

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

Tom McDonald



BORO HILL HOUSE, BALLYMACKESSY, CO WEXFORD

It climbs the hillock, obscured from view on the south and west sides by ditches on ascending ground, and out buildings; from the main road, coming from Enniscorthy, from a north-east perspective, Boro Hill House, Ballymackessy, Co. Wexford, is clearly visible, an elegant residence, owned by John and Cora Mernagh; there is no apparent hint of it as an index to an obscured dimension of the history of the County Wexford in the first moiety of the nineteenth century that confounds ordinary intuition.

Jeremiah Fitzhenry was the grandson of Mary King of the opulent Macmine family and son of Billy Fitzhenry, the agent to the estates of the Carews of Castleboro. His father had acquired a number of leases. The Fitzhenrys shared a lineage with the Carews and some of the Irish-Norman aristocrats and boasted an ancestry going back to King Henry II. The Carews were powerful in the Whig or Liberal Party: it may attest to the potency of the French Revolutionary zeitgeist that Jeremiah became “a most determined leader” (to quote the state papers) of the Rebels in 1798. Pardoned after the Rebellion, he later left for France and became an officer in Napoleon’s army; in April 1811, on the basis of a controversial meeting with Wellington, he was pardoned and returned home. He, henceforth, supported the Whig Party and the various Catholic causes but ever boasted his French army title rank of Colonel.

In August 1836 the genuinely reforming and Liberal Lord Lieutenant Mulgrave made a triumphal tour of the Co. Wexford. I presume that Lord Carew arranged that he should visit Boro Hill: The *Wexford Independent* reported on August 17th 1836:-

The processions continued to swell in numbers and importance, as it approached Boro Hill, the seat of Colonel Fitzhenry, adjoining Ballymacus, where the numbers could not have been under fifty thousand—and where a splendid arbour was erected, surmounted by a transparency of the royal arms, with the inscriptions

Cead Mille Failthe - Hail, hail, great Mulgrave - the representative of our most Gracious King,
the protector of our lives and liberties - and the dispenser of justice to all.

An amateur band was, also, here in attendance and a large sprinkling of our proverbially beautiful country women, who gave His Excellency a real sheo de bhatagh.

The arbour was, probably, set among the tree sown by the Rev. James B. Gordon, the famous author. The scenario is a medley of ideologies, cultures, political allegiances, historical themes and divergent personalities and personae. You could not script this if it had not happened!