnew (?).

34. During the following years Thomas Hugo may have cultivated close relations with officers of the Fermanagh Militia. In 1800, his daughter Elizabeth whom he had once hoped to match in marriage with the dashing Billy Byrne (hanged at Wicklow town in 1799) married Captain John Armstrong, of The Fermanagh Militia. Once Hugo had borrowed money from Byrne; so that it is plausible enough that, at this time, he may have been hand pressed financially. The villain would prosper; with his Memorial to the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, in 1800 soliciting permission for the marriage to be celebrated, Thomas Hugo tendered the astonishingly munificent donation of £1,000.

undeserved promise.³⁵

I instantly took my cane-sword³⁶, a case of pistols, got some money from my wife, took my leave of her, my son and daughter. I crossed Vartry River and went on to White Rock, formerly occupied by a Mr. Edwards and at that time by Mr. James McClatchy, sub sheriff of the County of Wicklow. I sat down to meditate what step I had better take.

About seven o'clock, same evening, like Lot's wife I looked back - and my house in flames! I then roused my spirits and vowed revenge of the wicked perpetrator, as you shall hear I made good in some time after.³⁷ Good Reader, promises made in wrath are often attended with difficulty and sorrow.

I then proceeded on towards The Devil's Glen³⁸, thinking on my wife and children whose lives were dearer to me than my own. My wife came to me, letting me know that this inhuman tyrant said that burning my house was little gratification to him, as he hadn't me to partake of the flames.

The soldiers broke open my desk and made themselves master of all I was worth³⁹ in cash, loaded themselves with beef, bacon, hams, etc. My wife and children, being destitute of shelter, was abandoned to travel about exposed-to the efforts of the wicked and merciless.⁴⁰

Gentle Reader, I omitted to remark to you that a man - name of Daniel Nailor who lived at Mullenraymond⁴¹, a miller whom I made pay the sum of seven pounds to Edward Brady of Ballinacor⁴² (by virtue of a Decree I sold his mare) this Nailor vowed that he'd have his revenge of me. He attended

35. We might note that Hugo had previously warned Holt.

36. Hollow walking stick, which could serve as a scabbard, or sheath, for the sword. Under Martial Law, which was in force at this time, Holt would not have been permitted to have weapons.

37. On June 16 Saunders News-Letter reported the burning of Hugo's house, along with a number of others. Holt probably led the expedition. In his History he does not fulfil his promise to tell the reader what form his revenge took. He may have been deterred by the thought that, although twenty years had elapsed since the burning, Hugo's son, Captain Thomas Hugo, was still living and might have brought charges against him if Holt admitted his complicity. On March 28, 1799, Neil Devitt was tried and found guilty of the burning. His punishment was to be deported to serve in the army of The King of Prussia.

38. The Vartry is a mountain stream close to the hamlet of Roundwood. Its course lies for about three miles from Roundwood over a rocky and gravelly bed, through open and easy banks, until its waters are precipitated about one hundred feet with great force and fury into the Devil's Glen, forming a picturesque and irregular cascade. *Angling Excursions of Gregory Greenbrake in Ireland, 1824. (Thomas Crofton Croker)*

39. In Holt's obituary in 'The Courier' it seems to be implied that certain compromising letters may have been found in Holt's house.

40. Later in Holt's History we learn that, in July, Hester and his children were staying with one of Holt's brothers at Bohemabreena. Later she would come to stay at The Mill House, in the north eastern corner of Holt's farm. It is surely likely that there she was given some form of protection by her landlord, Andrew Price. Perhaps Price was absent at the time of the burning and Major Hardy, Hugo and Thomas King took advantage of this absence.

41. Probably Mullenraymond Hollybrook, just outside Bray. See also Price p.p. 304 note on Ballyremon Commons (near Calary).

42. Probably Ballinacorebeg, near Roundwood.

accordingly at the burning of my house. At this time the country was under Martial law, so that any miscreant who swore disaffection against any individual was instantly liable to die and no further investigation.

I continued on my journey towards The Devil's Glen where I met with a few persecuted creatures similar to myself. We betook ourselves to a cave where we passed the night. Next morning, being the 11th of May, an old man, name of Edward Saul, came to look for me, carrying with him some refreshment. Many words passed between us concerning the terrific appearance the present times made.

I cannot help to remark that at least one third of the people of The Glen was Protestants⁴³, but in short I discovered it was hard to be sure who had escaped the oath of a United Irishman, though I really think it must be nothing less than diabolical influence should imbibe such an idea in the heart of man; but I hope from the aforesaid barbarous treatment⁴⁴ I have received will form an apology for my initiation in endeavouring to obtain satisfaction of that most cruel Hugo. Gentle Reader, I write from no disgust or bigotry to any sect of people, nor will I spare explaining the facts and cruelties that I saw by each sect. I write from my own knowledge and not from verbal information.

Night approaching, I betook to my cell, which was a hole in a rock in The Devil's Glen. A young man, name of John Arnold⁴⁵, stayed with me all night. The 12th inst. in the morning I was cordially visited by my old friend, Edward Saul, bringing me support as the day before. When refreshed I walked out wishing to hear from the distressed people of The Glen, but to my sorrow couldn't hear a sentence from my wife and children.

I being at the time loaded with sorrow mixed with the spirit of revenge I says 'Come, Arnold, come as far as Ballinalea (a small village about one mile distant) and we will get some whiskey.' He readily complied and so we went. We crossed Ashford Bridge and came to the house of Thomas Kavanagh⁴⁶. Mrs. Kavanagh knew me very well (she yet survives) and gave me refreshment, saying 'My dear Holt, I am sorry for your misfortunes. I would with a good heart give you support for a year could I convey it to you with

43. The proportions Holt gives may be correct but I think we cannot assume that he had made a count of heads, or even that the figures are based on personal observation. After his return from New South Wales Holt is likely to have read all, or part of, the histories written by such people as Musgrave, Taylor and Teeling, and draw his Figures from their accounts. Nevertheless, it is a significant indication that, at this stage, Holt, as a Protestant, did not feel he was 'exceptional', as he would later.

44. At first sight this might seem to refer to the burning of Holt's house, but, since we know that he has concealed the circumstances of his enlistment, He might be taken to give an inadvertent reference to his long drawn out efforts to recover the money owed to him by Hugo. (Crofton Croker pp34 also?)

45. John Arnold Arundel in the manuscript. Probably a case of 'the scribe's ear playing him false.'

46. Kavanagh. (See Crofton Croker pp 36)

safety.' I drank fully for some minutes, which only served to aggravate my mind by bringing to more lively recollection the state of my distressed family.

Mrs. Kavanagh runs rapidly to the room, saying 'You will be taken, for here comes Marks and Chapman.' I asked her was there only two? She answered 'No.' I replied 'I shall take them.'

I took out my pistol, walked towards them, saying 'Do ye want me?'

They answered 'No, sir.'

I replied 'You lie, you damned cowards. I'd soon send ye to Eternity.'⁴⁷

Arnold and I passed safely into The Glen.

At this time the drink began to operate on me, which kindled my affection and I set out in quest of my aggrieved family, first borrowing a musket from one of my persecuted comrades and a few rounds of ball cartridges, prepared my pistol and set forward to Mullinaveigue, but could get no tidings of my care.⁴⁸

There were several of the Militia stationed at Justice Price's⁴⁹. It happened at the time I arrived at the ruins of my dwelling that four of the Militia was passing from Roundwood to Mr. Price's. I was so exasperated from my former treatment that, knowing at this time all of their army was my sworn enemies, I fired on them, which made them expedite their motion to Mr. Price's. They got under arms instantly, saying 'Holt was coming with at least a hundred men.'⁵⁰

I charged my piece and walked towards a neighbour's house. This person told me my family were well, and said the army had consumed everything in my house, taking with them money, and in fine everything they wished to be encumbered with.

I then walked back to The Glen, remained there for three weeks⁵¹, each day hearing more news of the confused state of the country. At this time there

47. When captured later by Holt's men these two were indeed 'sent to Eternity.'

48. Irish expression for 'my children.' Also to include family.

49. Keeping guard perhaps during Price's absence because He was 'sickly' and 'in action.'

50. This is surely a very significant slip of Holt's. If Holt had not already been enlisted and held command as a Captain, it is hardly credible that, in such a short time, he would have been able to muster a hundred men. And who more likely to know that he held rank than members of The Antrim Militia?

51. This is untrue. Holt is listed as having been present before the Battle of New Ross at Corbet Hill. After that he may have returned to The Devil's Glen. We cannot be certain that he actually took part in the Battle of New Ross but he was almost certainly involved in all of the following actions: The first battle of Hacketstown on May 25. The first raid on Hugo's house on May 29, after which, Hugo burned down the entire village of Cloghogue, of which he was the landlord, adjoining Lough Tay and Laggelaw. It was probably as a result of this reprisal that Holt had difficulty in mustering his men to take part in the Battle of Newtownmountkennedy on May 30. It was reported that Holt's forces arrived late on the scene and this would have been a major factor in the defeat of the Rebels. Major Hardy did indeed burn out The Devil's Glen, on May 30. Standing by The Grouse House, above Laggelaw and the rebel camp in Cloghogue far below, Holt, as he says, would have been able to see 'the conflagration.'

were about sixty men in The Devil's Glen, in the like forlorn and wretched state as myself.

I called a Council of Advice. I remarked to them that I saw several men whom I conceived to be spies, from which I said it was safer to remove. They were all residents and seemed not willing to quit. I mustered up my little affairs and stepped on towards my old ruins and got to The Grouse House, over Luggelaw Mountain. Being weary, I lay down on my grassy bed and slept for some time soundly. Next morning, looking towards The Glen, I saw it in a conflagration. I gave God thanks for the present escape.

Holt says that he 'proceeded promiscuously towards the mountains.' That curt summary might be said to cover a multitude of events which, since they were usually rebel defeats and did not redound to his credit, he preferred to leave unrecorded. Had he described them, the reader might have suspected Holt's long-standing enlistment as a United Irishman.

On June 4 Holt was present at the defeat of the rebels in The Battle of New Ross. A page in Commissary Dieman's book of accounts refers to him having been allocated provisions by the Commissary there and accords him the title of 'Colonel.' There were no official rank in The United Irish movement but a Colonel might be assumed to command a minimum of 1,000 men. It is extremely unlikely that, in this period, Holt would have commanded such a number. Holt may have been called Colonel as a 'courtesy' title. There is no evidence that Holt actually took part in the Battle at Corbet Hill, above New Ross.

Holt may have been present on June 9, at The Battle of Arklow, in which the rebel forces were commanded by Garret and William ('Billy') Byrne of the Ballymanus division and had previously been in touch with Father John Martin, of the Dublin Directory's Thomas Street committee, when they met near Rathfarnham on the outskirts of Dublin. If Arklow had been captured the plan had been to thrust north towards Wicklow town and thence to Dublin, where the arrival of the rebel forces would be a signal for an insurrection in the capital.

The rebel attack on Arklow proved unsuccessful. It was rumoured that Holt bore some responsibility for the defeat, having delayed bringing troops under his command into the fray.

Having failed to describe any of these events Holt tells us that he comes across 'about seventy forlorn creatures' commanded by Colonel McMahon, McMahon was a Dublin lawyer whose offices were in Aungier Street, Dublin. It

seems likely that these 'seventy forlorn creatures' were part of a Dublin contingent which, in expectation of victory at Arklow had been ready to join forces with the 'victors' to march on Dublin.

Father Martin later gave information saying that on June 12 it was planned to attack Dublin and that Holt would be leading a corps which would assemble at Rathfarnham.

While encamped on Fancy Mountain Holt gets news of his wife and family. Fancy Mountain is only about three miles from the site of Holt's farm at Mullinaveige so that it seems likely that Hester, Marianne and Joshua were staying at The Mill House which, much later in his History, he names as their place of refuge. This was probably situated in the north eastern part of his landlord, Andrew Price's property. It seems possible that Hester Holt told Holt's emissary of the presence of a bullock in a lonely field which Holt reluctantly killed.

It is intriguing that Andrew Price who, as a magistrate, was probably seen by Hardy as a 'dove' might have offered refuge to Holt's family. Hester's mother belonged to the Manning family who are thought to have had 'Orange' sympathies and the connection aroused some suspicion among the rebels. Holt's tenancy was gained by rights succeeding to Hester from her mother. Had she been a close family friend of Price's or even a blood relation?

Joseph Thompson was employed by Frances Synge, and was enlisted as a United Irishman. He was taken prisoner on June 15 at a public house in Roundwood. His deposition confirms that, at this time, Holt was encamped on Luggelaw Mountain which is contiguous with Fancy Mountain. Thompson had been enlisted as a United Irishman but had refused to serve. As an inhabitant of Roundwood he may have been sworn in by James Kavanagh, a local innkeeper, or even by Holt himself. In describing Thompson's trial Holt represents himself as presiding judicially. Against this we may set Thompson's grudging assertion that, although Holt's men called him Colonel his actual rank still remained Captain perhaps a clue to Holt's vaulting ambition which will soon become apparent in the 'History'.

Holt's attitude to the 'conflagration' made by the yeomen in the vicinity of Glendasan and the engagement at Ballinvalla Hill seems intent on representing himself as by no means relieved of his moral responsibility to uphold law and order, as does his reference to Andrew Price who, by inference, would be ready to commend Holt's operation. This Janus like attitude will persist throughout much of Holt's 'History'. At this early stage in the Rebellion did Holt maintain some contact with his 'dove' landlord?

Holt says that, just before June 20 he found himself alone on Blackmoorhill. Does this infer that he had detached himself from his company?

Perhaps they detached themselves from him because he seemed equivocal about the Rebellion and had not yet gained their trust?

It is significant that he 'wandered' down to Whelp Rock. Was he debating with himself about whether to persist as a rebel? With his decision to assume command the die is cast. There is no going back for, if he does, he 'could expect nothing but death.'

That Holt until this stage might have wavered about his allegiance to the rebellion seems implicit in his reference to 'The Moving Magazine.' If Colthurst has lumped every woman in Roundwood as 'A United Irishman' what chance would a Roundwood man have if he were dissident?

I then proceeded promiscuously through the mountains⁵² and, knowing where I was going, at length I perceived a smoke arising out of a glen. I then crossed to the further side of the glen and discovered about seventy forlorn creatures who were gratified to see me. They were cooking some fresh beef which hunger and fatigue compelled them to procure. Nor was I in less need of it, not having taken any for twenty four hours.

There was a little fellow there who was titled Colonel McMahon. The poor creatures adored him as a little king⁵³. The first thing he proposed to me was that there was a house near Rathfarnham who possessed a large quantity of money. I answered that it was no affair of mine, that I was no robber. I kept myself quite cool, minding their manoeuvres. As McMahon saw I wouldn't comply with his burglarious designs⁵⁴ he would have me taken under pretence of being a spy, only I was identified by several of the party.

52. If Holt's 'gentle readers' were to find his story credible we can see why he chose to overleap the events of those 'three weeks'. Had he described them, who could be expected to believe that this 'reluctant rebel' could (as a leader moreover) take part in so many engagements?

53. In this sequence we see Holt at his worst. McMahon was a lawyer, practising in Aungier Street, Dublin. So grudging is Holt of McMahon's prominence as a leader that, in the rest of Holt's 'History' he is never once mentioned again. Nor for that matter, apart from Matthew Doyle, are other leaders such as Felix Rourke, Even Michael Dwyer, who often served under Holt, fails to score a mention until Holt reports his arrival in New South Wales with the niggardly description, 'Michael Dwyer, popularly known as Captain Dwyer.' In a few succeeding engagements McMahon shared command with Holt; although there is no question that, after his return from the Midlands campaign, in late July, Holt would be the supreme commander of the Rebel forces until his surrender, on November 10 to Lord Powerscourt.

54. McMahon's men, being from Dublin, would have found it necessary to raid houses for provisions. This seems to offend Holt's law abiding principles, his own men being able to draw freely on the farms held by other United Irishmen of their acquaintance, or on their own farms.

I stopped there from Thursday till Saturday⁵⁵ evening, when I proposed to these creatures it was more safe to remove to a more elevated part of the country. The creatures seemed to think my advice was sensible, but McMahon said that I might go alone as none of them should go with me. I answered 'As they are at free will, they may judge for themselves and do as they think most safe.'

I then, with lively motion, stepped over a small brook, saying 'My boys, any of you who wishes to save your lives, come with me!' At this time there were 118, and 116 of which came across that brook to me, leaving McMahon with 2 men.⁵⁶

We marched on to the Old Iron Mills, where we killed a bullock, we being much in need of it this being the 15th of June. In the morning of the 16th I marched to Fancy Mountain⁵⁷, over Cloghogue. I then heard from my disconsolate family. I then sent out a foraging party, who brought a bullock to camp, belonging to Andrew Price, Esq. It happened to be a beast I had reared indeed. It hurt my feelings. However necessity compelled me to have him killed.

The foraging party brought 8 prisoners in before me. I now refer to several of those prisoners who yet survive, namely Joseph Thomson⁵⁸, Richard Barry, David and William Edge, and others. First investigation was on Thompson, who was woodkeeper for Francis Synge, Esq. I found nothing criminal against him, save only being attested with the oath of a United Irishman, so we couldn't accuse him of more than negligence of duty. Barry was proved to have

55. Holt says that he stayed with McMahon's party for three days. This period was probably between June 7 and 9, McMahon's forces probably having assembled near Rathfarnham in expectation of joining forces with other rebels for an attack on Dublin on June 1. After the rebel defeat at The Battle of Arklow, on June 10, this plan would have been abandoned, after which McMahon and his men would probably have gone on to Whelp Rock. Father John Martin, of Drogheda, an emissary from the Thomas Street Committee of The United Irish Directory in Dublin, met Holt on about June 10 to discuss plans for this attack on Dublin. After his capture he gave this 'information.'

56. Holt states that 116 of McMahon's 11 men deserted 'their little king' and marched off with him. Were there and grounds for such an assertion, if indeed the desertion did take place? It is possible that Holt had persuaded them to join him in the attack on Arklow. But was Holt present at that battle? The late Billy Byrne, of Glenmalur, a mine of information about the tales of the Rebellion told me that he had heard that Holt had held off his men from the attack until it was too late, and that Holt was critical of the conduct of Garret Byrne in that battle. 'I never heard a good word about Holt' said Billy Byrne.

57. Adjacent to Laggala.

58. Joseph Thomson was a wood ranger on the estate of Frances Synge, namely Joseph Thomson. In a long deposition, held in the State Papers office at the Birmingham Tower in Dublin Castle, Thomson, who had probably been enlisted by the Roundwood innkeeper, James Kavanagh, casts doubt on Holt's right to be ranked as a Colonel, his tone suggesting that he has no liking for this fellow denizen of Roundwood. Another interesting feature of his deposition is that sectarianism had raised its ugly head in the ranks of the Rebels: Thomson says that the Rebels were about to execute him at the foot of the Round Tower in Glendalough when one of the Rebels rushed forward to protest that it would be an act of sacrilege to spill Protestant blood on sacred ground. He states that Colonel McMahon was in command at Whelp Rock. Thomson took part in the attack on Hacketstown on June 25.

taken the oath of secrecy. I liberated him.

The two Edges were accused to be Orange Men, but, on strict examination - nothing but bare accusation. However I detained them till evening, when I let them go. That night they told Lord Powerscourt what happened with me. They instantly joined his corps.

On the 17th inst. I marched to Glandisoun - situated over 7 Churches, County of Wicklow, where I discovered 100 creatures abandoned as myself.

On the 19th inst. - Got information that there was some Yeomen burning the adjacent neighbourhood. I instantly called to arms, ever wishing to be instrumental to prevent destruction. I then asked an opinion of some of the most sensible of my company. They all wished to put - if possible - a stop to the conflagration. So instantly examined the quantity and state our firearms were in. Found only 13 guns fit for duty. I eagerly wished to try the pikes. However, the places the Yeomen were committing inhumanity was 5 miles distant necessitated me to go on rapid.

We met on the side of Ballinvalla Hill⁵⁹. When in view of each other, both parties got quite serious. I took windward of the army and commenced quick fire. I endeavoured to force down the pikes, but to no effect. My ammunition being very scarce, I soon discovered the distance betwixt the army and me was too long to force the pikes to action - which was worse of my side, having no determined person to mind the motion of the army. So, not liking the position I was in, I sent two of my best men over to the left of the party. When stationed, they began to play, or fire balls across; which threw them to confusion. I then ordered the Pike men to retreat and go down the hill, as the Yeos could follow them - by which means I obtained a safe retreat, tho' so few, without missing one man.

The next Bulletin, tho, stated that the Rebels retired behind a ditch, but I am confident there never was a ditch in same place since the birth of Christ, but to the reverse. Some of my men run after their enemy till quite out of breath.

And the same day, some of my enemy's horsemen going home, got their horses shod by a Phelim Sally⁶⁰. And, when they asked him what was his charge - on Sally answering, they shot him at his anvil. I refer the whole of this occurrence to Andrew Price⁶¹, Esq.

I then marched over the mountains till my limbs grew quite weary. I lay down and slept, and when I awoke in the morning, I was much surprised to

59. Slernaine near Luggala.

60. The surname Sally still occurs in the Roundwood district. Sally's bridge probably owed its name to the family.

61. Does Holt imply that his landlord may have been sympathetic to him?

find myself on Blackmoor Hill⁶² on a heap of stones that made fast the fixture where a Walter Read was gibbeted.

On the 20th of June I wandered down to Whelp Rock, where I found a vast number of creatures, but no sort of uniformity appeared among them. I spoke to some of them who bore the name or title of Captain, asking that, in case they were attacked, what form did they mean to proceed? Their answer seemed to me to not have the smallest economy⁶³. I immediately endeavoured to set them to rights, as I of course could expect nothing but immediate death.

Being resolved not to lose my life dastardly, I commenced exercising them. And every day the number was augmenting.

I next commenced providing gunpowder. I chose a large, rather ill looking woman, whom I titled 'The Moving Magazine'⁶⁴, and sent her to procure two large earthen crocks, some saltpetre and sulphur. I directed my men to pull heath in order to make it into coal. I infused the coal in the cracks - which process enabled me to make some powder. Though soft, it answered my expectation by placing a better sort for priming. This useful creature, or Moving Magazine, went through many camps to procure ammunition. She obtained many from such as were disaffected. I procured her a basket of gingerbread and some fruit to prevent suspicion. We must here observe that she was metamorphosed into a United Irishman from a respectable personage's testimony - namely Wm. Colthurst, Esq. who declared that every woman from Tinnahinch Bridge to Roundwood was a United Irishman.

Colonel McMahon often set up camp at Whelp Rock (Near Lackan, and now on the edge of Blessington Lake). I think it not at all unlikely that, when Captain Holt 'wandered down to Whelp Rock' and found a vast company of men with 'no uniformity' among them, Colonel McMahon was in charge. It may be that Holt behaved high-handedly, claimed the rank of Colonel, and attempted to wrest command from McMahon, and that he even succeeded in his attempt.

After the Rebel army was defeated at the famous Battle of Vinegar Hill,

62. Mountainridge on Wicklow Kildare border, stretching from Carrig to Lackan, as far as Sorrel Hill.

63. Holt uses the word to mean efficient use of resources.

64. Moving Magazine, may have been the daughter of Phelim O'Toole of Annamoe. Thomas Crofton Croker's vivid description of this Amazonian lady may be a figment of his imagination or, on the other hand, may have been relayed to him by Sir William Betham, Holt's friend and neighbour in Kingstown (Dun Laoghaire).

near Enniscorthy, on June 21 they marched north and arrived at Whelp Rock.

At this stage, although Holt does not refer to it directly, the sub-text of his 'History' suggests a keen rivalry between the ambitious Captain Holt, the Wicklow yeoman, and the defeated Rebels from Wexford, although of course, many of the rank and file hailed from Wicklow. General Edward Roche, and most of the other leaders, were from Wexford. Moreover, there would have been 'the class factor' which Holt never speaks of and which would have accentuated Holt's antagonism: all of the other leaders were 'gintilmen.' Garret Byrne, of Ballymanus in South Wicklow, who as a Catholic aristocrat, was the leader of the most prestigious family in the county, often excites criticism from Holt.

Holt describes an absurd, but significant confrontation with Roche, in which he challenges the General to a duel with pistols, because Roche has slighted one of Holt's men. It is also significant that Holt mentions that he has now been deemed as entitled to the rank of Colonel, having 960 men - probably because he knew that, in this case, the statutory rule requiring 1,200 men for the entitlement - was being bent.

Would the United Irish Executive in Dublin have authorised this promotion? Perhaps they were never consulted.

Holt tells us that General Roche asks him to take supreme command in the forthcoming engagement, which becomes The Battle of Ballyellis, about a mile east of Carnew, and which took place on June 30.

In later years, when Holt's name was under a cloud, his leadership at Ballyellis was disputed but there seems no doubt that he was responsible for the great victory there.

Flushed with victory, Holt refuses to join Garret Byrne and the Wexford men and marches his army, of more than a thousand men, to Whelp Rock. After a defeat of the Rebels at Ballyrahan, he learns that a vast number of men (about 11,000) is marching towards his camp and realises that he must provide food for them, which he does with much efficiency.

After they arrive, there is a Council of War. Holt proposes another attack on Newtown Mount Kennedy (probably still smarting from the defeat there on May 29, and his inability to muster sufficient forces, and his late arrival on the scene) and thence an attack on the capital. Father Kearns proposes that they go into Kildare and Meath to rally forces in those counties, and to link with the forces of General Aylmer in the Clonard region (Kearns had once been parish priest there).

After that, the intention may have been to move towards the Boyne, concert with the forces from Ulster, (which Kearns assumed, quite mistakenly,

to be 'at the ready') and then head for Dublin to take the city.

Kearns, Holt tells us, carries the meeting by two votes. The army marches to Clonard for a disastrous engagement (on July 11), such a resounding defeat for The United Irishmen that, after further engagements at Carbury and Longwood, the Rebels are reduced to a few straggling parties, their numbers amounting in all to perhaps no more than two hundred men.

At this stage, Dublin Castle must have thought that the Rebellion was well and truly over. It was not.

After several 'miraculous' escapes, Holt moves south, through Navan and across the Boyne. Having threaded his way through the streets of Dublin, he spends a night in the ruins of The 'haunted' Hellfire Club on Mount Pelier, has a brief meeting with his wife, Hester, who is staying with his brother at Bohernabreena, where she urges him to surrender, and finally makes his way to the camp at Whelp Rock. He does not stay there (perhaps because Colonel McMahon is in command?) and, after a dalliance with a girl on Three Lough Mountain, arrives at the Rebel camp at Baravore in Glenmalure, where Michael Dwyer is probably in temporary command.

Despite his gestures of protest (and surely they would have been gestures) Holt becomes the undisputed leader and is commanding forces, made up of defecting Militia men and Yeomen and refugees from The Midlands campaign.

When General Humbert's forces land at Killala Bay in County Mayo, there is a dramatic increase in Holt's recruits, most of them deserters from the Yeomanry and the Militia, some from the regiment of mercenaries, The Hessians. Holt notes that many of these men are youths, and will require stern discipline. With the surrender of Humbert, a fortnight later, the prospect of a United Irish victory once again recedes; but there remains the possibility of another French expedition, and this time led by the United Irish leader, Wolfe Tone.

Holt's authority is challenged. His army is fragmenting. 'Information' given to Dublin Castle in September attributes this to Holt's unpopularity, but Holt's 'History' suggests that he recognises this as strategically prudent. Perhaps he was happy enough to have dissident Rebels 'weeded out.' In a letter to her brother, The Duke of Richmond, Lady Sarah Napier might have been nearer the mark when she referred to Holt as 'a clever man who rejects mob and chooses his associates.'

We might here consider why Holt might have felt himself at odds with many of his men. By this time the infrastructure of The Rebels seems to have changed dramatically. Some Protestant United Irishmen had defected from the Rebel ranks and gone over to The Orange Order. As a Protestant, Holt would have seen that his forces had now acquired a Catholic-sectarian complexion.

On occasions he found himself leading raids to burn down Protestant houses, merely because they happened to be owned by Protestants; although it could be argued that Protestant houses, usually being more prosperous than those of Catholics, were often roofed with slate and this made them more easily convertible into barracks, should they be requisitioned by Loyalist forces.

Many of Holt's men - it is a common enough mutation in long drawn-out Rebellions as he observes in his 'History', are criminals, bent on plunder, using the Rebellion as a cloak.

In September, General Craig advertised in a daily newspaper a reward of £300 for the capture of Holt. The advertisement continued until November 13.

We take up Holt's 'History' again at events which occurred in October....

My 'Moving Magazine' arrived and brought me intelligence that, if I went to the camp of the Kings County Militia, forty of them would join me, and further said the moment I would challenge their sentry or pickets that moment those that were to join me would bayonet forty of the Loyal men, and that would make a difference of eighty out of one hundred and sixty - the present strength of the camp. I began to consider how to act, as I was aware of the perilous situation I stood in with my own people and, should the information given to me by 'The Moving Magazine' prove to be a falsehood, it was more than probable I would be suspected to be a party in it and perhaps be brought to trial and, if found guilty, put to death. I concluded the best mode of proceeding would be to call a Council of War and have the sense of the people on the subject. I then called on Colonel Doyle, as he was the only sensible man in my party, Hacket having quit me some time previous to this and brought 80 of my men with him - for no other reason than my protesting against the robbing system. I must confess I did not regret much their quitting me, except on one principle: That eighty men reduced my number considerably, together with the desertions taking place at every favourable opportunity as the men began to dread the approaching long nights and could weather.

Colonel Doyle communicated the matter to as many of the people as he thought requisite, and it was agreed to hear my observations on the subject. I then gave them my opinion and they consented to comply with any mode of proceeding I thought proper to adopt. I thanked them for the good opinion they seemed to entertain of me, and then desired them to repair to their respective quarters until further orders. I retained Colonel Doyle with me, that I might have some conversation with him on the subject. I mentioned to him that I was

often betrayed and that it was necessary for me to be very cautious on this occasion, as every one of the people knows I am acquainted with the ground the camp is on, it being within gunshot of the ruins of my house and one quarter of a mile of Roundwood. Doyle made answer and said 'Sir, I am not competent to give you any advice on the subject and therefore hopes that God will direct you to the best mode of proceedings.

The day was wet, but the evening cleared up fine, and I fired my signal for marching and gave orders that every man should be ready in one hour, being resolved to give no opportunity to any informer to get before me at the camp, being still in dread that the money offered for my head would purchase it unless I was very cautious.

We proceeded without interruption until we came to Glenmalure river. It was unfortunately much flooded, in consequence of the great rain that day. I halted until the rear came up and had their opinion whether it was fordable or not. They were of different opinions. I rode a huntress belonging to Buck Whaley on this day. I leaped her into the river and kept her head up against the stream as much as possible. I got safe across to the other side, but not without being wet up to my waist. I then dismounted and cried out 'Come on, my fine boys! Cowards never gained anything!'

Several came over, but the horses were obliged to go back and forwards nine times in order to bring the footmen over. But the most unpleasant thing that occurred with me was Mrs. Holt was with us, and how to get her over was the most difficult part. We had to act however. I desired her to venture into the stream, being aware she would not be alarmed, or quit the horse's back if possible. One of the men asked her if she would carry him over the river. She desired him to jump up behind her, and then plunged the horse into the stream. The beast she rode was not able to bear up the weight of them both and, the current running so rapidly, they were cast off into the river and the horse came over without them. They were drifted down with the current into deeper water. I jumped into the water to their assistance, but they were driven up on a sandbank, near the opposite side of the river, before I reached them. I was nearly suffocated and found myself quite weak, not being a good swimmer. A man of the name of Miley, who was standing on the bank looking on, said 'I will lose my life, or save the General and his wife.'

He accordingly jumped into the river, and soon reached us. He then took me by the hand. The other two got a hold of me by the other arm. Miley kept next the stream and landed us safely on the other side. My wife lost her beaver hat, but it was afterwards taken up twenty perches lower down than where she was cast off. She also lost her shoe, but I considered it easier to get a shoe than a wife, although I must confess women were very plenty, particularly widows.

We gave God thanks for our safe deliverance and proceeded towards a farmhouse at some distance.

I rode up to the door and related to some young women that were within what happened, and requested that they would try if any of their shoes would fit Mrs. Holt, and also that they would exchange clothes with her. They complied with my request, and I paid them for the shoes.

We then marched across Cullentragh, Derrybawn, Knockfinn bridge, Drumeen and Old bridge. We halted near Baltinanima Wood at the edge of the river and was then within two miles of our place of destination⁶⁵. I waited until the rear come up and then said 'Gentlemen, we are within two miles of the place we are to stop and, as soon as we get over this river, I will make three divisions of you to carry the business we came here on into effect.'

Several of them were not aware of what I was about to do, and I believe it is certain if soldiers were to know what they have to encounter before they were enlisted, few of them would take the bounty, but it is the opinion of some of them they ought to do nothing but walk about and receive their pay. Colonel Doyle spoke to the men and said 'If you take directions in a proper manner, the business will soon be accomplished.'

I knew the river we were about to cross very well and reined about my horse into it instantly, keeping his head up as well as possible against the stream, and soon reached the other side. I called out to the men to follow me. As soon as they heard that, one of them cried out 'He is going to sell us all, or else he would never venture over.'

I heard the words he expressed distinctly and, turning about my horse, I proceeded to re-cross the river. I soon reached the opposite side and, when landed on the bank, proceeded towards where I heard the knave. I called for Doyle and asked him where the man was that made use of that expression. He replied 'I am looking for him.' I then asked him did he know his name? He answered he did not but, if he could ascertain it, he should suffer death.

I then spoke to them and said 'No, you wretches, it is not in my composition to do any such thing, but I believe you will one day or another sell me to my enemies.'

I had my sword drawn to cut a way if any of them replied. There was a great argument amongst them. I then dismounted and walked about. It was about 12 o'clock at night. Colonel Doyle and some of the sensiblest of the party came to me and inquired what was to be done. I told them to go and inquire from that villain that said I was going to sell them all, or otherwise bring him to me until 'I would run this sword through his heart.' I turned about to my wife

65. And about a mile from the site of his farm at Mullinaveigue.

and said 'My dear, I wish you were at the other side of this river', and my reason for saying so was that she would then be within two miles of a friend's house where her children were at the time.

She replied and said 'I will not quit you this night, as I dread if you can find out the person that insulted you, from the hate of mind you are in at present, you will kill him and then the rest of the men would put you to death.'

I then returned to Knockfinn⁶⁶ bridge and proceeded along the road leading to The Seven Churches. I then turned to the right, on to Glenmacnass and soon entered a little village. The people was seemingly very glad to see me, but I was as inclined to think they would as soon have my ruin as my company. I ordered a bed to be got ready for Mrs. Holt, and then ordered the man of the house to stand picket all night and tould him if the army were to disturb me without getting proper notice, I would put every soul of his family to death.' And you must also send up to Brian Brady's and let him know I ordered him to send out pickets at the other end of the glen. I then went to bed and tould my wife that there was too many insults offered to me, and that I would form some plan to extricate myself from my present situation.⁶⁷

Next morning I marched, but fired no signal. I suffered one of them to communicate it to the others to show them I did not intend to overlook the insult I received.

We marched to Oakwood. I stopped at Oliver Hoyle's as usual. This man was no party man but an honest, worthy neighbour, but I must confess was badly recompensed for his attention to United Irishmen, as he was robbed and murdered by a banditti of robbers that went through the mountains after I surrendered myself in The Castle of Dublin.⁶⁸

Holt's intention to 'quit the kingdom' is borne out by a report written by an informer at about this time stating that Holt meant to leave Ireland and find refuge in Britain; whereas Holt says his destination would be America.

The site of the Mill House was probably in the north-eastern corner of Holt's farm at Mullinaveigue. That his wife and daughter, Marianne, lived there without protection at this time seems very unlikely. Perhaps Hester did

66. Knockfinn bridge at Laragh.

67. Although Holt does not say so, at this time Hester seems to have returned to the Roundwood district. We might presume that she and her husband had discussed the possibility of planning an escape, or surrender, for him.

68. Oliver Hoyle was a Protestant.

have protection from the Holt's landlord, Andrew Price, and on the day after the sale of Holt's goods and chattels, it was temporarily relaxed. Whatever the case, she would hardly have dared to live within a few hundred yards of the site of the farmhouse if her whereabouts were known publicly, unless some form of guard were usually mounted.

The question arises as to why Price should have had any special care for her? Was it simply because he was a humane man, who perhaps believed that the Holt family had suffered unjustly? If so, this would accord with Holt's repeated assertion that he had been persecuted by Thomas Hugo and driven into the ranks of The United Irishmen for self preservation. It might be noted that Holt never explicitly denies that he might have been enlisted some time before his farmhouse was burnt down.

The rumour that Hester's mother's family, the Mannings, had Orange connections is intriguing. It was to Hester's mother, Mrs. Long, that the property had originally been leased. Perhaps there may have even been a familial, or consanguineous connection between Holt's wife and Andrew Price.

Holt was, after all, so alert to the safety of his son, Joshua, that he had arranged for the boy to be moved every fortnight. He would hardly have been less vigilant for the safety of his wife and 'his favourite child.'

Holt's brother, Jonathan, served under him. His other brother, William, being also enlisted as a United Irishman, this is more evidence - if it were needed - that the Holt clan leaned towards the United Irish cause. Perhaps Holt's quarrel with Hugo was far from being the decisive factor in his own enlistment.

The report of the killing of Mr. Hume was published in the 'Dublin Courier' of October 10. The onset of autumn, together with the treachery of some of his men in assaulting and robbing his wife, would only have made Holt's desire to extricate himself from The United Irishmen - if his band of men can still be categorised under that title - the more pressing.

Now, gentle reader, at this period I was very unpleasantly situated, being obliged to watch the movements of His Majesty's forces and also all informers, both public and private, my own wretched men to not knowing the moment they might call me to trial and probably take my life. I coolly deliberated on my unpleasant situation and made a conclusion that to quit the kingdom was the most practicable line of conduct I could pursue, and accordingly gave

directions to Mrs. Holt to call an auction and sell the remnant of my property that escaped the fury of my enemies. She accordingly went to Mr. Price, who lived in the neighbourhood, to arrange the sale, which was done in some kind of form or in such manner as was found practicable. I also remarked to my wife that, if she could make up as much money as would pay our passage to America, that we would go there, providing we could procure a vessel to carry us. At this time she lived in an old house called 'The Mill House.'

On the night after the sale of the goods by auction, she was attacked and robbed, not only of the money she had, but the clothes off her back and the ear rings that was in my daughter's ears. They also inquired for my watch. She told them she left it with me when she was with me last. They replied she did not, as they seen me later than she did. I was informed of these transactions and much grieved at hearing it. Previous to Mrs. Holt's parting me at our last interview, I appointed a place to meet her if some unforeseen accidents did not happen.

My old friend Hacket came back to me about this time and began to seduce more of my men over to his robbing system, but he did not long succeed as he was shot at near Arklow and his head exhibited on a spike in the town, as a just reward for his abominable conduct.⁶⁹

My gentle reader, at this time I was very unpleasantly situated, having my son to remove every second week from place to place, to avoid the vengeance of the Yeomanry. He was at this time in Aughavannagh and I made a resolution that I would go see him at all risk. I accordingly fired my signal for marching and took our route through Knockaderry, Knockanarrigan, Knockadroose, Imail, and soon arrived in Aughavannagh. I took my quarters at Mr. Byrne's and had, in my own guard, John O'Neill of the Co. Antrim and some three deserters from The Kings County Militia, well knowing these men could not deceive me, as their situation, if taken, would be as bad as my own. My entire force at this period was only two hundred men, including about fifty cavalry, amongst which was my brother, Jonathan.

I was very unwell to add to my much distressed state of mind and my brother, seeing me so dull in spirits, he requested I would not be fretting, saying the first man that ever would insult me of the party they would make an example of him. He then asked my opinion of his taking a party of the cavalry with him to reconnoitre the country, least we should be surrounded. I consented and he accordingly took a small party of the cavalry with him, at the same time appointing to meet me at Jacky Byrne's.

They had not proceeded very far when they were met by the Army and my

⁶⁹ Hacket was executed after Holt's surrender.

poor brother fell a victim to his circumstance, I never seen him more. I soon perceived one of the party, John O'Neill, running up towards me. I asked him what was the matter? He said they were met by the Army and that he seen my brother in the midst of that evening and was sure I never would see him alive, and that he also seen Mr. Hume, captain of a cavalry corps, shot.⁷⁰ I then asked him where he was situated. He said he run up the hill and left his horse behind him. I told him I believed him to be telling truth, as it was like his conduct, and that he was always a damned coward.

I then proceeded towards where I hear the firing, with the remainder of my men. The day was wet and foggy, so much so that we could scarcely see anything at the distance of ten perches, so that we found it difficult to march. The firing soon ceased and I proceeded along the foot of Lugnaquilla, a large mountain that is situated between Glenmalure and Imaal. We soon fell in with the remnant of my brother's party, who confirmed the matter as to his death, and also Mr. Hume's. I then proceeded to get a full account of the transaction from one of the party, whose name was John Moore. He told me that Mr. Hume was a little in advance before his corps and that he, Moore, met him and presented his piece at him, knowing whom he was. He cried out 'Cavalry man, I am Captain Hume. What party do you belong to?'

Moore replied 'General Holt, and if you put your hand to your pistols, I will blow your brains out,' ordering him at the same time to dismount, which he complied with. The moment he alit on the ground he, Moore, shot him and one of the men, named Conway, came up and fired another ball through his head. The Army appeared in a few minutes and began to fire indiscriminately. They then retreated, but my brother was unfortunately shot.

I must confess the loss of him lay heavy on me, but when I began to think of the uncertainty of this world and my own situation, I found it necessary for me to strike out some mode of proceeding. I then called Colonel Doyle and asked his opinion of the late transaction, at the same time remarking to him that there must be an informer in the neighbourhood, or else there could not be so close a lookout for us. He said he was of the same opinion, and then asked me should we remain where we were that night. I told him we would, as I seen no safer quarters that we could procure at present. He then placed our pickets and outposts, giving them orders to have a close lookout.

My good reader, this Jacky Byrne that I have mentioned to have taken up my quarters at his house, was a private informer and I had some suspicion of him but, in some time afterwards, was convinced as to the fact. This man and his two sons stole several of our horses, brought them to Dublin and sold them

70. Hume had been one of the members of Parliament for County Wicklow.

and was constantly carrying information to the Army of where I was posted.

Holt must have felt that his own situation was now quite desperate. No longer did he have an 'army' capable of open confrontation with the enemy. For that strategic reason, and because he now perceives that some of the men in his ranks are no better than 'banditti,' he is ready to relinquish his little 'army' and allow it to disintegrate into bands of guerillas. 'Information' given to Dublin Castle implies that some of the officers serving under Holt at this time 'broke away' from him. Against this we might set the comments of Miles Byrne in his Memoirs who says that, far from exerting pressure on his men to remain with him 'he never took any trouble one way or another about them' and that if men who had gone home, decided to return to his ranks 'they would meet a kind reception ... In the worst times he appeared gay, never desponding.'

Holt says 'the smaller our number was the safer we were.' The only other leader for whom Holt had feelings of warm friendship was Matthew Doyle who was one of those who 'broke' with Holt at this time. There is no reason to believe that this 'break' implies any animosity between the two men. In a letter written to William Colthurst from Cork Harbour on May 18, 1799, Holt would say of Doyle: 'He was the only man of his profession that always strove to save the lives of Protestants.'

As Holt puts it one might think his illness was the main factor prompting the desire to see his wife and daughter. More likely perhaps that the compelling reason was to consult Hester about preliminary negotiations for his surrender. On October 15 'The Courier' reported: 'The daring and desperate ravager, Holt, has, we hear, had the audacity to send proposals of capitulation to government.'

The ambush at Ballynabrocky by Lord Powerscourt's men invites a comment. Holt attributes the 'information' of his whereabouts to 'a woman by the name of Byrne.' He may have been wrong. It seems possible that Lord Powerscourt, having been sounded out about his attitude to Holt's overtures for surrender and, being aware that Holt had been in touch with Hester and was in the vicinity, took advantage of this information to plan the ambush in which Holt comes so near to losing his life.

On the following morning, we marched across the mountain between Imlail and Knockadroose, and then halted. Some of the men regretted to see me ill, and more of them wished to get into the sporting company - I mean the robbing and drinking party. I heard them all deliver their sentiments on the subject and then told him I was no longer able to be of any use to them, from the bad state of health I was in, but trusted in God I would soon recover. I then remarked to them that they experienced enough of my manoeuvring to teach them how to conduct themselves. Some of them shook their heads, intimating they dreaded they could not manage without me there. I stated to them that I should go wander in some retired place, to save my life. They said I should not leave them, as it was their duty to watch me and protect me in my present situation, as a token of gratitude for the attention I paid to their preservation on all occasions.

About fifty of them remained with me and, amongst the number, was a man of the name of Joseph Begley, an Englishman that was taken prisoner about ten weeks prior to this and, when brought to treat before me, I asked him if he was a United Irishman? He answered 'Damn his eyes if he was an Irishman but he was an Englishman,' and 'I will stay with you, if you let me.' I ordered the men to give him something to eat and that we would make a United Irishman of him. He then said he had no objections - he never would wish to go back to his regiment. He was a butcher by trade and was very useful to me.

A division took place amongst the men, when forty nine turned out to remain with me as my life guard. The remainder went with Doyle and others. We shook hands and parted and I wished them all success indiscriminately. I marched with my little party through Oakwood and halted at the Widow Reilly's in Knockalt, where we remained that night and next day, at the same time taking care to keep out our pickets, although I was aware the smaller our number was the safer we were, but the reward for my head was the temptation to induce the people to betray me into the hands of my enemies.

I got a little relief from my complaint at this time and began to think of going to see my wife and daughter - as she was my favourite child. I communicated the matter to my little squadron. They wanted to accompany me but I told them it was better not, as I knew the route to take so well that I could get very near the place by daylight and return in the same manner. They agreed to any mode I wished to adopt.

I left Knockalt about one o'clock in the afternoon and crossed the mountain, in sight of the road. I crossed over Luggelaw, down Sleamaine and through Mullinaveigue, and soon found my wife and daughter. She then informed me of the manner in which the robbers treated her and the expressions they made use of, which leads me to suspect they were some of the

men that quit me and joined Hacket in the robbing system. I prayed to God that I might soon hear of the destruction of this infernal gang.

She told me she knew one of them. His name was Byrne, and formerly was in the habit of working for me. He was afterwards hanged at Wicklow, and another boy she also recognised to be John Delaney from Roundwood. He was sent to The Foundling Hospital, and reared by William Pollard. He was transported to Botany Bay for the robbing system, in some time after.

I remained with my wife, talking of my misfortunes until about two o'clock on the following morning. Before we parted, I appointed a place to meet her on a certain night. It was at Pat Mullaly's, near Athdown. I then took my leave of my daughter, and never seen her again until my return from New South Wales.

I brought a boy and horse with me on this night. It was in the latter end of October. There was a smart white frost on the ground, and moonlight, and when we reached the top of the hill over the Iron Mills near Kippure I made the boy return, and then quit the road - shaping my course to Ballynabrocky Mountain. I came to a widow's house that I was known by. She was glad to see me and said she was sorry to find my health so much impaired. She then requested I would go to bed and that she would send one her daughters out to watch for me and, when I would get up, she would have some breakfast ready for me. I then took off my coat, as I very seldom stripped entirely, and lay down.

About sunrise in the morning, I was not more than half an hour lying down, when the old woman ran into the room and told me the country was full of Army, both horse and foot. I jumped up, put on my coat and hat and run out. I perceived the foot soldier very near me, sufficiently so to kill, but I suppose they had no orders to fire. I began to run, and you may be sure they run also. The cavalry was on the other side, coming through Athdown. They knew me and rode on as fast as they could, thinking to get before me. My pistols were empty and, as I went across under Simon Kearney's house in Ballydonnell and leaped across a stream that cut a large gulf in the ground, in running down the hill two of Lord Powerscourt's cavalry came up within pistol shot of me. I then said to myself 'I am taken after all.' I turned about and presented my pistol towards them, saying 'Damn you! Stand back or I will blow your brains out!'

Those two cowards turned their horses about, which gave me fresh spirits, and I then concluded I never would surrender until the last moment, and then intended to put an end to my own existence, that they should not have the satisfaction of hanging me alive.

I then pushed forward, and had not proceeded twenty perches when I

perceived a small cavity in the ground, made by the running of water from the mountain. I was on the flank of it, and also on the descent of the hill, so that the foot soldiers lost sight of me and the cavalry could not advance without being in great danger. I leaped into this cavern and found it to be eight feet deep or thereabouts, and took its course underground for some distance. I began to think what I would do, as I dreaded they seen me jumping into this place. I remained in this situation for a considerable time, and at last put up my head and found a standing line of infantry within ten perches of me. There was a large tuft of heath growing over this place, through which I put my head, and the army crossed the very place several times.

I heard one of them swear 'Damn his eyes!' - but he seen me, 'about that very place.' Another said that I dealt with the devil. Another that this was 'Three times he got within shot of me, and he escaped!' Another that it was not me they seen, and a fourth that he would swear he seen me, and would swear to me.

The reader may judge my situation must be miserable, striving to push forward into the hole and at last stopped by the water. I searched about with my hand until I found a stone, and placed it under my hip to let the water pass under me. In about half an hour after this, I put up my head a second time - and perceived the Army going through Athdown, and more disappointed.

I had a struggle to get out of this dreary but fortunate asylum, my blood being congealed from the length of time I remained in the cold water and being very warm at my entering it. I would not be astonished if it cost me my life. When I got up on the bank I could not walk, having lost the use of my limbs. I then lay down on the ground and began to roll on the ground as well as I could, for the purpose of bringing the blood in circulation. When I recovered the use of my limbs, I looked about and found Simon Kearney's to be the most convenient place I could make for, and immediately proceeded towards the house. When I reached it, Mrs. Kearney made me strip off, gave me a dry sheet and made me go to bed. When I had got a sleep she brought me some dinner.

From the good care this lady took of me I soon recovered and then began to think of my poor men, and accordingly took my leave of Mrs. Kearney and proceeded in search of them, and found them in Glenbride, a small village at a small distance from the place I was chased in. When the poor creatures was informed of the matter they were astonished.

The reader will observe that, when I was going to see Mrs. Holt and my daughter, I was seen by a woman of the name of Byrne, who had her husband and two sons in gaol at this period, and if she could set me for the army so as that I would be taken, they was to get their Free Pardon. She accordingly gave information to Lord Powerscourt and he ordered his cavalry out in pursuit of

me, together with a party of infantry. But I disappointed them in a miraculous manner, as I believe the reader will admit from the manner it is described.

It seems very likely indeed that the arrangement for Hester to approach Mrs. La Touche ('the widows' and orphans' friend') had been made earlier than Holt allows and that he wanted firm assurances that would guarantee his eligibility for an amnesty. It is also probable that he was already acquainted with Mrs. La Touche who was the daughter of Mrs. Tottenham. (Early in his 'History' Holt has told us that he 'was care keeper, wood ranger, sale master in Ballycurry for Mrs. Tottenham.'). The approach to Mrs. La Touche through an intermediary the husband of Hester's relative, might have been the easier for that acquaintance.

At this stage Holt is playing a delaying game, keeping his options open; for there still remains the possibility of an expedition from France which might retrieve the fortunes of The United Irishmen. And, should he surrender, what terms might be offered to him?

He implies that, because of his ill health, he intends 'to go to a friend's house to recover his health.' There was probably more to it than that. Reports of his movements given to Dublin Castle suggest that he was likely to be heading to Dublin for a meeting of The United Irish Directory. If the French were about to land then he might take the other option and stay 'in the field.'

At my parting with Mrs. Holt I appointed a place to meet her and communicated the matter to my men, but did not tell them the place lest I should be sold again. The appointment was at the house of a man of the name of Mullally and, agreeable to promise, I went to the place but, previous to my going, I told the men I would return in a short time and desired them to remain in Glenbride, and to be careful in, keeping out the watch.

On my arrival at Mullally's I found my poor miserable wife there before me, after walking ten or twelve miles. After some conversation relative to my escape on the late occasion, she told me she had a notion of speaking to Mrs. La Touche to intercede with Lord Powerscourt for me to try if he would protect my life, in case I surrendered myself to him. I told her in reply it would be

well done, but Mrs. La Touche had no knowledge of me, or was she aware that I saved Luggelaw House from being burned. However I then said Mrs. La Touche was a good woman and her benevolence was always bestowed on those in distress. My wife had a relation whose husband was in the employment of this amiable lady and we concluded it would be well done to try the event of this enterprise. We then, after some short time spent in bewailing our wretched condition, parted, with my promising to call to see her if possible in a few days, to be informed of Mrs. La Touche's answer.

I then returned to my men at Glenbride and found myself attacked with my old complaint, so much so that I was scarcely able to walk. I took up my quarters in this house of a man of the name of Quinn. This man said he would go to Russborough to see how the army was situated and inquire if there was any information given them respecting me. I told him I was obliged to him and requested he would bring me a gallon of spirits from Black Ditches. At his return he said he would, and welcome. I gave him half a guinea in gold that I got from my wife that morning and desired him to get it of the best quality, as the poor men would want a glass of spirits that stands sentry these cold nights. This man returned about twelve o'clock on this night and told me there was no spirits in Black Ditches and returned me the money. I told him I was sorry for it but it could not be helped. He then said he would go and bring home one of his cows that she might be milked for me, adding that boiled milk with an egg broke on it would be a good remedy for my complaint. He then went out, but did not return.

I went to bed and soon fell asleep and, while in that situation, I dreamt and had a vision and thought the bed took fire all round me and, in the imaginary dangerous situation I was in, I thought I made a leap to escape from the fire and fell out of the bed. I came out of the room instantly and found nine of my men lying round the fire. I roused them up and told them I had a dream that forbode to me something would happen very serious this morning. The men prepared themselves instantly for the worst. One of them went out and, as he was getting over a stile at the end of the house, a party of soldiers that had the house surrounded cried out to him 'If you don't come here we'll shoot you.'

The man ran, and seven of them fired at him but all missed. When I heard the shots I cried out to the remainder of the men 'We are all sold. Let us now fight like men in preference to being hanged like dogs.'

Each of them examined his arms and such of them as wanted priming it was given to them. I had my pistol in one hand and my sword in the other. The first two men that made their way out was Joseph Begley, an Englishman, and James Donohoe from the County Waterford. They were both shot dead. I then proceeded to the door and, perceiving the white belt on the sargent, I shot him

dead and then run out, sword in hand. I leaped over the dead body of the sargent, when a volley was fired at me which took the leaf off my hat and shot the plume I wore on it into three pieces. This hat belonged to a French officer but the Scotchmen prevented me from ever wearing it again. One of my men, named Maurice run out with me. He was wounded under the hip, but not dangerously. Two more followed us, unhurt.

The last two that remained in the house were Matthew McDonnell and his brother. The former was delayed in looking for his blunderbuss that one of the former men carried out. The second sargent at this time approached the door and one of the McDonnells fired at him and shot him dead. They then rushed out and made their escape without injury. The reader will observe the night was dark so that white belts and well cleaned muskets served us for moonlight.

Maurice, that was wounded, kept in company with me and, when we got as far as we imagined out of the enemy's power, I then proceeded to examine his wound and found the ball passed through. I put a small piece of tobacco in my mouth and chewed it a little and then put it in the wound. I must confess I bestowed a laugh on the poor fellow, notwithstanding the perilous situation I was in a few minutes before, to see him leap up off the ground from the smarting of the tobacco juice.

We then began to lament the loss of the poor men we left behind us, supposing them mostly all dead, and indeed I am certain if we were not alarmed so soon not a man of us would have escaped. The man of the house we were in was the informer. He knew the place where our pickets were posted and brought the army another route silently, so as to put it out of their power to hear or see them coming. The only thing that saved our lives was the darkness of the night, as the soldiers could not see us when we once got out of the door, and consequently could only fire at random. When we were all gone out of Quinn's house, the Army came to the door and fired in, not knowing but some of us might still be within. They shot his sister and his child, his first cousin and his servant boy. During this time Quinn himself was in Glenmacnass, as he set off there the moment he placed the Army round the house, thinking I could not escape, to claim the reward for apprehending me. But at his return he found himself disappointed, together with a decrease of four persons in his family. The Army had two sargents and four privates killed and seven wounded. Our loss was two killed, three wounded and one taken prisoner.

I proceeded across the mountain to a small little village called Ballynatona and stopped at William Brady's. In about two hours after my arrival at this place, the remainder of my party joined me. We then returned to bury our dead and, in our march seen the Army returning as they come out, but less in number. After finishing the office of burying the dead, we marched to

Scurlock's Leap and remained there one night and, on the following morning, proceeded in the direction of Shankill and took up our quarters at the house of Thos. Donohoe's.

I called my men together and told them that it was impossible for me to escape the vigilance of informers while I remained publick in the manner I was, as the reward was tempting the people to betray me into the hands of my enemies in all directions and that, to evade this, I intended to go to a friend's house for a few days, at some distance off, to recover my health and disappoint those wretches if possible. They wished to know the place I was going to, but this I gave an evasive answer to, but promised them I would return and that I would search for them until I made them out. I then took my leave of them, desiring them to go down towards Imail, conceiving it to be the safest quarter they could remain in.

In his 'History' Holt has made no mention of his contacts with The United Irish Executive in Dublin. During the critical month of October and, in the early days of November he attended several such meetings. The proof of this is to be found in the papers of The State Papers Office in Dublin Castle. At one of the meetings of the Executive, on October 15, a decision was made 'that all should be over and not to act without the French or till the English troops are recalled.' The note of urgency would have been occasioned by the news of Napoleon's defeat at The Battle of the Nile and the report that, on October 11, Sir John Warren had driven away a French squadron off the coast of Donegal. In succeeding weeks the following events occurred, spelling inevitable defeat for The United Irishmen: On October 22 a French fleet, with Wolfe Tone aboard, was sighted off Killala Bay. Sir John Warren's naval units succeeded in defeating the French soldiers who had sailed from the port of Brest. On November 3, Wolfe Tone was arrested in Lough Swilly and landed at Bunrana on the Inishowen Peninsula. He would be tried in Dublin on November 11 - the day after Holt's surrender. On November 19, while Holt was a State Prisoner in Dublin Castle, Tone, after an earlier attempt at suicide, died.

Of Holt's movements we know that he 'slept last night in Dirty Lane' and that he stayed in a cellar at Francis Street and, on October 18, was visited there 'by some of his friends. His final visit to one of the Dublin meetings was probably on November 3. We can be sure that the sojourn at a friend's house in Dundrum, which he describes, was en route to one of the Dublin meetings.

Now the reader will observe I am once more alone by myself and, having an invitation from a relation of mine in Dundrum, I thought within myself it would be a safe place for me to repair to, notwithstanding it was on the high road leading to Dublin. I set out accordingly across Butter Mountain, Glenasmole and the Three Rock Mountain and, finding myself very weak, I sat down to rest. This was on the top of a rock covered with heath. I then lay down on my breast and soon fell fast asleep, but was not long in that situation when I imagined the rock took fire under me. I bounced up and went about twenty perches lower down the hill and began to consider whether I would proceed on or return back. While I was deliberating in this manner I heard the sound of horses' feet and soon perceived My Lord Powerscourt's cavalry crossing by the rock I had been lying on. I lay down between two thorn clumps that grew naturally on the mountain and let them pass. I then got up and gave God thanks for my deliverance, as I was well aware they were looking for me, as I was afterwards told the fact by Lord Powerscourt himself.

I then concluded I could not be in a worse situation by proceeding to Dundrum than I then was in, and accordingly proceeded. I soon arrived at the house of my friend, and went round to the rear of the house and threw up some sand against one of the windows. My friend raised one of them and immediately knew me. He then came downstairs, opened the door and let me in. He told me he was glad to see me and asked if I would take some refreshment. I told him it would be time enough when I would get some sleep. He then showed me to my room, I locked the door on the inside, left my pistols and sword on a table in the room, resolving if I was attacked to have some sport before I would be taken.

I slept the night tolerable well and, on the following morning, arose early and got some breakfast, after which my friend Mr. Wright brought me some books that I might amuse myself reading of. I then told him I would go by the name of Long.⁷¹ I sat near the window of my room, from which I had a commanding view of the Dublin road and, at night, came downstairs to drink punch with Mr. Wright and a gentleman that lodged with him. The latter person frequently looked very sharply at me.

I very often sent out the maid for some spirits, telling her to inform the person whom she got it from that it was for a Mr. Long that lodged at her master's. I lived in this situation for some days, until at length the gentleman that lodged in the house went to Dublin, and did not return.⁷² On the same

71. Long was his wife, Hester's, maiden name.

72. For discretionary reasons, no doubt wishing to conceal from the reader the extent of his involvement with The United Irish movement and his several visits to meet with the Executive in Dublin at about this time, Holt here gives us a minimum of information. A report held in Dublin Castle shows that, on November 3, he was tracked by an agent as he moved about Dublin.

evening I asked Wright if there was anything suspicious in this occurrence. He said he was certain there was no danger. I went to bed at the usual hour and soon fell fast asleep, but was not long in that situation when I imagined that the house was afire, and the bed under me. I awoke with the fright and found myself getting out of the bed. As this was the third time I was forewarned in this manner of approaching danger I dreaded the result. Mr. Wright was alarmed at the noise and came into my room to enquire the cause. I desired him to get a candle lighted and bring it to me as quick as possible and then I would inform him of the cause of the noise. He immediately done as I required, and I then related the matter to him and told him he would have plenty of Army round his house before sunrise in the morning. I then took my leave of my friend and set out. It was about four o'clock in the morning.

I soon passed The Iron Mills, and by Ballawley Hill to the Three Rock Mountain. I was not two hours out of the house when it was surrounded by a corps of cavalry. They found the nest but the bird was flown. I was then aware that some information must have been given, and whether to accuse Wright, his maid, or the gentleman, his guest, I was at a loss to know from that period to this. The reader will see by this transaction that there is a temptation in money that it is difficult to withstand.

I proceeded from the Three Rock Mountain in search of my men. I carried in my pocket some bread and cheese and breakfasted on it near the first spring well I came to, and had no other means of taking up a drink from the brook than by stooping down over it and drinking like the beasts of the field. I proceeded across the head of Glenasmoel, keeping the side of the mountain with a view of the glen.

I stopped at the house of a man named Murnane and told him the escape I had from being taken. He then asked me did I recollect being in a house on the mountain that day? I answered I did. He said there was three men in it at the time, one of which gave information to Lord Powerscourt. If in an hour after I left the place 'He immediately ordered out the cavalry in pursuit of you.'

He then said he wondered I did not write to Lord Powerscourt to try if he would do anything for me, and said His Lordship said a few days ago, on parade, it would be a pity if I should die any shameful death. He further said he considered Lord Powerscourt would conceive I done him great honour by surrendering myself to him.

I deliberated coolly that night on what this man had said to me, and began to think how I could arrange the matter. I slept but little and, early on the following morning, proceeded in search of my wife to hear what answer she got from Mrs. La Touche. I fortunately met with her on that day.

She told me Mrs. La Touche said if I would write her a letter, stating that

I would surrender myself to Lord Powerscourt, she would go to him herself in person and try what arrangement she could make. My wife carried pen, ink and paper in her pocket that I might write the letter privately. I then considered this was a good opportunity for me to get out of the power of spies and informers and, being confident there was an end to the unfortunate system I was implicated in, I took my pen and wrote to this lady as follows:

Dr. Maddam,

God and you are my dependence and as you are so good as to take my case in to your hands I hope it will prosper as does every thing you under take to perform. Let the result with me be what it will at your request I will surrender myself to Lord Pourscourt at his house on (such a day) and am maddam your Very obedient Humble Servant

Joseph Holt

to Mrs. P. Latouch⁷³
Belview near Delgany

When this good and humane lady received this letter, she said she would go first to Lord Meath⁷⁴ and procure his interest in my behalf, which she soon was granted. She then proceeded to Lord Powerscourt and showed him my letter. He was highly pleased, thanked Mrs. La Touche and promised her my life should be protected. She drove back with speed and sent a letter to my wife in the most cordial manner, stating the promise she was made by Lord P.

Gentle reader, my tongue could not express and my pen would not be sufficient to write the many good acts done for me by this amiable lady and Mr. La Touche. However, I will explain some of the outlines of them in their proper place in this my narrative.

I am informed, naturally, of this transaction, and the reader will admit I had a painful office to undertake, namely communicating the matter to my men, which I considered myself bound to do, well knowing it would be the last subject I ever would have to explain to them.

73. Mrs. P. Latouch -I have here reverted to the spelling and punctuation of the manuscript.

74. Lord Meath of Killruddery was one of the largest landholders in County Wicklow.

Holt tells us that, after his surrender, he finds that Lord Powerscourt has prepared 'a sumptuous repast' for him. It is in this episode that we see Holt at his most vulnerable and naive. Garrulous, gullible, he is wine and dined, plied with liquor to loose his tongue, flattered by Powerscourt's treatment of him as an equal, as the 'gentleman' he has always longed to be. When he retires to bed Holt, as he more or less admits, is well and truly 'tanked.'

Writing of the occasion twenty years later Holt still fails to see through the tactics of Lord Powerscourt in allowing him those few, brief hours of glory.

The Rebellion had lasted six months. Holt implies ('lets slip' might be more appropriate) that the 'transaction' of the insurrection had, for him, lasted eight months; a hint perhaps that he had committed himself to active service as a United Irishman in March, two months before his house had been burnt down.

If Lord Powerscourt assented to Holt's malediction against Hugo as 'heartily' as Holt says, this confirms that Holt was far from being alone in his hatred for the squire of Drumeen. Indeed Luke Cullen's informants spoke of Hugo as a damned tyrant. Powerscourt was probably aware that the indiscriminate burning of houses by some landlords had driven some tenants, who might have preferred to stand apart, into the arms of the Rebels.

Holt had hoped to be allowed to emigrate freely to America, to be an exile rather than a political prisoner. In a letter to Lord Powerscourt ('or Lord Monck' reads the address) he had offered to surrender, with the proviso 'but as to give myself up to be transported I never will I would suffer to be shot in pieces first'. But did he, after all, surrender unconditionally?

In a letter written by Under Secretary Cooke to Viscount Castlereagh on November 9, Cooke, having stated that 'Holt means to surrender' and that 'Cornwallis has offered no terms', is uneasy at the legal quandary which would be posed after Powerscourt and Monck had entered into negotiations with Holt. That being the case, 'how can he be executed?' asks Cooke.

Did Cornwallis renege on an assurance given by Powerscourt? Probably we will never know but I suspect that Holt was given some grounds for his belief that promises given to him were not being honoured.

It is in the following sections, much more than in the preceding text, that Holt, no longer preoccupied with detailed accounts of his feats as a warrior, allows us a fairly comprehensive self portrait. His braggadocio is in full spate. The enemy forces, often being doubly enlisted, are in his eyes, hypocrites, contemptible opportunists. Never does it cross his mind that he might be open to the same charge, that his own argument might be turned against him with redoubled force; for if these two-faced cowardly wretches fought badly - perhaps because they had been enlisted for a Cause in which they did not

believe - how bizarre that Holt who - in that respect, was at one with them, should bring to bear his considerable military skills against an enemy with whom, in his heart, he sympathised.

That is a sophisticated, logically impeccable argument, such as a Prosecutor might deploy in a court, but it is an unrealistic one. Once the dogs of war have been let slip what price the rights and wrongs of the original Cause? Many soldiers will go on fighting out of a desire to save their own lives, only a few such as Holt, will have a taste for battle, exult in it as a sport.

So far the self-portrait reveals no intellectual distinction in our man. By military criteria his record has qualified him for heroic status. As a man, like so many formidable warriors, he is overweening, blunt, even crass, vain, ruthless, scornful of the ordinary run of men for whom the better part of valour is discretion. It is only when he is humiliated, victimised and seen to be fiercely protective of his brood that we will begin to warm to Joseph Holt, the man. His experiences in New South Wales humanised him.

I proceeded according to Promise and found them⁷⁵ at Brady's of Ballinalough⁷⁶. I called them together and said:

Men, I am about to surrender myself to Lord Powerscourt, to evade an awful death. That hundreds has endeavoured to betray me you all know and, as to any hopes of our succeeding it is entirely out of the question, as the report of the French coming to our assistance is quite unfounded. You are all sensible that your present situation in cold and hunger is beyond human conception and I shall give you my last advice, namely to return to your respective homes and betake yourselves to your usual employment. You may be certain, when I am from amongst you, the cavalry will desist from patrolling those hills and vales, so much so that the traveller can pass without being annoyed by those Vulcans. I now entreat the Omnipotent Being to protect you and guide you all safely to his own fold, which shall be the constant prayer of your unfortunate commander when probably wandering the wilds of some foreign land, So Adieu for ever, my dear fellows.

75. His men.

76. No such townland exists in this area. Probably meant to be Ballylow. Near Athdown and north west of Sally Gap.

I shook hands with each of them, while the tears fell from their eyes, and I assure the reader mine was not without a tear of sorrow for being obliged to part them. Before I took my final leave of them I told them to be aware of Hacket's party - as their trade was robbing they certainly would be punished sooner or later. The poor fellows knelt down and offered up their prayers to God for my future welfare. I then bid them the last farewell and, while I remained in their sight, they were pitching their hats on the top of their firelocks, waving them in such a manner as to let me see they still had me in view.

I proceeded across the side of Ballynabrocky mountain, through Kippure, and ascended Djouce mountain. When I arrived at the corner of Lord Powerscourt's demesne wall, I sat down to rest and try if anyone seen me or was in my view. After some short time, I proceeded in the direction of Bahana, to the house of an old friend, William Keegan. He was at home and received me cordially. I met Mrs. Holt at this place. Our worthy host brought me some refreshment and, after partaking of it and conversing on various subjects, Mr. Keegan and I set out together for Lord Powerscourt's, where we arrived about seven o'clock in the evening on the 10 of November, 1798.

Mr. Keegan sent in his name, adding that I was with him. Lord P. soon made his appearance and took me by the hand, welcomed me to Powerscourt in a pleasing and graceful manner. He then conducted me upstairs to a spacious apartment, where he had a sumptuous repast prepared for me.

When I was done dinner and the cloth removed, the table was furnished with wines of every description, and some excellent spirits. The conversation naturally turned to the transactions that happened in the country for the former eight months. I answered such questions as he demanded of me in a manner suitable to their requisition and, after some time spent in this way, I asked His Lordship's liberty to give a toast. He said he had no objections. I then announced:

'Bad luck to Thomas Hugo!'

Lord P. said with all his heart. There was a friend of His Lordship's present and he said he had no objections.

The reader will observe my reason for giving this toast was to turn the conversation on the Rebel army, namely the burning of my house caused by this wretch. Lord P. then turned to the subject and I related the matter to him in a short manner. When he heard it he shook his head.

Holt had a reputation for being verbose and blabbing indiscretions when 'in his cups' and Powerscourt seems to have pumped him for information. Taken in open carriage through the streets of Dublin on the next day (Stephen's Green, Grafton Street, Dame Street) and confined in the Birmingham Tower in Dublin Castle, Holt was then visited by Lord Cornwallis and other officials and closely questioned. On that same day, hardly a mile away, Wolfe Tone had cut his throat in Newgate prison. Taunted by his gaoler, Jemmy O'Brien (who would eventually over-reach himself and whose grisly hanging was later celebrated in a ballad 'The night that Jemmy was stretched') Holt was now hard put to fight for the rights that had been promised him.

He had believed that he would be granted an absolute pardon and allowed to emigrate to America. Informed that he was bound for Botany Bay he demanded that he be treated as a political prisoner and spared the rigours and humiliations of convict life. And his wife and children? Holt pleaded that they be allowed to accompany him. That prospect was dangled before him like a bait and he agreed to give certain 'information' perhaps reasoning with himself thus: 'After all, these men I have named have not been true to the Cause. Some are Roman Catholic bigots, some no better than banditti. Why should I who, before the Rebellion, acted "in the name of The Law", protect a criminal rabble?'

Taken to The Pigeon House and put aboard a convict hulk bound for Cork Harbour, Holt was fearful that the other United Irishmen aboard might suspect that he had gone over to the other side and turned Informer. Confined in that hulk in Cork Harbour for many months, one day he was brought ashore to meet General Myers, who held out promise of an absolute pardon, provided that Holt agreed to serve with the English forces and helped to stamp out the remaining pockets of rebels. Holt declined (or so he says) this offer. That would be Treachery. And yet - in New South Wales (so we learn from a secret letter he wrote) he would aspire to become a constable.

One day Holt was overjoyed to spy his wife, Hester, and his teenage son, Joshua, on the shore at Queenstown (Cobh). Mrs. La Touche had agreed to pay their fares and they will be travelling with him to The Antipodes. His daughter, Marianne, will remain behind in the care of that same 'gracious lady' for 'New South Wales is no place for a young girl.'

On board ship - which is still anchored in Cork harbour - Hester gave birth to a second son, Joseph. Holt was befriended by Captain Cox, who was going out to the colony as a Paymaster and was in charge of the United Irishmen on board as prisoners. Holt steered clear of his former comrades and cultivated the friendship. Cox, recognising Holt's talent for leadership and his agricultural skills entertained the idea of employing Holt as a Manager of the

farm lands which have been granted to him in the colony.

On arrival at Port Jackson, where would Holt's allegiances lie? He still hugged his title, 'The General' to himself. Would he be tempted to lead the Irish again - for they are a formidable force in Botany Bay - in a revolt? Or join forces with the Establishment and follow his aspiration to become . . . a constable, a gentleman farmer, a squire? Will he be granted his promised status as a political prisoner?

When the Minerva anchors in Sydney Harbour his loyalties will soon be put to the test.

Peter O'Shaughnessy

Segment Two: A Rum Story - Joseph Holt - thirteen years in New South Wales



Peter O'Shaughnessy is best known for his work in Australia, Ireland, Britain and Canada as a theatre director, actor and playwright. He is one of the leading directors in the world of the plays of Samuel Beckett.

He has also been distinguished for his many productions of the plays of Shakespeare and for his performance of such roles as Othello, Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear and Shylock. For the British Council, he has lectured on the plays of Shakespeare in many parts of the world.

Peter O'Shaughnessy has close ties with Ireland and has lived here, on and off, for many periods since he first visited the country in 1952.

In recent years, the following books by Peter O'Shaughnessy have been published:

The Fabulous Journey of Mac Con Glin

The Gardens of Hell

Con's Fabulous Journey to the Land of Gobel O'Glug

A Rum Story - The Adventurers of Joseph Holt

- thirteen years in New South Wales (1800 - 1812)

Appendices

From The Luke Cullen Papers

Holt had 'an unbounded and habitual desire of thrusting himself forward.'

'Holt was a coward boasting good for nothing fellow.'

'A qualified informer in conversation.'

'Not a difficult task to poison the minds of the natives of the mountains against him.'

He 'invariably joined the strongest party in debate.'

'Extremely vain.'

'Holt could not keep himself quite (quiet).'

'Notwithstanding there were men far superior to him in the qualifications of a warrior . . . but he knew the country and the people better perhaps than any man.'

'Not very well liked.'

'I could not clearly see how men who habituated themselves to the cry and din of loyalty could quickly turn around and figure in the opposite extreme He called himself a Tory Hunter, then considered the expiring spark of priest hunting and he wished them to consider him entitled to some celebrity in that way.' Cullen, Luke.

'As a constable with long standing associations with the magistracy and the yeomanry, he was in a position to assess the principal assistance to those of his new affiliation when martial law began to make inroads into the organisation.' Cullen, Luke

Against such remarks we may range the balanced account given of Holt by the man who often served under him, Miles Byrne:

' . . . In the worst times he appeared gay, never desponding . . . In short, he had qualities which quite fitted him for the kind of warfare we were obliged to make in the Wicklow mountains I think it but justice to say so much of Holt, from the many strange stories that have been told of him.

Holt's Handwriting

The following letter from the State Papers in Dublin Castle, was written by Joseph Holt after his surrender.

To Matthew Doyle, written from Dublin Castle:

November the 21th Tower Dublin Castle

Dear Mathew if would have you to come in and resign your self up to some gentleman and you need not fear your pardon if told good power want of you and he says if you come in you should get your pardon and being by also tell any more you can see to do the same for you shall your lifes are in danger if never was half so happy for any thing if down as I am since I gave myself up and secured it too the liking I have for you that makes me wish for you if hope you will consider of and that very soon for there is no time to be lost in doing so if need not tell you any more as I know you are a man of good understanding my dear friend I hope I will soon have the pleasure of seeing you no more at present from your sincere and Affectionate friend

Joseph Holt

What The Papers Said

I had, last Sunday, [16th Sept.] occasion to go as far as Roundwood in the county of Wicklow, which is about fifteen miles from town; and though I must acknowledge, I thought, from the information I received of the state of the country, that much exaggeration took place, I was undeceived in my ride; disagreeably undeceived by the shocking appearance of the country. In order to acquire personal information, I rode several miles beyond Roundwood (having set out early in the morning), and must confess, that such a scene of desolation and misery never presented itself to my view; for five miles not a single cabin to be met with, all levelled to the ground; here and there the elegant mansion of a nobleman or gentleman in ruins, the bare walls only standing; large groups of females, old and young, with numbers of children – want visibly depicted in their countenance, declaring they had no home; they were starving; – they had lost their father; – and think only of wreaking vengeance on that enemy – the only means they possess of doing so, are the firebrand and the pike, and of these they cruelly avail themselves!

Courier Newspaper, 8th October, 1798

'The following extract of a letter from Dublin, received by this mail, gives a very melancholy picture of the situation of the county of Wicklow. 'The pastime of the county of Wicklow is shooting human creatures, but on a dearth of game that of burning cabins is resorted to; but these being difficult to find on Thursday night last in the **neighbourhood** of Roundwood, a set of those sportsmen, disappointed of the number they intended to shoot before supper, set fire to four Romish chapels. Next day the country people rose up, gave battle, and killed upwards of seven hundred of the—, some of whom were the King's county—, commanded by the noted A—. To be met on the road even with a protection in your hand, is inevitable death; and to be found in your house is as certain; because in the former case, you *are running away*; and in the latter you *are hiding*. You are not to think there is any exaggeration in this statement, I know the fact. Lord Cornwallis is no match for the Orange faction.'

Courier Newspaper 31st October 1798

A letter from Dublin says — "Holt had long endeavoured to negotiate for his security, when he found his associates deserting him; and at last, when left almost alone, *surrendered unconditionally*, expressing at the same time a hope, that the discoveries and information which he should be enabled to communicate, might procure him the favour of government."

'Since the surrender of Holt, vast numbers of rebels have voluntarily surrendered themselves in the counties of Wicklow, Wexford, and Kildare; in the latter county, on Monday last, forty-eight of these deluded men surrendered in a body to General Dundas, at Kilcullen, who commands in that district,

'Holt is confined in Dublin Castle. According to the stipulations made previous to his surrender, he is shortly to set off for North America.'

Courier Newspaper, 19th November, 1798



Joseph Holt

Our Patrons

Noel Kavanagh Motors, Roundwood
Terry Kavanagh, Butcher, Roundwood
Dr. John Keating, Newtownmountkennedy
The Lakeview Inn, Roundwood
Lynhams of Laragh
Paddy Maloney, Annamoe
Joe McCabe Motors, Roundwood
Paul McGuinness, Annamoe
John O'Sullivan, Moneystown
Dr. B. V. Pippet, Wicklow
Johnny Price Motors, Roundwood
Margaret Roche, Solicitor, Enniskerry
Roundwood A.F.C.
Roundwood Community Council
Roundwood Home Producers
The Roundwood Inn
St. Kevin's Bus Service, Roundwood
An Tochar G.A.A. Club
Tochar House, Roundwood
An Tochar Resource Centre
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Vance & Wilson, E.&M.O'Brien, Bray
Vartry House, Roundwood
Village Take-away, Roundwood
W & D Motors, Sallynoggin
Whites Foodmarket, Roundwood
Wicklow Willows, Roundwood
J. J. Wolohan & Sons, Rathdrum



Scurlochs Heap

Oldcourt

Ashdown

Ballylow

This vast Tract of Mountains and Bogs

Whelp Rock

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