Serious Crime 1847-48
William Ryan (Puck)
Hero or Murderer

Contents

Chapter 1
Introduction

Chapter 2
William Ryan (Puck)

Chapter 3
Witnesses

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Primary Sources

Secondary Sources and Bibliography

List of Illustrations

Map 1 & 2

Graph

Picture of Network Convictor Death Mask

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Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction 2-10
Chapter 2 William Ryan (Puck) 11-21
Chapter 3 Witnesses 27-41
Chapter 4 Whiteboyes 43-51
Chapter 5 Conclusion 54-61

Primary Sources, 62-66
Secondary Sources and Bibliography 67-68

List of Illustrations
Map 1 & 2 22
Graph 23
Picture of Francois Courvoiser Death Mask 24
Ryan (Pucks) World 25
The Horror of Hanging 26
Picture of a meal cart under escort 42
Croom Map 52
Reward Posters 53
William Ryan (Puck) was executed for the murder of John Kelly on the 7 February 1848, outside the Limerick County Jail.

The reason for the murder committed by Ryan (Puck) was land, land that was shared between Ryan and his father with Michael Kelly, the brother of the deceased John Kelly.

The persons in the house at the time of the murder were John Kelly the deceased, (brother of Michael Kelly) his wife, his nephew, his niece, and Michael Kelly and a servant boy also named Michael Kelly. Entering the house in the evening of 22 September 1847 was the assassin William Ryan (Puck).

The house in which Ryan (Puck) was arrested is the home of William Frewen; he received transportation for life for harbouring Ryan (Puck).

Margaret Ryan, a main witness in the case, she was the niece of John Kelly. The Crown paid her £50 and a free passage to America.

Mary Glesson, a main witness in the case, the Crown paid her a sum of money with free passage to America for Mary and her family.

The land consisted of 12 acres, the landowner was a gentleman named Mr. Biggs. The Kelly’s had 9 acres and the Ryan’s 3 acres. The Ryan’s were not paying their rent, and the landowner took the land back and gave it to the Kelly’s, who were paying their rent, and were doing many improvements to the farm.

Persons that were affected by the murder, the Kelly family, the witnesses and their families, Margaret Ryan, Mary Glesson, Michael Kelly, and the Frewen family of Bunkey, County Limerick. Also the family of Ryan (Puck), his mother and brother.

The Body of Ryan (Puck) after his execution was cleaned by his execution was cleaned by his mother and brother and the body was then buried in the Limerick County Jail.

William Ryan (Puck) at the time of his execution was 23 years of age.
To write with reference to serious crime in 1847-48, one would need a characterization on the life of an individual who was tried, convicted and executed by the Crown. This person’s life and death will show what was happening in the Counties of Limerick and Tipperary. What parallels or impact on crime did the famine have? The personality that was at the pinnacle of the crime wave in County Limerick and Tipperary in 1847 was William Ryan (Puck). Maurice Lenihan can be given the recognition for keeping the William Ryan (Puck) story alive through the paper, *The Limerick Reporter and the Tipperary Vindicator*. Maurice Lenihan was born in Waterford in 1811. After a lifetime’s work as a journalist and editor, Lenihan died in poverty in Limerick in 1895. Lenihan was also a historian, and his major work on the history of Limerick, *Limerick: Its History and Antiquities*, was published in 1866. In this work Lenihan writes of a Special Commission that sat in Limerick when several prisoners were tried, including William Ryan, commonly called Ryan Puck, were hanged in front of the county Limerick jail on 7 February 1848 for the murder of John Kelly at Knocksentry, County Limerick in the previous September. Other prisoners were sentenced to transportation, among whom was William Frewen, transported for life for harbouring Ryan Puck.

Maurice Lenihan received an inquiry from a gentleman named Charles H. Hartney, of Troy, New York, U.S.A. on 31 July 1877. Hartney was looking for the facts about the case, and Maurice Lenihan accordingly obliged, through the annals of *Limerick Reporter and the Tipperary Vindicator*.

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2. Sean Spellissy, *Limerick The Rich Land*, 1989. p. 62. Limerick Prison: In 1816 three acres of land was purchased on the New Cork Road (now Mulgrave Street) for £958.33. Work commenced on the New County Jail in 1817 and was completed in 1821 at a cost of £23,000. James Pain designed the prison, he is better known for designing big houses of that period.
Tipperary Vindicator, with a full account of the case in August 1877. Lenihan’s description of the trial and his account of the state of the nation during the famine years will help resolve some questions about the events in the case of William Ryan (Puck). Nevertheless what of the witnesses in the Special Commission, how did the Crown care for them after the trial? After all, some of the Crown witnesses lives were now in danger. Why was William Ryan (Puck) such a hero to the people of East Limerick? The police would have known of him prior to the murder of John Kelly, so why did they not arrest him for any one of his many daring attacks on landlords and property, and his notoriety for waiting his moment to shoot someone down? Any one of his crimes would have got him a sentence of transportation for seven years or for life.

Between 1840 and 1851 groups of men often threatened farmers and landlords about the price of potatoes and milk, sometimes even telling the farmers what to charge for their produce. In some of these cases, shots were fired and the Chief Constable of the said counties offered rewards. Some of these attacks were based around the whiteboy tradition, but William Ryan (Puck) was not a whiteboy but the crimes he committed were of a whiteboy type.

Another historian who wrote of William Ryan (Puck) in his book Limerick Historical Reflections 1996, was Kevin Hannan, who describes the trial of Ryan (Puck) as one the best remembered trials held in the County Courthouse, Kevin Hannan also wrote, “Ryan (Puck) was a young man in his twenties and a great favourite in a wide area around East Limerick, he was known to have risked life and liberty on many occasions assisting those who were being ill-treated by the landlords, sometimes seeking redress for sufferers far outside his own

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4 Limerick Chronicle, 23 August 1877.
5 Chief Secretary’s Office, Registered Papers, Outrage Reports, (cited hereafter as O. R.) a report on James Moloney, Ballyingillough, County Limerick. 1840. N.A.I. 17/9835.
area". Kevin Hannan’s account is concise and generates the opinion that William Ryan (Puck) was a hero, justified by his actions.

Ryan (Puck) is also mentioned in a book by Ciarán Ó Murchadha called ‘Sable Wings Over The Land’. In this book there is reference to the murder of James Watson near O’Brien’s Bridge, County Clare and the executions of Ryan Small and John Crow for their part in the murder. Ryan (Puck) was involved in this murder.

The Limerick Chronicle provides us with an accumulation of information on the events surrounding Ryan (Puck’s) execution in 1848. Many questions arise from the Limerick Chronicle accounts: how did the Crown deal with agrarian crime? Was it one law for the rich and one law for the poor? The thread throughout this work is William Ryan (Puck), comparing his crimes with other crimes of that period.

The outrage papers for Limerick 1840 to 1850 will provide information on how the Crown treated witnesses. In some cases, reward money was considered for the brutal crime that took place, in other cases the reward money was out of proportion to the outrages committed, e.g. for one sheep that was stolen the reward was £10 plus £5 private reward; on the other hand in a rape case the reward was £20. Many new facts about the witnesses in the Ryan (Puck) trial will come to light, the niece of John and Michael Kelly had lived with them since a very young age. Her name was

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Margaret Ryan; she was the Crown witness who identified William Ryan (Puck) as the murderer of John Kelly at Knocksentry. She was engaged to marry a policeman, but shortly after the trial they parted company. Her own family did everything in their influence to stop her testifying against William Ryan (Puck). Why was her family so set against her testifying? After all she was well cared for by her uncles and now one of her uncles lay dead because of Ryan (Puck).

Michael Kelly, the brother of the murdered John Kelly was in partnership with Ryan (Puck) and his father, on land owned by Mr. Biggs. The farm consisted of twelve acres, the Ryan's holding was three acres, and Michael Kelly held the other nine acres. This crime will be examined against the background of other crimes of the time. A graph showing the crime rate will be produced using the British Parliamentary Papers, from this the rate of murder and manslaughter in Limerick and Tipperary County, in 1850 will become clearer.

The famine did turn the wind of changes for many of the inhabitants of this land. To convey in the very sad words of Maurice Lenihan a man that witnessed the famine of 1845 to 1850: "Famine had already eaten into the marrow of the population, the voice of the wailing was almost stilled throughout the land, owing to the fact that tens of thousands of the people had already fallen helpless into coffin-less graves, and the survivors here and there were decimated by eviction and the worse than charnel house of the workhouse". - Some very emotional words

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9 O. R. for Limerick, a letter from Sir. Matrew Barrington refusing monies to the family of Margaret Ryan, 1st August 1848. N.A.I. 17/1107. 10 *The Limerick Chronicle*, 23 August 1877.
by Maurice Lenihan, to describe an empty land and the whisper of death still on-going. Disease and hunger was destroying the populace. Did this propel the lower classes to its limits, looking for provisions, thinking of committing crimes as a way to alleviate their problems? If ever a time was seasoned to commit serious crime it was then.

What condition was Limerick in at this time? H. D. Inglis a visitor to Limerick city in 1834 gives an interesting view, on a visit to Ireland leaves us in no doubt about the condition of Limerick city, "I know of no town in which so distinct a line is drawn between its good and its bad quarters, as Limerick. A person arriving in Limerick by one of the best approaches, and driving to an hotel in George Street (now O'Connell Street), will probably say, "What a handsome city this is!" while a person entering the city by the old town, taking up his quarters there - a thing, indeed, not likely to happen - would infallibly set down Limerick as the very vilest town he had ever entered." Some nine years later in 1843, J.G. Kohl on visit left a similar impression of Limerick with his views, "The Irish town is generally full of dirt, disorder and decay; the English quarter, on the other hand, reminds one of the better parts of London. The inhabitants of the two quarters live in a sort of constant opposition to one another". There was no mention by either gentleman of serious crime, was this to suggest that the city was well regulated, while on the other hand the county of Limerick was ungovernable. To support this view, a proclamation by the Lord Lieutenant and Council of Ireland was issued on 27 January 1846, declaring a state of disturbance in the Baronies of Clanwilliam, Owenybeg, Small County and Coshlea, forewarning the people of those baronies that an additional establishment of police would be installed.

11 The Limerick Chronicle, 23 August 1877.
12 H.D. Inglis, A Journey Throughout Ireland, during the spring, summer and autumn of 1834, Whittaker, London 1836.
13 J.G. Kohl, Ireland, Dublin, the Shannon, Limerick, 1843, p. 39.
14 O. R. for Limerick, A Proclamation Poster, telling of additional policing needed because of the state of disturbance in the County of Limerick, 1846. N. A. I. (There's no ref. number on the poster but a copy will be include in this work).
William Ryan (Puck) was born 1825; at a time when the authorities were struggling for many years to maintain law and order in Ireland, and the worst parts for agrarian crime were Limerick and Tipperary. What kind of society did Ryan (Puck) grow up in, did he need to pursue a life of crime or could he have pursued a more law-abiding career? He could have joined the army, which many young men did in an effort to leave Ireland. With the population increasing, from 6,802,000 in 1821, to 7,767,000 in 1831, and by 1841 it had reached 8,175,000. The land could not support the population with sub-division already stretching the small landowners and farmers and cotters and the landless labourers to its limits. Having survived famine before, the inhabitants of the land could have never imagined what the blight of the potato would bring in 1845 and the effects from deprivation they’re after. What benefit would young Irish men have in joining the Crown forces? Or was Ireland just a recruiting and training ground for the Crown for the many campaigns the British Empire became involved in over the centuries?

Policing Ireland was always a problem for the authorities. The authorities however did try to introduce policing methods in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The yeomanry was established in 1796, it basically was a third army with very strong links to the gentry and the orange order, under the act, the corps offered arms, equipment, uniforms and pay to volunteers who would submit to discipline and place themselves under officers holding

commissions from the Crown or the lord lieutenant. It would have to be said the yeomanry existed primarily in Ulster, in 1831, out of a total of 29,000 men Munster had 2,000 and their links with Orange lodges made them dubious as far as policing Catholics went. In fact they would be the cause of trouble by their presence but by 1834 they were disbanded by the Whig Government. In 1814 the Lord Lieutenant was empowered by the Crown to appoint a chief police magistrate, with a specially appointed force under his command, this force was called the Peace Preservation Force. A further reform followed in 1822 with the act for the Constabulary was introduced. By the 1830 the constabulary numbered 7,700 officers and men, but the Peace Preservation Force was declining away with them stationed in only ten counties, their numbers amounted to six hundred. The Constabulary force were given the honour to be called the Royal Irish Constabulary by parliament, by way of thanks for arresting Smith O’Brien and his followers during the failed uprisings in 1848, and the more serious Fenian uprising in 1867. Ryan (Puck) had no regard for law and order and anyone in authority and serving the Crown would be the last thing on his mind. Ryan (Puck) in younger years would have been aware of Daniel O’Connell M.P. in delivering Catholic emancipation which was a major victory for middle class Irish catholics in 1829, and in later years he would have also have known of the political agenda of William Smith O’Brien M.P. who joined the Repeal Association in 1843 which led to his downfall

1848 with the failed rebellion. But Ryan (Puck) was a much more violent man than these two
popular heroes. O'Connell and O'Brien were both very well educated gentlemen while Ryan
(Puck) was of the lower classes, who only learned to read and write in the last few months of
his life while in prison. But Ryan (Puck) was gaining a reputation for helping others by
taking on the authorities but not with a political agenda but by using lethal force, coming
from a class society, that places Ryan (Puck) in the lowest part of his own society, the very
elements that could cause him to revolt against the Crown.

The Repeal Association issued some strongly worded posters throughout the country, one
such poster taken down in Francis Street, Limerick, by James Daly, Head Constable, on the 3
March 1847; ....."Men of Limerick! You sons of the heroes of the siege, I beg to address
these lines to you, the day, nay the hour has arrived! No longer slavery in this beautiful land
of ours, no longer starvation in this land of milk and honey; by nature's dictates by the all-
seeing God, but cursed, cursed, by our accursed rulers, even for centuries. Oh! English
misrule has caused all." The poster goes on to say, O'Connell is looking with anxious soul
sore from his grave, both John O'Connell and Smith O'Brien's hearts are in the right place,
"France! Oh, Glorious France! Has taught tyrants a lesson, France not only the boast and
pride of Europe, but of the world, and may be, that perhaps at even the eleventh hour
England may take the hint"..... Would there have been a political view on the crimes
committed by Ryan Puck? William Smith O'Brien M.P. did meet with Ryan (Puck) in 1848,
but inappropriately for Ryan (Puck), because William Smith O'Brien came to his cell in the
Limerick Prison to read the death penalty decree the day of his execution. William Smith
O'Brien was born at Dromoland Castle, County Clare on 27 October 1803, the second son of
Sir Edward O'Brien. O'Brien was unrelenting in his work for the economic regulation of
Ireland at Westminster; he was an unyielding advocate in national rehabilitation for Ireland

19 The Limerick Chronicle, 9 February 1848.
through economic growth. William Ryan’s (Puck) world was a million miles removed from that of William Smith O’Brien, but each one was a male protagonist to the people. O’Brien fought through with a political agenda, while Ryan (Puck) fought over land with landlords and killed for land. Both were for the people but one was a killer and executed for his crime. Or was Ryan (Puck) a hero to his own kind, and a thorn in the side of the authorities.

Patrick Sarsfield, Hero of the Siege of Limerick. 1690-91.

William Ryan (Puck)
Chapter 2

The story of William Ryan (Puck) is not that exceptional for its time. He committed murder because of land, but what makes his case extraordinary is the fact that he was involved in three murders. The pragmatic way to examine Ryan's (Puck) life is to start on the day he was executed. The previous year 22 September 1847 Ryan (Puck) committed murder, and received the death sentence from the Lord Chief Baron. It was to be the 6 February, but the sixth was on a Sunday so it was then changed to the seventh on a Monday, this was giving Ryan (Puck) an extra twenty-four hours to live, but this was never questioned, should there have been legal question on the extra day, for to tell a person that they were going to be executed on a certain day and then change it through no fault of the prisoner the Crown would be deemed to be wrong, even in this case the prisoner was clearly guilty as charged. The only mention of this was by Mr. J. O'Sullivan, of the Cork Weighouse, he alleged that the death penalty that was passed upon Ryan (Puck) was illegal.21

21 The Limerick Chronicle, 9 February 1848.
On the same day that Ryan (Puck) received the severity of the law for the crime he committed there was also another execution, a young man named Andrew O'Dea who was just eighteen years old. Andrew O'Dea had committed murder because of land, his father was ejected from the farm he worked at Duntryleague, County Limerick, and the farm was offered to John Noonan, but on 9 June 1846 Andrew O'Dea with his brother Patrick tried to kill Noonan but it was the brother in-law of Noonan that was killed, and it was only for the fact that the gun jammed twice that Noonan escaped certain death. The gun used by the O'Dea brothers was repaired the day before at a smith’s forge. John Noonan had a wife and eight young children, and was now unable to continue to do business for fear of his life. The Crown gave him £50 to remove himself and family to some other place; this was approved by Sir Matthew Barrington, Crown Solicitor.

The only common link between Andrew O'Dea and William Ryan (Puck) is that both had committed murder over land because of a grudge. But William Ryan (Puck) was a known highwayman, and a hired killer in the case of an east Clare land agent Mr. James Watson, and he was also responsible for the murder of Mr. Peter Nash. Ryan (Puck) was seen as a hero for the people who would take on the landlords and anyone in authority. Andrew O'Dea was guilty of one murder, but he was no hero to anyone,

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23 The Limerick Chronicle, 8 January 1848.
by all accounts he was a handsome lad, even the Queen’s Counsel, Mr. Bennett declined offering any remarks to the jury because of the young age of O’Dea. The Chief Baron was moved by this case while reviewing the evidence to the jury; the jury never left the jurors box finding Andrew O’Dea guilty.26

There is another link between Andrew O’Dea and William Ryan (Puck), subsequent to their executions, a gentleman named Mr. Riding, accompanied by Professor Barnett and Mr. Falkener a scientific gentleman from England, took a cast of the heads of Andrew O’Dea and William Ryan (Puck), with the purpose of sending them to Phrenological Societies, without any thoughts on the men, and then compare the opinions of the societies to each other.27 The information is to be passed on to the public. These gentlemen said that there could not be two heads within the range of rational persons, presenting more different developments than the heads of these two criminals.28 This would suggest that both murderers were miles apart by their actions. Professor Barnett went on to astound the people of Ennis in May 1848 with his demonstrations of extraordinary phenomena. The centrepiece of his Phrenological collection was the late William Ryan (Puck) and models of celebrated warriors, philosophers, idiots and murderers.29

William Ryan (Puck) came from a hard background, he turned out to be a seasoned killer; he may have been influenced by the death of his father who died in a faction fight.30 The case against Andrew O’Dea is seen as a youth who because of the loss of their farm led him to commit murder even if it was the wrong person he killed, but murder is murder whether its in England or Ireland and the death sentence prevailed in the 1800s.

26 The Limerick Chronicle, 8 January 1848.
27 Phrenology: the theory that the various faculties and powers of the mind are connected with certain parts of the brain, and can be known by an examination of the outer surface of the skull, the science by which character can be read by examining the skull.
28 The Limerick Chronicle, 9 February 1848.
29 Ciarán Ó Murchadha, ‘Sable Wings Over The Land’ Ennis, County Clare, 1998. pp. 175, 176.
30 The Limerick Chronicle, 9 February 1848.
William Ryan (Puck) was a man who travelled. His world was not a small one; he would have gained a comprehension of the way life was lived in other communities. He took part in the murder of Mr. James Watson of Ballycorney, County Clare, on 17 May 1847. In this murder Ryan (Puck) was savage, he beat the butt of the gun off the victim who screamed for mercy as Ryan killed him, breaking the butt of the gun on the victim. In contrast to this, while Ryan (Puck) suffered from a fever in the Limerick County Jail he was treated with compassion when a doctor treated his fever in December 1847.31

William Ryan (Puck) must have presented to the authorities a fearful extravagance of aggression, because on the day he was executed the entire City Police were present as was a troop of the 1st Royal Dragoons, were drawn up in front of the jail under the command of Sub Inspector Williams, and not too far away in the Artillery barracks convenient to the prison were two companies of the 92nd Highlanders ready for duty. Major General Napier and Colonel Cox and Lieut- Colonel Doyle were also present at the prison. There were immeasurable crowds in attendance at the implementation of the death penalty upon Ryan (Puck) and O'Dea.32 The need by the Crown to have a very high police and army presence at the execution would suggest that trouble was expected from the populace, but why was this? Is it because Ryan (Puck) had a following or was it the fact that Andrew O'Dea who was recorded as being a courteous young lad, who was caught up in a bad situation because of the family’s loss of their land.

31 The Limerick Chronicle, 15 January 1848.
32 The Limerick Chronicle, 9 February 1848.
On the day of the execution at 2.30 both prisoners were attended in their cells by William Smith O’Brien Esq Sub Sheriff, both prisoners were in devout prayer with their respective priest. Within six months of these executions, William Smith O’Brien became a prisoner of the Crown and was tried for high treason in Clonmel, County Tipperary. There was quite an assortment of citizens present in the cells of the condemned men who had by now accepted their providence, Rev. William Bourke, Roman Catholic Chaplain, Rev. William McDonnell, Rev. James Ryan, Rev. J. Bunton, Rev. J. Quinlan, and Rev. M. Cosgrave, Mr. James Walsh principal of the order of the Christian Brothers in the city was also in attendance for the prisoners. Two executioners were present and attended the pressroom where the prisoners were now in that wing.

This was not a savage approach by the authorities to execute two Irish men but contrasting the way the authorities treated these men in their final days it was full of compassion and done with a professional manner. The day previous to the execution William Ryan (Puck) and Andrew O’Dea spent time with their parents and brothers and sisters saying their last goodbyes. That night the condemned men never went to bed; but stayed up all night by candlelight in profound prayer. The prisoners made their last statement both admitting their guilt, but in Andrew O’Dea’s statement he writes that he acted alone and was not aided by his brother or any other person. By making this statement he saved his brother Patrick from a similar fate or even transportation for life. A very brave deed by young O’Dea

33 The Limerick Chronicle, 9 February 1848.
34 The Limerick Chronicle, 9 February 1848.
35 The Limerick Chronicle, 9 February 1848.
because the authorities had a witness who said that both brothers were at the scene where the murder of Mr. Edward Murphy took place.

The name of the witness was Mr. John Noonan. He was the intended victim but it was his brother-in-law, Edward Murphy, that the fatal shot struck. Andrew O'Dea also stated in his final statement that he forgave all those who took part in his prosecution, and warned others not to indulge in revenge, which was the cause of his circumstances that had landed him at the gallows. These statements were referred to as dying declarations of guilt made by O'Dea and Ryan. O'Dea wrote a very good hand, and was an intelligent youth. Ryan (Puck) only learned to read and write in the county jail about twelve months previously, while undergoing imprisonment for another offence.

The statements were attributed to the prisoners, but one cannot help but see the influence of the church coming through the statements. In Ryan (Puck's) statement this is more evident. The church was involved with the prisoners right up to the end, until the prisoners were launched into eternity. The church, whether it be Roman Catholic or Church of Ireland used their influence on the prisoners to make sure that the condemned men were guilty as charged, in other words to make sure that the Crown made a safe and sound conviction. This approach didn't work all the time, resulting in the death of some innocent souls.

This is Ryan (Puck's) last testimonial, as it appeared in the *Limerick Chronicle*, Wednesday 9 February 1848,

....."I admit the justice of the sentence pronounced upon me I am sorry from my heart for all my crimes, and I humbly beg pardon of the Almighty God for them, and hope for his mercy through the suffering and death of my Lord and redeemer Jesus Christ. I humbly ask pardon of every one I may have injured or offended or to whom any act of my life may have given bad example, as I


37 *The Limerick Chronicle*, 9 February 1848.
hope for pardon for my sins from the great God. I freely and from my heart forgive all those who prosecuted me or otherwise injured me. I ascribe all my misfortune and crimes to the neglect of my religious duties, and I advise all young persons like me to attend to the instructions and advice of their clergy, which I am now sorry for having neglected. I do declare that during my life I have never received one farthing except what I earned as a labourer by the sweat of my brow. I hope that all who read or hear this will pray to the Lord to have mercy on my soul. Signed by William Ryan (Puck)”....

In this well worded statement, Ryan (Puck) blamed his entire downfall to his neglect of religious duties, but not a mention of the famine, could this have been because Ryan (Puck) did not feel the effects of the famine since his crimes may have been well paid. Ryan also stated that he never received one farthing except what he earned as a labourer by the sweat of his brow, but this does not match up with the facts because Ryan (Puck) was one of a gang that was hired to kill Mr. James Watson of Ballycorney, County Clare, on 17 May 1847. In this murder Ryan (Puck) was gruesome in the way he beat Watson to death, breaking the butt of the gun on the victims head. As a hired assassin he would have received some type of payment.

38 *The Limerick Chronicle*, 9 February 1848.
39 *The Limerick Chronicle*, 22 January 1848.
The fatal day had arrived for Ryan (Puck) and O’Dea, 7 February 1848, the day of their execution. The clergymen having put on their canonicals the mournful procession formed in the avenue fronting the tower upon which the gallows was erected, and the appearance of the criminals as they slowly approached the last stage of their life, produced deep and profound impressions upon the respectable class of spectators who were admitted within the prison walls. O’Dea, a handsome lad, of ‘mild innocent aspect’, who had only entered upon his nineteenth year, appeared weak and depressed, yet he walked with a firm step to the scaffold, holding a book in his hands, from which he repeated the litanies and prayers appropriate for the occasion after three clergymen by whom he was supported. The respectable classes were moved by the sad occasion, and the youthful appearance of Andrew O’Dea. Ryan (Puck) came out more resolute, and did not exhibit any indication of nervousness, he was accompanied by three Roman Catholic Priests, and held a crucifix and beads between his hands, praying aloud, in an audible tone, and to all appearance, exhibited a genuine atonement for his past sins, (a temperament which he accepted from the date of his conviction) beseeching God to have compassion upon his soul.

It was by direction of the Sheriff that no persons except the clergymen the officers of the prison and the executioners be admitted upon the scaffold for the drop, a directive adopted at the request of the chaplain. Having ascended the place of execution, the two ill-fated young men, (Ryan being 23 years of age) continued in prayer for about ten minutes, after which the Dublin hangman, veiled in a black serge, came forward to perform his repulsive duty as finisher of the law. The ropes were adjusted and caps drawn over the faces of the doomed victims. The fatal bolt was next drawn, and O’Dea was launched into perpetuity without a struggle. Ryan (Puck) struggled hard for a few seconds, and from the convulsive heaving of the body, must have died in great agony, if in a state of consciousness.

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40 The Limerick Chronicle, 9 February 1848.
The bodies having suspended for the usual time were cut down, and conveyed in coffins to the prison yard for interment, the relatives of both being permitted to perform the sad office of washing. Some days after the execution, through the annals of the *Limerick Chronicle* the executioner denies that there was an offer made to him to sell the clothes of Ryan (Puck). Immediately after his body was cut down, the mother of the culprit carried away every particle of his dress. The clothing of Andrew Dea was taking away by his father on the same occasion. There was a popular rumour that Ryan (Puck) body was still warm when it was cut down and the surgeon was sent for, and Ryan (Puck) was bled to death. But historian Maurice Lenihan dismisses this rumour, and he was in a position to do so. Lenihan had showed attentiveness in the Ryan (Puck) case as he covered the case in his paper *Limerick Reporter and the Tipperary Vindicator*. He also mentions it in his book *Limerick: Its History and Antiquities*, published in 1866.

The character of Ryan (Puck) the man becomes clearer in a brief account in *The Clare Journal Ennis 1848*. Where he stated that:

.....he did not like to give the Kelly's the satisfaction of thinking that he was hanged for the murder of their relative, and that he would sooner have pleaded guilty to the charges against him in Clare than run the chance of an acquittal in Limerick, as he wished to die in his own county....

Obliviously the feud with the Kelly's was buried deep into Ryan's (Puck) heart. Also the piece mentions his county of Clare, so Ryan (Puck) was not from Limerick or Tipperary but from Clare. Ryan (Puck) also stated:

..... that he expressed his regret to the police that, he did not remain at large for a week longer than he did, as he would have the satisfaction of shooting

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41 *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 February 1848.
42 *Limerick Chronicle*, 23 August 1877.
43 *The Clare Journal Ennis*, 13 January 1848.
the man who employed him to commit that murder (Peter Nash, Murder),
and who only paid an instalment of the blood-money, and would not give
him the rest ..... 44

Again the brutality of the man is more evident than before. When one reads something like
that, one wonders why young O'Dea had to face the same fate as the real blood killer Ryan
(Puck). But the reality of the situation is both committed murder.

Without a doubt the crowd came to take a last look at Ryan (Puck) who was described as a
powerful man by the Clare Journal 1848. The executor begin his work at two thirty, both
prisoners were tied in the usual manner. When the finisher of the law drew the bolt, young
O'Dea died within two minutes, but the powerful Ryan (Puck) struggled for seven minutes as
the clergy stood over him and prayed. The sight is best described in the Clare Journal 1848
..... the scene was enough to chill the blood, and paralyse the nerves of the stoutest ..... 45
Maybe there was something in the rumour 'that the surgeon had to bleed Ryan (Puck) to
death'.

The last public execution in Ireland took place in Wexford, outside the county jail, Tuesday
11 August 1863. The unfortunate was a man named Joseph Kelly age forty-five; he came
from a farming background. He was described as a man of strong passion and cruel nature.
He was previously acquitted of manslaughter charge. The crime that brought him to the
gallows was murder. He killed a schoolteacher named Michael Fitzhenry. 46 The reason
offered for the murder was revenge. The schoolteacher held a farm once held by the Kelly's,
the case is similar to Andrew O'Dea's case and Ryan (Puck) case. A brutal murder took
place, but the last public execution had all the elements of history gone past in the nineteenth
century. The crimes were the same but the state failed to see the root cause till it was to late,
ejection from the farm led to poverty or emigration for some of the lucky ones. The other

44 The Clare Journal Ennis, 13 January 1848.
45 The Clare Journal Ennis, 10 February 1848.
46 Evening Herald, 23 April 1957.
misfits would go to the smoke filled industrial cities of England, while crime was the only way to survive for others.

The last execution in the Ireland took place in Mountjoy Jail Dublin Tuesday 20 April 1954. The case was one of murder, committed by Michael Manning on Wednesday 18 November 1953. He killed a woman named Mary E Cooper, a staff nurse at Barrington’s Hospital. The murder took place at Castletroy not far from the site of the present University of Limerick. The trial and subsequent execution of Manning caused a huge sensation in Limerick. There had not being a murder in Limerick city or county for a period of twenty-five years. It was over a hundred and six years since Ryan (Puck) was executed with Andrew O’Dea to last execution in Ireland. One of the worse counties in Ireland for serious crime Limerick had gone twenty-five years with out any murder convictions. It’s hard to say why this was; maybe it was the fear of the hangman or the influence of the church. But it would be fair to say that Irish society had come a long way to living in peace with each other.

William Frewen’s House, at Gardenhill, County Limerick, (R 682 613) where Ryan (Puck) was captured, not far from Bunkey (R 684 605) were Ryan lived.

Knocksentry, (R 677 584) County Limerick, where William Ryan (Puck) murdered John Kelly, 1847.

Source: Map 1, Ordnance Survey of Ireland Discovery Series 65, 1: 50 0000
Source: Map 2, Ordnance Survey of Ireland Discovery Series 58, 1: 50 0000
Murder and Manslaughter 1831 to 1841.

Source: British Parliamentary Papers 1841.
Courvoisier’s death mask was exhibited in Madame Tussaud’s well into the twentieth century. Its obscene realism at least reminds us that this book’s subjects once lived as we do, and then were killed. Courvoisier was hanged before 30,000 people (including Dickens and Thackeray) for murdering and stealing from his aristocratic master.

Why was there so much interest in executions of the nineteenth century and why was society fascinated by death? Was it the entertainment of the day? Francois Courvoisier was executed in England for murdering and stealing from his aristocratic master in 1840. As in the case of Ryan (Puck) and O’Dea the cast of their heads was used for Phrenological Societies, and immense entertainment was had in Ennis when the celebrated Professor Barnett put Ryan’s (Puck) mask on display.

An illustration of the size of William Ryan (Puck's) World.
It's worth pointing out that Ryan (Puck) lasted seven minutes on the end of the hangman's rope before his life ended.

The horror of Hanging in the nineteenth century.

27. Théodore Géricault, *A public hanging*, 1820. Sketched while he was visiting London in 1820, Géricault's image confronts the terror of the condemned with unparalleled immediacy. It was never to the English taste to get as emotionally close to the subject at this. English depictions invariably diverted attention away from the scaffold's victims towards the crowd.

9. The hanged man's touch, 1828. The touch of a hanged man's hand had long been believed to cure cancers and warts. This illustration from 1828 purports to depict an incident in 1814 when some women mounted the Newgate scaffold for the purpose, one of them 'so much affected by the ceremony that she was obliged to be supported'. The picture's comic line (owing much to Rowlandson), and its indifference to topographical accuracy, suggest how few took the old belief seriously by the 1820s.

The treatment of witnesses by the Crown.

Did the Crown secure convictions in all cases without any forensic evidence?

What was to be anticipated becoming a Witness for the Crown?

The value of the witnesses for the Crown

Witnesses in serious crime, 1840-50

On becoming a witness, what changes would one have to make to their life?

Were the lives of the witnesses in danger after giving evidence to the Crown?

Were the lives of the families of the witnesses in danger, did the Crown give help to these families?
Witnesses

Chapter 3

In all serious crime committed, victims were left for dead or murdered outright in a show of aggression or rage, revenge or robbery. In some cases manslaughter was as much as the Crown could get in a conviction, in other brutal cases no convictions were secured. When the Crown did succeed in getting a conviction for murder, the death penalty became a reality for the prisoner, but for the Crown to succeed in getting convictions they had to depend upon the evidence of witnesses, but the more serious the crime the more danger to the life of the witness. With that in mind what did it mean to be a Crown witness? In almost every case witnesses were paid a sum of money for giving state evidence. This is not to suggest that the Crown paid for evidence but to a certain extent took care of witnesses who suffered losses by giving evidence.

There were ten witnesses involved in the Ryan case. All the witnesses were for the prosecution, and there were no witnesses called for the defense, a speech by Mr. O’Hea being the only defence put forward for Ryan (Puck).50 One of the witnesses, Mary Glesson had to be taken to Limerick City for her protection including her husband Timothy and their two sons James and John, for fear any acquaintances of Ryan (Puck) would try to kill them.51 Mary Glesson was the eyewitness that Ryan (Puck) passed on his way to Knocksentry from Bunkey to commit the murder. The account given by Mary Glesson gives an insight into the disposition of Ryan (Puck) just a half hour before the murder. Ryan (Puck) passed Mary Glesson on his way to Knocksentry, at this time he was in the company of a man. He was not armed at this stage but the other man was armed with a gun or blunderbuss. The witness

50 The Limerick Chronicle, 23 August 1877.
51 O.R. Papers for Limerick report by William Tracy Royal Magistrate writing about the very important witness Mary Glesson, having her and her family brought to Limerick for their protection.1848, N.A.I. 17/118
recognized Ryan but did not know the other man. Before passing the witness both men separated and joined company again heading in the direction of John Kelly's house.\textsuperscript{52} Ryan (Puck) was the only one charged with the murder of John Kelly, his co-conspirator provided the weapon. This would suggest that Ryan (Puck) had an influence over other persons more than likely by fear of violent aggression. His code of dress at the time would suggest his state of mind at this time; he wore a straw hat and had no shoes or stockings on, not the attire of a highwayman or the hero of the people but more than likely a man focussed on committing murder.\textsuperscript{53} Ryan (Puck) was involved in a bloody feud with the Kellys since losing his family's section of land to them. All the violence came from Ryan (Puck), even an attempt to murder Michael Kelly by Ryan (Puck) took place, wounding him in the back on 17 September 1847 in Bunkey. In this attack Ryan (Puck) discharged a pistol at his victim. Michael Kelly gave his statement in the presence of Ryan (Puck) who said he had nothing to say other than he was innocent of the charge of shooting him.\textsuperscript{54} A very dangerous man was emerging, and he was out of control, Ryan (Puck) had no regard for human life.

The witness Margaret Ryan had resided with her uncle Michael Kelly at Bunkey for many years prior to his murder. She identified Ryan (Puck) as the person who murdered her uncle on 22 September 1847.\textsuperscript{55} Margaret Ryan was a primary witness in this case and by being a witness her life would change forever. Her first incidence as a Crown witness was to move to a Limerick City Police Station for her protection as Ryan (Puck) had many acquaintances that would gladly dispose of the witness. The Crown got this witness to come forward with the understanding that she would be completely protected in a city police station and when

\textsuperscript{52} The Limerick Chronicle, 23 August 1877.
\textsuperscript{53} The Limerick Chronicle, 23 August 1877.
\textsuperscript{54} O.R. Papers for Limerick, statement taken from Michael Kelly in the murder case of John Kelly by William Ryan (Puck) by William Tracy and John Dwyer. 18 October 1847. N.A.I. (no ref. Number on statement).
\textsuperscript{55} O.R. Papers for Limerick, statement of Margaret Ryan to the Earl of Clarendon Lord Lieutenant General and General Governor of Ireland, 1848. N.A.I. 17/847.
the case was concluded she would receive a reward, which would help her to leave Ireland. The authorities were very slow in honoring their agreement with Margaret Ryan after the Crown had successfully prosecuted Ryan (Puck) and he was executed 7 February 1848, but Margaret Ryan was still looking for her reward on 23 May 1848. She was not able to return home for fear of her life and was now looking for answers from the authorities as to why she was still waiting for assistance to leave Ireland. The Crown Solicitor, Sir Matthew Barrington would have known of Ryan (Puck) and his murderous ways, because he was a Limerick man and would have come across Ryan’s (Puck) name in other cases as Crown Solicitor, but this did not help Margaret Ryan in her claim from the Crown to honor the agreement she had made with them for her testimony. But there was an offer of £30 to the witness by the Crown Solicitor, Sir Matthew Barrington, which she did not consider at all equivalent to the loss she had sustained in being driven from her home and friends amongst whom she might have otherwise lived in comfort and comparative independence.

There was certainly one common thing involved in becoming a Crown witness: in all cases their lives changed forever, more so in serious crimes. Rewards offered by authorities sometimes did not seem to take the view that the witness was as much a victim as the person

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56 O.R. Papers for Limerick, statement of Margaret Ryan to the Earl of Clarendon Lord Lieutenant General and General Governor of Ireland, 1848. N.A.I. 17/847.
57 O.R. Papers for Limerick, statement of Margaret Ryan to the Earl of Clarendon Lord Lieutenant General and General Governor of Ireland, 1848. N.A.I. 17/847.
the crime was committed against. As witnesses they were expected to spend many months in
the police barracks, under the protection of the authorities, but sometimes the Crown left its
 witnesses down by not taking care of them. Other witnesses, however, tried to take advantage
of the State to hopefully gain a chance to leave Ireland at a time when the famine had bitten
hard into the populace in 1847-48, but it would have to be said that the authorities did show
empathy towards its witnesses as it did for its prisoners, and the authorities applied the same
law to Ireland as it did in England, but a slow moving bureaucracy did not help in dealing
with witnesses.

Margaret Ryan made another plea to the Earl of Clarendon Lord Lieutenant General and
General Governor of Ireland on 23 May 1848. In this petition she wrote of the danger that her
father and mother and brothers were in if they were left in the country. After all she was
promised a free passage to America and some land for her father and mother by Sir Matthew
Barrington and William Tracey R.M. but had heard nothing thus far, and it had come to her
attention that the Government Agent Mr. Seymore was now in Limerick arranging transport
to America for Crown witnesses. She also asked that a free passage and suitable outfits and
some land in America be granted to her father and mother and two brothers and sister and
herself, and she directed the Lord Lieutenant General for the truth of what she writes to Sir
Matthew Barrington Crown Solicitor and William Tracey R.M. 58

What circumstances were now happening with the witness Margaret Ryan? She did her
duty and gave her evidence and was now expecting the reward. Why were the authorities so
unenthusiastic about helping the witness? Quite on the contrary, the authorities were happy to
look after the witness Margaret Ryan but it was she who had tried to change the
circumstances of her reward because her own state of affairs had changed drastically, and by
writing to the Earl of Clarendon, Lord Lieutenant General, and General Governor of Ireland

58 O.R. Papers for Limerick, second statement of Margaret Ryan to the Earl of Clarendon Lord Lieutenant
General and General Governor of Ireland, 1848. N.A.I. 17/847.
it would seem she was going over the heads of the Crown Solicitor Sir Matthew Barrington and William Tracey R.M. who were dealing with the Ryan (Puck) case from the beginning to the end. Sir Matthew Barrington did do a follow-up to the predicament of Margaret Ryan as a Crown witness and discovered the reason for her extra demands upon the state. Sir Matthew Barrington denied that any deal was done with the father and mother and brothers and sister of the witness, because the family of the witness tried every exertion to stop the girl from testifying. The Crown Solicitor was very clear in writing that the family had no claims upon the state. The witness was offered a free passage to America and £30 which she had not yet claimed because she had refused to emigrate to America. The reason she refused to go to America was that she was engaged to a policeman and had intended to marry, but this relationship had now ended, and now the witness is anxious to have her father and mother and brothers sent to America with her. Sir Matthew Barrington was also recommending that the reward should not be paid to the witness at present as it would be taken from her by her father and that the reward should be held in trust in case she did not emigrate to America.¹⁹

The authorities was at odds with the witness over the reward but a very meticulous Crown Solicitor, Sir Matthew Barrington, did his research on Margaret Ryan, which led him to form his opinion in regard to the reward. This was not a case of the hierarchy picking on the vulnerable of the community, but a caring Sir Matthew Barrington who wanted nothing but the best for the witness. It was now looking like Margaret Ryan would travel alone to America but in a final twist Sir Matthew Barrington left it be known that he knew all the facts of the witness, that she was adopted by her uncle, Michael Kelly, when she was a infant and she had not lived with her parents since she was a baby, and that Michael Kelly and his family had received from the Government a free passage to America, money for clothes and some land in Canada, but Sir Matthew Barrington did come to a decision on the reward that it should be increased to £50 for Margaret Ryan.⁶⁰

There were three things coming through from being a Crown Witness. One was the reward money, a slow moving bureaucracy didn’t help, and many witnesses would have to petition the authorities a few times before they were sorted out. The second item to come through was the need for the witness and sometimes their complete family to leave the area or the county, in serious crime, they would leave Ireland. The third item that witnesses sought were clothing. This was very important to the witnesses as many witnesses were in rags or less, but this culture of receiving an outfit when

one became a Crown Witness is hard to pin down. It could be that the famine had left the citizens with no money to buy clothes or was it a way of getting extra money out of the authorities.

In 1848 Daniel Keeffe was a witness in a case of whiteboyism and he testified against four men Edmond Madigan and Matthew Barry and John Herlihy and Daniel Ryan, all of whom were sentenced to transportation for life. The witness was described by Sir Matthew Barrington in this fashion: ‘Memoralist was a witness in a case of whiteboyism which is disposed of, he may be now discharge from support but I would recommend that a free passage to America should be given to himself and his family and £10 for an outfit’. But Daniel Keeffe complained to the Lord Lieutenant General and General Governor of Ireland about the food he received in Limerick city police station, which consisted of bread and a small amount of coffee and not one shilling did he received in reward. But once again there is evidence of a slow moving bureaucracy. It can be said of the authorities that justice was swift because of the witnesses that came forward, yet the same can’t be said of the Crown in regards to rewards, for in some cases the time factor was anything from six months to two years or in extreme cases four or five years.

In the 1800s the Crown had to depend upon witnesses to secure convictions in most cases. Forensic evidence was not yet a powerful tool for the Crown to secure convictions on. The total amount for clothing for Daniel Keeffe and his family was £5, but Sir. Matthew Barrington recommended £10 for clothing so what would have became of the other £5. The list of clothing is supplied on a copy from its original document from the outrage papers for Limerick.

The authorities were very effective with its paper work, when something as simple as price list for clothing was furnished to Sir Matthew Barrington. Other witnesses did not fare so

61 O.R. Papers for Limerick, the petition of Daniel Keeffe to the Lord Lieutenant General and General Governor of Ireland, 1 June 1848. N.A.I. 177758.
well but were at the mercy of authorities. One of these witnesses was Michael McMahon. He was awarded £10 for an outfit for himself and his family and free passage to America. He was a witness to a savage attack on Owen Maley a farmer from Madeboy in the parish of Ablington in County Limerick on the 11 February 1848. Seven men attacked the farmer leaving him in a grave condition, Sir Matthew Barrington described the attack as a ‘serious case of whiteboyism’ and the persons involved were of the worst character in that part of the County. In this case Michael McMahon was claiming that he had a family, McMahon was telling a white lie, as he was not married and had no children, but it was for his three young brothers that he was looking for free passage to America, the authorities noted this when a list of their ages was requested for the travel certificate, after some petitions by Michael McMahon to the Lord Lieutenant General and General Governor of Ireland, it was decided by the Crown that his brothers would be left travel as his family to America, first they would go to Dublin and get there new outfits for which the Crown would pay £4, and then travel to America where Michael McMahon will receive £6 on his arrival. The crime was committed on 11 February 1848; the case went to trial in May, and in September of that year Michael McMahon was still waiting to leave Ireland.

Why were the authorities so slow in helping its witnesses? Was the Crown apprehensive because some witnesses may have being using the situation of serious crime as a way to take advantage of the state, by becoming a state witness ensuring free passage to America and in some cases receiving money towards new clothes? The famine years were disastrous for the lower classes, and who would not suggest during these years that they would do things completely out of character for them, but after reading many Crown statements one would see that witnesses would have been happy enough to carry on with a normal life rather than

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62 O.R. Papers for Limerick, the petition of Michael McMahon to the Lord Lieutenant General and General Governor of Ireland, 19 July 1848. N.A.I. 17/699.
63 O.R. Papers for Limerick, constabulary report from the Inspectors office in connection with the witness Michael McMahon, 26 August 1848. N.A.I. 17/1280.
becoming implicated as a witness in crimes that would change their lives for ever, and put
their families in fear for their lives. Michael McMahon as a Crown witness did his duty and
was responsibly for the breaking up of a major gang.\textsuperscript{64} The witness had good reason for
including his brothers as his family, because friends of the gang attacked his brother John
leaving him with a broken skull on 29 April 1848. John spent 43 days in the County Hospital
severely ill, and now the witness was imploring his Excellency for help in leaving Ireland,
stressing that he did not receive any reply to his previous petitions on 15 May and 13 June
1848.\textsuperscript{65} The Crown did do research on the witness Michael McMahon in regards to his
family, finding out that he was not married but had 3 brothers and not a family of his own as
he referred to in his first petition.\textsuperscript{66} It is evident that the Crown showed compassion for the
witness in allowing his brothers to emigrate with him; the Crown would also provide the
eight shillings for the rail trip to Dublin and extra money to keep them till they were ready
for embarking to sail to America.\textsuperscript{67}

The authorities were very vigilant in who it awarded free passage or reward money to. This
might suggest that other witnesses took advantage of the authorities, but if this is so the
Crown would have convicted innocent people on the word of witnesses looking to start a new
life in America, or was it a fact that some individuals committed serious crimes hoping they
would receive a sentence of transportation to Australia or other colonies, thus avoiding the
worst years of the famine of 1845-47, leaving poverty behind them, desperate times would
have produce desperate measure. In Michael McMahon's case, on 12 September 1848 the
Government Emigration Office acknowledged that everything was in place for free passage

\textsuperscript{64} O.R. Papers for Limerick, the petition of Michael McMahon to the Lord Lieutenant General and General
Governor of Ireland, 25 August 1848. N.A.I. 17/0174.
\textsuperscript{65} O.R. Papers for Limerick, the petition of Michael McMahon to the Lord Lieutenant General and General
Governor of Ireland, 19 July 1848. N.A.I. 17/699.
\textsuperscript{66} O.R. Papers for Limerick, report by Mr. Enright and Mr. W. Caldwell for the Crown in relation to the witness
Michael McMahon, 29 August 1848. N.A.I. 17/3333.
\textsuperscript{67} The Outrage Papers for Limerick, report by Mr. Enright and Mr. W. Caldwell for the Crown in relation to the
witness Michael McMahon 29 August 1848. N.A.I. 17/3333.
to New York. He was to report to 22 Eden Quay, Dublin. Finally Michael McMahon was to receive a certificate to identify him on his arrival in Dublin and the authorities would provide them £4-10 shillings for clothes. The witness cannot be blamed for being over anxious, after many petitions to the Crown waiting for news, and sometimes not receiving any reply, after all the case was held in May 1848 and it was 16 September 1848 that he was sure that he would be travelling to America, for the witness and his family it was a matter of life death, and for the authorities, it was just paper work.

Other witnesses to claim rewards were Police Constables. Their responsibilities were to track down the perpetrators of serious crimes and deal with everyday law and order. The more serious the crime the bigger the reward money. Did this consequence mean that the Constables only went after criminals that would bring big rewards on the arrest of the culprits. The Police patrolled the county on horseback armed with guns and swords, while on one of these patrols Police Constables captured Ryan (Puck) in the home of the Frewen Family at Gardenhill, Bunkey County Limerick. Where Ryan (Puck) was captured, was only a mile from where he committed the murder of John Kelly, at Knocksentry, County Limerick. People who were in the house at the time of the arrest of Ryan (Puck) were Thomas Frewen, William Frewen, outside the house was John Frewen,

69 O.R. Papers for Limerick, a report to Mr. English from Mr. Williams telling him of the arrangements for the witness Michael McMahon, 16 September 1848. N.A.I. 17/1384.
also outside the house was the sister of the Frewen brothers. Arresting officer was Alexander W. H. Heard Sub Inspector of Constabulary, stationed at Castleconnell, County Limerick. He claimed £50 reward as soon as he testified to the arrest of Ryan (Puck) at the next general assizes. In his statement, taken by William Tracy and John Dwyer, he stated that while on patrol on other business in Gardenhill area in relation to the murder of Peter Nash he directed his party to search the Frewen house. In his statement, taken by William Tracy and John Dwyer, he stated that while on patrol on other business in Gardenhill area in relation to the murder of Peter Nash he directed his party to search the Frewen house. There was a conspiracy to murder Peter Nash and when the conspiracy was carried out, one of the first names linked to the murder was Ryan (Puck). William Tracy R.M. believed that Ryan (Puck) murdered Peter Nash and the three Frewen Brothers Thomas, John and William were part of the conspiracy, though this was never reported in the papers or in the trial of Ryan (Puck).

In the Limerick Chronicle there was a short piece referring to William Frewen and his part in harbouring Ryan (Puck). Special attention was drawn to the trial, Frewen was referred to as a respectable farmer, indicted as an accessory after the fact to capital felony, by harbouring and concealing in his house an outlawed murderer Ryan (Puck). William Frewen was found guilty and sentenced to be transported for life, the judges declaring that for example's sake, in the current state of the country, where crime if not connived at was abetted and encouraged by those who sheltered criminals under their roof, they could not impose a lighter penalty for so serious an offence. The seriousness of the conviction was to be more important than any other at a Commission or Assizes in Ireland, for a salutary principle of law and morals was now established in a light that could not be misunderstood, and the sentence was calculated to produce the greatest possible benefit to the whole

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71 O.R. Papers for Limerick, Crown report by William Tracy R. M. linking Ryan (Puck) and the Frewen brothers with the murder Peter Nash at Gardenhill County Limerick, 26 October 1847. N.A.I. 17/1764.
community, especially in the rural districts where the timid or disaffected had hitherto given countenance and shelter to well known Criminals.\textsuperscript{72}

The arresting officer Alexander W. H. Heard was very clear in his account of the arrest of Ryan (Puck) ..... “my party and I discovered and apprehend William Ryan (Puck) concealed in the roof of a timber bedstead in Frewen’s house”.....\textsuperscript{73} Alexander W. H. Heard in claiming his reward wrote that Ryan (Puck) was described in the \textit{Public Hue and Cry} as the murderer of John Kelly and there was also a private reward offered for his apprehension both by placard and publication in the \textit{Limerick Chronicle}, the reward posters were posted through out the county and in Police stations in the immediate vicinity of the house in which he found and arrested Ryan (Puck). Sub. Inspector Heard also stated that when his party and he found Ryan (Puck) he was armed with a blunderbuss loaded with powder and eleven balls and that the blunderbuss was cocked and capped.\textsuperscript{74} Ryan (Puck) was now vulnerable but instead of surrendering he said he would shoot any that came near him, Ryan (Puck) asked William Frewen who else was in the room but Frewen never replied. Sub Inspector W. H. Heard stated that after arresting Ryan (Puck) he took him outside the house were a women came out of Frewen’s house and gave Ryan (Puck) a pair of shoes, this women he believed to be the sister of the Frewen brothers.

This account of the arrest given by Head Constable Nicholas Philips differs to that of Sub Inspector Heard, he stated that it was one of his men, Cornelius Fleming that uncovered Ryan (Puck). As Fleming searched the house he noticed someone hiding on the bed, he drew back and shouted “there’s somebody in there” Nicholas Philips drew his sword and asked William Frewen “who was in there”, he replied that it was Billy Ryan. Philips jumped immediately on

\textsuperscript{72} \textit{The Limerick Chronicle} 8 January 1848.

\textsuperscript{73} O.R. Papers for Limerick, the arrest of Ryan (Puck), statement of Alexander W. H. Heard Sub. Inspector of Constabulary stationed at Castleconnell County Limerick, 18 October 1847. N.A.I. (no ref. Number on statement).

\textsuperscript{74} O.R. Papers for Limerick, the arrest of Ryan (Puck), statement of Alexander W. H. Heard Sub. Inspector of Constabulary stationed at Castleconnell County Limerick, 18 October 1847. N.A.I. (no ref. Number on statement).
the bed to arrest Ryan (Puck), but Ryan (Puck) was armed with a blunderbuss and told Philips not to come any closer or he would blow his brains out. Philips carried on and got up on the bed and with the assistance of Inspector Heard arrested Ryan (Puck). Philips also stated that in the house at the time of the arrest of Ryan (Puck) were William and Thomas Frewen, and John Frewen was near the house as Philips went into the house. He stated the sister of the Frewen’s was in the house but he could not be sure whether or not she was in the house all the time. Head Constable Nicholas Philips was also claiming £50 reward for his part in the capture of Ryan (Puck).75

The two men claiming the reward money no doubt took part in the arrest, with Philips being more daring than his Inspector, but as for the other men in the party there was no mention of them in claiming the reward other than a mention of one Cornelius Fleming who uncovered Ryan (Puck) on top of the bedstead. £50 was a lot of money in 1847, at the time of the famine the difference £50 would have made to a family was enormous. There is no evidence to suggest that either man shared their reward with their men, but as Ryan (Puck) was charged and convicted both men were entitled to receive the reward money. Who was the real hero for arresting Ryan (Puck), after all he was responsible for three murders, a most dangerous highwayman in Counties of Limerick and Tipperary?

75 O.R. Papers for Limerick, the arrest of Ryan (Puck), statement of Head Constable Nicholas Philips, stationed at Castleconnell County Limerick, 18 October 1847. N.A.I. (no ref. Number on statement).
Recognized for his bravery in the capture of William Ryan (Puck) was Head Constable Nicholas Philips, he traced the disreputable murderer from the time of the murder of John Kelly, and while he was on the run he pursued him until his arrest, where he single handed rushed the distressed fugitive who was armed with a loaded blunderbuss, and after a violent struggle expecting at any moment to be shot, Philips was only armed with a sword, the prisoner eventually surrendered to the courageous officer.  

The police came under increasing pressure as the famine worsened.


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76 The Limerick Chronicle Saturday Evening 8 January 1848.
The Crown Forces out in strength to make sure the meal cart is delivered

Some very sad cases, to the more serious ones.

Chapter 4

Other elements involved in serious crime.

Whiteboys

Their link to serious crime in the Limerick Region.

1841 to 1848.

Late in the seventeenth century a sense of insurgence began to characterise the character of the Whiteboys in parts of Munster. The Whiteboys were a cluster of natives from different districts in parts of Munster that would organize violence against landlords or any of the public that was seen to cooperate with them. They came from an underprivileged and working class society with a background in renting lands and houses. They were ruthless in their approach to dealing with landlords and the Crown. If they warned to their class not to pay rents to the landlords or to take up employment, it would be prudent not to do so. On the occasions that some of the community did cooperate with the landlords, after receiving a warning by the Whiteboys their houses were wrecked or burned down. Sometimes the unlucky ones were murdered in cold blood.\(^78\)

What reason would the Whiteboys have in preventing families from paying their rents or taxes? Was it because others in the locality were struggling to make ends meet, and so by sticking together that the landlords had no choice but to wait for the said rents? Was it a case of intelligent and educated people taking advantage of the less well off? Or was it the case that the Crown and the landlords were too quick to punish the tenants or to have their agents evict them? Were the Whiteboys the cry from the lower classes that things had gone too far, leading to poverty and hunger and then homelessness? How much more could hard working people take, the Whiteboys tried to

address some of these problems but they seemed to hurt their own kind more than the authorities that they rebelled against.

During 1796 and 1797 Chevalier de La Tocnaye, on his travels through Ireland, describes what Whiteboys were like in dress and manner. De La Tocnaye was a Breton, an officer and Royalist who sought shelter in Britain from the revolutionists in France. Arriving in London 29 December 1792, he describes himself as having a genius for observation.79

The Whiteboys were completely defeated in Wexford County in July 1793, some outrage had taken place and the magistrates of Wexford ordered the arrest of the culprits. A score or more were arrested, and the Whiteboys demanded the release of their comrades or they would come and free them. De La Tocnaye observed that in every country of the world the peasant paid tithe with reluctance; everywhere it was regarded as an onerous impost, prejudicial to the spread of cultivation, for the labourer was obliged to pay on the product of his industry. In Ireland it seemed to him a more vexatious tax than elsewhere for the great mass of the people being catholic, it seems hard that they should be obliged to maintain a minister who was often the only protestant in the Parish, and who exacted his dues with rigor. Beyond the ordinary tithe he had a right, over nearly the whole of Ireland, to one-tenth of the milk of a cow, one-tenth of the eggs, and one-tenth of the vegetables of the gardens. One can easily understand that these conditions might be very severe when the minister exacted his dues in kind, and especially when.....these poor miserable folk have, as well, to supply subsistence for their own Priests. They had often made complaints and claims in connection with this subject. Two or three thousand Whiteboys advanced on Wexford town. The Major in charge made his way to the front of his soldiers to speak with the Whiteboys, and after some discussions, he was savagely attacked with a scythe and killed. Immediately on seeing their Major killed by the Whiteboys the soldiers opened fire on the killers, the whole force of

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the Whiteboys were scattered and fled the scene. Several hundred Whiteboys were left dead, and those left wounded, fearing the punishment that would follow if they were caught managed to drag themselves as well as they could into the cornfields and hedges and there they died.\textsuperscript{80} Poverty seems to have been a major factor in the Whiteboys organizing, paying taxes and struggling to survive. It was useless to complain of unfair taxes and on top of this they had landlords to pay rent too as well. The Whiteboys dress code was as simple as the name it gave; the Whiteboys wore their shirts outside their trousers revealing the white of their shirts.\textsuperscript{81} Where did it go wrong for the Whiteboys? They set out to serve in their community, but by 1830 to 1850 crimes were described by Sir Mathew Barrington as of Whiteboy character, meaning a vicious crime had took place planned by a group. Is this to say that society turned them into criminals? By 1840 there was no evidence of large groups of Whiteboys but much smaller assembly of groups of Whiteboys ranging from three to twenty or more.

An attack by Whiteboys on the Home of Patrick Toomy of Dohora, near Croom, County Limerick, involved between five and seven Whiteboys. The cause for this savage attack on Patrick Toomy and his wife was that Toomy was working as a caretaker for Dr. O'Flaherty and was offered the job to run the farm, which he took up during 1841. The said doctor

\textsuperscript{80} A Frenchman's Walk through Ireland, Chapter 3 pp 55, 56.
\textsuperscript{81} A Frenchman's Walk through Ireland, Chapter 3 pp 57.
turned out the former caretaker of the farm.\textsuperscript{82} The ingredients were now in place for a Whiteboy attack, Toomy was co-operating with the landlord by taking up his new position on the farm, at the cost of the former caretaker. The home of Toomy of Dohora, near Croom, Co. Limerick was then attacked. On 20 July 1841 an armed gang of five or seven forced their way into the house. They beat Toomy savagely, leaving him in a critical condition with a fractured skull. They also beat his wife. Their son, William was in an outhouse and was helpless to do anything, and witnessed this frightening attack of the Whiteboys on his parents. Toomy was pronounced close to death by the doctor and spent several weeks in bed in a serious condition.\textsuperscript{83} After the prosecution of this case, Mathew Barrington, Crown Solicitor, put pen to paper and said that this was a Whiteboy case and, as a reward, he granted £20 to Patrick Toomy.\textsuperscript{84} Was this the best the authorities could do to help the Toomy family? Patrick Toomy reported this attack to the Police. After this he would be left with no friends in his community, from now on his life and that of the lives of his family would be in constant danger, and the standard of life style, which the Toomy family enjoyed, was going to be a thing of the past. Patrick Toomy had worked as a land steward (farm manager) for over thirty years, with some of the most respectable gentlemen in the county and part of that time was spent with the Earl of Dunraven. Up to July 1841 Toomy lived with Doctor O'Flaherty at Dohora near Croom, Co. Limerick. He was forced out of his home by a party of Whiteboys who thought they had left Patrick Toomy for dead. Toomy identified three of his aggressor's, two of whom were the sons of the former land steward and the other a cousin of the said two; their names were Thomas and James Renahan and David Kelly. Toomy described Kelly as one of the worst members of society. After their convictions all three

\textsuperscript{82} O.R. papers for Limerick. Police report about the attack on Patrick Toomy, 20 July 1841. N.A.I. 17/10809.
\textsuperscript{83} O.R. papers for Limerick. Acknowledgement of £20 received by Patrick and Maria Toomy, 18 April 1842. N.A.I. 47.044C.
\textsuperscript{84} O.R. papers for Limerick. A Petition by Patrick Toomy to the Earl DeGrey Lord Lieutenant of Ireland asking to be compensated for his injuries, and for his help in getting 3 men prosecuted for the attack on his family and their home, 15 March 1842. N.A.I. 45.056C.
assailants were sentenced to transportation for life but Kelly had his sentence reduced to two years imprisonment in the Limerick County Jail. Kelly’s house was only a hundred yards from Patrick Toomy’s home. Toomy believed that Kelly was a ringleader of the Whiteboys and without doubt one of the worst members following the Whiteboy system. Patrick Toomy’s worst fears would now be realized by the news that Kelly would not be transported for life but instead a prison sentence of two years would be served. In a letter of concern he wrote to Henry Thompson Esq. Sub Inspector of the Police, Adare Co. Limerick. Toomy tells of great rejoicing, which took place in the neighbourhood of David Kelly’s residence on the night of the 14 May 1842. Fires were ablaze at the joyful news of Kelly’s sentence of transportation being commuted to a short term of imprisonment of two years. Toomy stated that it was quite evident and clear that Kelly was one of a party of Whiteboys, otherwise they would not light fires.

Patrick Toomy and his family did pay a very high price for taking the land steward job on Doctor O’Flaherty farm in July 1841. He wrote many petitions to the Lord General of Ireland seeking help from the Whiteboy Kelly, who after all spent very little time in prison. From 1841 to 1847, Patrick Toomy’s life had transformed from a competent land manager to that of a poorer family in his community.

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Ending up being placed among the paupers for outside door relief being a means of support that he and his family were not accustomed. During 1844 Patrick Toomy in another petition to the authorities pleaded for help in getting passage to the Australian Colonies for himself and his wife and four boys and three girls to join up with his son-in-law and two of his daughters who had already emigrated there. The Toomy family was going into turmoil with the family having to make many changes to their life styles. Two of his daughters and son-in-law had gone to Australian Colonies and in a moving letter to their parents, they enlightened them of their trip to Westbury, Van Deimans Land, Australia.... The voyage took three months and fourteen days, and there were three deaths on board, all children. They arrived at Launceston on the 6 January 1843, and they were astonished to find that it was the summer season in this country. They were well provided with rations on their emigrant vessel..... “All our troubles would be over if you and your family freely arrived here, because of the friends and relatives of them who thought to murder you without a cause, I know Ireland is not safe quarters for you or yours while a drop of blood of the Renahan or a Kelly flows in the veins of any man there as I well know they are all bad and particularly towards you and yours”..... Friends of the Renahan and

88 O.R. Papers for Limerick. Petition by Patrick Toomy to the General Governor of Ireland, seeking passage to Australian Colonies in 1844. N.A.I. C11273
Kelly families also threatened Patrick Toomy's son, and now it was not safe for him to stay at home as he was in dread for his life. A Police escort took him to Croom for Police protection.

Toomy also tells of the trepidation of his other two sons, and to get away from the place they enlisted in the army. After moving some twenty miles away from the said neighbourhood to work for another gentleman, Patrick Toomy stated that because of the influences and agency of Kelly and his friends that he had to cease employment, wherever he went the cry of the spy followed him.

This case of the Whiteboys wrecking a family's life will be disputed that it was not the work of the Whiteboys but that of other factions, their argument will be that it was too late in 1841 for a Whiteboy attack, that the Whiteboys had died out in the latter end of 1700. But in Patrick Toomy's Case between five and seven members of an armed gang attacked his home and family on 20 July 1841. Out of the gang three were arrested and charged, only one was described as a Whiteboy: he was David Kelly. Another interesting fact is that when the sentences of transportation for life were handed down to the three aggressors, Kelly was the only one that had his commuted to two years imprisonment in the Limerick County Jail. He was a noted Whiteboy but yet he got the lighter sentences of the three assailants, it was believed by Patrick Toomy that Kelly was the one that organized the brutal attack upon him.

Kelly was of bad character and was known to the Police. He also lived the Whiteboy system, he was notorious and ferocious, even Mathew Barrington described the attack on Toomy's home as that of the work of Whiteboys, when he was awarding £20 to Patrick Toomy for bringing the three aggressors to justice. The £20 rewarded to Patrick Toomy by the authorities as compensation did very little to help his family. They suffered a lot more than Kelly the Whiteboy who got a short sentence in the Limerick Prison. Why did the authorities...

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90 O.R. Papers for Limerick. Police report, Toomys sons were threatened 21 July 1840. N.A.I. 17/10939.
give Kelly a reduced term in prison? After all the other two assailants Thomas and James Renahan were the sons of the former land steward at Doctor O’Flaherty’s farm, they may have had a reasonable reason for the attack on Toomy, and as they were not known to the police, the law could have taken a more compassionate view of their sentence, but took the opportunity to send out a very strong message to would-be Whiteboys that these types of vicious acts and attacks on community and property had to stop. The only victims were the Toomy family. Their livelihood had gone, two sons had enlisted in the army, and two daughters had gone to Australian Colonies, and Patrick Toomy and his family had ended up on outside door relief being a means of support, with the famine now taking its toll on the community, a deprived future looked ahead for the Toomy family. In 1847 some six years after the attack that changed the lives of the Toomy family in a further petition to the authorities seeking help in getting a job in a secure area, even a government situation would suit. But Mathew Barrington State Solicitor replied on 10 August 1847 that Patrick Toomy had already received £20 from the State and that he was not necessitated to receive any further enumerations from the authorities. Patrick Toomy was let down by the State, what if he did not prosecute or identify the perpetrators in this case, would he have been better off? Furthermore starting a new life in some other part of Ireland instead of taking on the Whiteboys in court, and with the State clearly not supporting him as time went on. The only one identified as a Whiteboy, David Kelly succeeded in terrorizing the Toomy family from inside and outside of prison, and a attempt at murdering Patrick Toomy would suggest that the Whiteboys had won at the expense of Toomy’s livelihood. More was thought of the two sub-Constables Cullen and Feeney for arresting James Renahan, than that of Patrick Toomy for his part in bringing the three perpetrators to justice. Cullen and Feeney received a reward of £1 each, they found James Renahan concealed in a chimney at his quarters and as he tried

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to escape from the Constable’s he was gently persuaded to descend from inside the chimney with the points of the bayonets of Cullen and Feeney. Their Captain sent a good report to the police Inspector. The Toomy family were now scattered to the four corners of the earth, evident in their case is the influence of the Whiteboys sending them from relative prosperity working family, to exist as paupers in the community. But for those historian who say that the Whiteboys had died out in the latter end of the 1700, another report in January 1848 of a Whiteboy attack is recalled at an inquest held by Mr. Martin, coroner at which James Butler Esq. D.L. of Castlecrine attended on the body of Martin McMahon of Carhuemore, Sixmilebridge, County Clare, (one of three brothers who so nobly defended their house) who died on Wednesday night from the beating he received from the Whiteboy assailants. A verdict of willful murder was returned against the prisoners already in jail. And the report went on to say that it was hoped the government would contribute pecuniary aid to the McMahon family in their sad affections. If the McMahon family received the same help from the Crown as the Toomy family did between 1841 to 1847, their future was going to be very bleak indeed, but in 1848 the Whiteboys were still here. How did the Whiteboys continue to exist for many years terrorizing the populace? Was there corruption in the Police force, or corruption at a higher level within the authorities, or was it easier to ignore them and hopefully they would go away? Whatever the reason for their existence they left their victims in a dreadful way, if not dead, such were the viciousness of the Whiteboys.

95 The Limerick Chronicle. 12 January 1848.
This map shows Dohora, Croom, County Limerick, the townland where Patrick Toomy lived and worked for Doctor O'Flartery until the Whiteboys attacked him in 1841 and changed his life from land steward to pauper.

Source, Internet, Genuki UK and Ireland Genealogy. [www.genuki.org.uk/](http://www.genuki.org.uk/)
£20 REWARD.
I HEREBY Offer a REWARD of TWENTY POUNDS
To any Person who shall, within Six Months from the date hereof, give me such information as may lead to the apprehension and conviction of Morgan Finnucan, who stands charged with having, on the 2nd instant, at Cullinagh, in the County Limerick, committed a Rape on the person of an infirm old Woman.

W. G. BRETT,
Chief Constable.
Barrington's Bridge, 19th August, 1889.

£30 REWARD.
I HEREBY Offer a REWARD of THIRTY POUNDS
To any Person who shall, within Six Months from the date hereof, give me such information as may enable me to discover and bring to Justice the Person or Persons who, on the night of the 23rd instant, set fire to the Dwelling-house of John Myres, at Kilbeg, in the County of Limerick, in consequence of which it was entirely consumed, together with some articles of Furniture.

B. JACKSON,
Sub-Inspector.
Pallaskelly, 26th February, 1840.

£50 REWARD.
WHEREAS, early on the morning of the 15th instant, Two Shots were fired into the House of Mr. Patrick Cochlan, of Old England, Parish of St. Patrick, in the South Liberties of the City of Limerick, which broke several Panes of Glass; and that a Notice was found, (supposed to have been posted by the same Party,) threatening the life of Mr. Cochlan, if he should continue to sell land.

I HEREBY Offer a REWARD of FIFTY POUNDS
To any Person who shall, within Six Months from the date hereof, give me such information as may enable me to discover and bring to Justice all or any of the Persons concerned in Firing the Shots, or Writing and Posting the Notice aforesaid.

W. WILLIAMS, Sub-Inspector.
Kilbenny, 15th February, 1840.

Some of the many reward posters of the 1800s. Gives an insight to the amount of serious crime been committed in Limerick and Tipperary County in 1840-48.
Conclusion  
Chapter 5

The way serious crime impacts on the lower classes is quite remarkable, in the sense that a lot more of the common people had not turned on society leading to riotous behaviour and other serious crimes. It could be argued that the way the state dealt with crime was fair and proficient. The Irish were living in a society divided socially, each social group producing a hero of sorts. Daniel O'Connell delivered catholic emancipation in 1829 by peaceful methods. But this victory was more for the middle classes of Irish society rather than the common people.

Some people became heroes by chance, in other cases society created them with no intentions of doing so in the first place. Paupers and lower classes needed their heroes too. And the more confrontational their hero the bigger his stature in folklore stories and society. In the nineteenth century anyone seeing to be taking on the state would come to the attention of the community they lived in. But when this person was of the lower classes, there was a sense of gratification that one of their own was fighting back. Someone who would represent the needs of unprivileged people, such a hero would come from the common people with a working class background, from the
ranks of unprivileged people. That’s what emerged in Bunkey, County Limerick in 1847. William Ryan (Puck) a name that was feared throughout the counties of Clare, Limerick and Tipperary. There are no streets or monuments named after him, unlike Patrick Sarsfield or Daniel O’Connell or William Smith O’Brien just to name a few heroes of Ireland past.

Nearly every county in Ireland produced a hero; whether that was a good thing or bad thing can be argued. The hero would have to be measured by his actions. The people of whichever class their hero represented would need their respect. It is also fair to say that no one starts out to be a hero. This would suggest that society needed heroes. But being a popular hero was a dangerous thing to be in the nineteenth century, more so at a time the state had laws, which could get you executed, or transportation for life or thrown in jail. But of course you have to break the law to receive the wrath of the justice system.

What phenomenon would bring so many paupers and working class people to break the law in 1840-50? Of course the famine played its part in 1845-46-47, disease and fever had weakened its people. It’s easy to say that their lives looked disheartening. But the majority of them got on with the hardships of their lives without breaking the law. The state was looking for answers to help its people. The famine was not evenly spread throughout Ireland, a quick look at famine maps shows us that it was more to west than the east, more to the south than the north. This would suggest some variation in the impact of the famine. The significance of the famine may not have been viewed by Westminster in the early years as being as serious as it was; after all we had famines before.

William Ryan (Puck) would not pay his rent for his share of the farm, causing him to lose the three acres he leased with his father. The Kellys of the same farm rented another nine acres. The Kellys did many improvements and in return received the three acres the Ryans lost from the landowner Mr. Biggs. These actions by the landlord kicked off a feud between the Kellys and the Ryans. But it was a one-sided feud that would see John Kelly murdered
and the attempted murder of his brother Michael. The Ryan (Puck) case shows throughout this study, that the very nature of the man was to kill his enemies. But his enemies were law-abiding folk who worked hard to keep the farm going. The state left the Kellys down very badly, so where was the law that would offer protection to the Kellys. The Kellys' loss was enormous, John Kelly murdered; Michael had to give up the farm and leave Ireland with his family and go to America. While, Ryan (Puck) died in his beloved country. Why did not the state take care of the Kelly’s? After all they had a police force and an army at their disposal. But the truth is the government had no control over serious crime either in preventing it or protecting the victims. Some areas of the country were quiet; while other counties had their community ruled by the lawless gangs or by individuals. The counties ranked the highest for lawlessness between 1840-50 were Tipperary and Limerick. In the Munster region the whiteboys did their part in taking on establishment and landlords, in many cases they advised farmers what to charge for their produce. Accepting land from landlords after there was an eviction on it would bring the whiteboys to one’s door, as in the Toomy case in this study. There was kind of a righteous approach by the whiteboys. But one of the problems with the whiteboys is that they hurt their own kind. It was more like organised crime. Planned attacks sent a strong message to the communities.

But there was one man who didn’t fear the whiteboys, Ryan (Puck). So why didn’t the whiteboys sort out Ryan (Puck)? Is it because they didn’t want any trouble from Ryan (Puck) and to be seen restoring law and order was not what the whiteboys were about. But Ryan (Puck) was doing what the whiteboys were doing by his actions, e.g. killing land agents and land stewards. He also hired himself out to do the killing for other persons who had been evicted from their land. His favourite weapon was a blunderbuss. Ryan (Puck) was not a whiteboy, but he was a fearsome man to have on your back. This might suggest that in that
part of the county there was no need for secret societies. Or did Ryan (Puck) act alone thinking he was serving his community.

Ireland was coming to the boil 1847-48, with repeal being to the forefront of the Irish political agenda after the famine. It would be fair to say that Catholic emancipation in 1829 left a sour taste with the poorer Catholics of Ireland. The benefit of Catholic emancipation was more for the wealthy Catholics. The Irish suffered at their own expense in the nineteenth century, but the unprivileged of Ireland suffered at the expense of privileged of Ireland who had ‘emancipation’. And in the 1840s repeal was the new revolution for the Irish. Repeal was mention many times before 1848. For Daniel O’Connell it was to be the next logical move after ‘emancipation’, but it was others who took up the fight in 1847-48. But the unprivileged and small Catholic tenants of 1847-48 were still paying tithe taxes to an alien church, but the rich graziers, many of whom were Protestants, were actually exempt from the payment of the tithes. With that political background in mind, would that give explanation for some of Ryan’s (Puck) actions? But Ryan (Puck) had to answer to the state for his murderous actions, the state being of middle classes and privileged people. If Ryan’s (Puck) trial was held by his own peers from his own community he would have left the court held high, hero to the common people. Without doubt a hero did emerge for the paupers, peasants, and the common people at a time when the country was experiencing many emotions from policies forced upon the unprivileged by Irish members of parliament and magistrates while Westminster looked at the Irish problem.

The Irish problem was enormous, mass emigration, hunger and disease and fever went hand in hand, thousands homeless. For many in county Limerick and Tipperary law and order did not exist in 1840-50, not for the want of the state trying to restore some remnants of normal life.
The decades of the repeal campaign were a violent time, agrarian unrest and disorder. The middle classes became more conservative, but the masses became more rebellious. In that type of political climate, to an uneducated man such as Ryan (Puck) through the hungry forties, the actions he was carrying out were in order for the day.

While many of the middle classes did not get involve in serious crime. Ryan (Puck) would receive the full wrath of the justice system. This is not to suggest that the middle classes were the untouchables of society. The great Daniel O'Connell received a prison sentence, while William Smith O'Brien for his part in the failed rebellion of 1848 received the death penalty, later commuted to transportation for life. The man that sheltered Ryan (Puck) while on the run, was a strong farmer, William Frewen, he received transportation for life as a warning to other substantial farmers not to harbour criminals. From this it would have to be said the state laws was being fair to all sides. But the Irish jails as well as the British Jails were full of paupers, unprivileged, drunks who could not pay fines, instead doing the time. Petty crime was indeed keeping the jails full.

The Crown Solicitor, Sir Matthew Barrington, was by all accounts a decent man. He did not persecute a felon; he simply administered the law in a professional manner. William Tracy Royal Magistrate for Castleconnell was very aware of the violent nature of crime in the Limerick and Tipperary regions. He wrote many reports on the subject. His major concern was the hiring of assassins by the middling ranks of farmer. It was in one of these cases that
Ryan (Puck) showed his true colours and not that of a hero. Murdering a man in a horrific way, as he was going about his business.

The concerns of William Tracy are to be applauded, as with Sir Matthew Barrington, they defended the state law but were not afraid to speak out or write to the Lord Lieutenant General and General Governor of Ireland, always seeking a better understanding of the way the unprivileged were getting caught up in crime. The privileged people who hired underprivileged people for the task to commit murder would go virtually undetected. While Ireland was part of the British Empire, the law being administered would seem just as fair in Ireland as in England. But in Ireland there was local Magistrates doing their best for the community they served. But if one were to isolate one thing that separated communities it would have to be said that it was a class society. Of course one could worked very hard and if lucky you could end up in high society, but this would be for a few. But when things go wrong for whatever reason, the very society that you strive to be part of would quickly forget you. Historian Maurice Lenihan is an example of this, he work hard throughout his life; he became editor and owner of *The Limerick Reporter and the Tipperary Vindicator*. But he died in poverty in Limerick in 1895.

The states laws and church laws were never hand in hand. But the Catholic Church had the benefit of using the pulpit for supporting whatever crusade would benefit the Church. Some times this would be the best way of getting a message across to the community, but it must have being fraught with danger if some poor souls took to heart that their duty to their church was more important than anything else in life. This would lead them to break the law. The involvement of church was a dutiful one; many prisoners did confess to the clergy, but the sacredness of the confession was short lived because it would become common knowledge if the prisoner was guilty or not. But whether or not the prisoner was guilty or not the sentence was carried out.
In Ryan (Puck’s) last statement the evidence of the church helping Ryan (Puck) in writing a well-worded paper blaming his neglect of his religious duties, which was the cause that led him to committing crimes. Are we to consider that Ryan (Puck) found God in his last days? Or was it the Catholic Church using the day of Ryan (Puck’s) execution as a warning to get the huge crowd in attendance to reconsider their belief and go to church. The crowds who came to see Ryan (Puck) must have felt the important of the man, the presence of the dragoons and police and the many public figures would suggest that this execution was special. If nothing else the state got their man, but to the massed crowd, mostly ordinarily people to them a hero was being executed. The authorities most likely feared an attack on the scaffold where Ryan (Puck) stood and army and police were justified by their presence. There was no evidence to suggest that the crowd did make any attempt to surge or attack the scaffold, nor was it common practice in the nineteenth century to do so in Ireland.

The execution itself would have cause great distress to the Ryan and O’Dea families, and one can’t help wondering was there disgrace now attach to the families. Would some of the victim’s families now seek retribution for their loved ones? How did their community treat them? There is no evidence as to how the families were treated or cared for by the state or by their community after the execution, other than to say of Ryan (Puck) that there was laments sang at fairs and markets. But this was common practice for male protagonists of the nineteenth century.

Andrew O’Dea was eighteen at the time of the double execution, while Ryan (Puck) was twenty-three. This was an average age of prisoners executed in the nineteenth century, but there is evidence of other age groups, between twenty-three and fifty but not as common. O’Dea was looked upon as a youth at the time of his execution, while Ryan (Puck) was only a handful of years older. The authorities had a terrible human rights record for hangings; this work could be saturated with names and cases of executions from the eighteenth and...
nineteenth century, but the shocking thing is that the state executed men, women and children
not for murder but for crimes that would be viewed today as misdemeanour. The hundreds of
Irish who were executed will be long forgotten in the twenty-first century. The fire in the
Public Record Office at the four courts in 1922 virtually destroyed all the official court
records in Ireland. But there is still enough evidence in existence to help study the many
hundreds of cases in serious crime of the Nineteenth Century.

The County Courthouse.

The county courthouse were Ryan (Puck) received the death penalty in
1848. Source, Kevin Hannan, *Limerick Historical Reflections*, Limerick
1996. p.252
Primary Source:

The Limerick Chronicle, 8 January 1848.
The Limerick Chronicle, 12 January 1848.
The Limerick Chronicle, 15 January 1848.
The Limerick Chronicle, 22 January 1848.
The Limerick Chronicle, 9 February 1848.
The Limerick Chronicle, 16 February 1848.
The Limerick Chronicle, 23 August 1877.
The Clare Journal Ennis, 13 January 1848.
The Clare Journal Ennis, 10 February 1848.

Evening Herald, 23 April 1957.


• Chief Secretary’s Office, Registered Papers, Outrage Reports, (cited hereafter as O. R.) a report on James Moloney, Ballingillough, County Limerick. 1840. N.A.I. 17/9835.


• O. R. for Limerick, a letter from Sir. Matthew Barrington refusing monies to the family of Margaret Ryan, 1st August 1848. N.A.I. 17/1107.

• O. R. for Limerick, A Proclamation Poster, telling of additional policing needed because of the state of disturbance in the County of Limerick, 1846. N. A. I. (There’s no ref. number on the poster but a copy will be include in this work).


- O.R. Papers for Limerick, report by William Tracy Royal Magistrate writing about the very important witness Mary Glesson, having her and her family brought to Limerick for their protection. 1848, N.A.I. 17/118


• O.R. Papers for Limerick, a report written by Sir. Matthew Barrington on the subject of a Crown Witness Margaret Ryan in relation to a reward, 1 August 1848. N.A.I. 17/1107.

• O.R. Papers for Limerick, the petition of Daniel Keeffe to the Lord Lieutenant General and General Governor of Ireland, 1 June 1848. N.A.I. 17/758.

• O.R. Papers for Limerick, the petition of Michael McMahon to the Lord Lieutenant General and General Governor of Ireland, 19 July 1848. N.A.I. 17/699.

• O.R. Papers for Limerick, constabulary report from the Inspectors office in connection with the witness Michael McMahon, 26 August 1848. N.A.I. 17/1280.

• O.R. Papers for Limerick, the petition of Michael McMahon to the Lord Lieutenant General and General Governor of Ireland, 25 August 1848. N.A.I. 17/0174.

• O.R. Papers for Limerick, the petition of Michael McMahon to the Lord Lieutenant General and General Governor of Ireland, 19 July 1848. N.A.I. 17/699.

• O.R. Papers for Limerick, report by Mr. Enright and Mr. W. Caldwell for the Crown in relation to the witness Michael McMahon, 29 August 1848. N.A.I. 17/3333.

• O.R. Papers for Limerick, report by Mr. Enright and Mr. W. Caldwell for the Crown in relation to the witness Michael McMahon, 29 August 1848. N.A.I. 17/3333.

• O.R. Papers for Limerick, letter of acknowledgement from the Government Emigration office in the case of the witness Michael McMahon in regards to free passage to New York, 12 September 1848. N.A.I. 17/1344.

• O.R. Papers for Limerick, a report to Mr. English from Mr. Williams telling him of the arrangements for the witness Michael McMahon, 16 September 1848. N.A.I. 17/1384.

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• O.R. Papers for Limerick, the arrest of Ryan (Puck), statement of Head Constable Nicholas Philips, stationed at Castleconnell County Limerick, 18 October 1847. N.A.I. (No ref. Number on statement).


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