VINDICATION OF JACK BIRCHALL AS PER DANIEL GROSE MS 10558

Des Guckian

DES GUCKIAN WISHES to inform all interested people that he has made a great additional discovery of evidence to support everything in his article in *The Leitrim Guardian 2004, pages 98-99*, entitled 'Jack Birchall's Bequest'. On Tuesday, 14 August, 2007, he viewed in TCD, Daniel Grose's account written in Co Leitrim in the period about 1836. It confirmed all that is in the folklore about this very sad framing of, as it happens, two innocent people.

Three or four different Leitrim national schools had, in their folklore collections of the 1936-1940 period, referred to the wrongful hanging of young Jack Birchall. One account said that the ropes used to hang him kept breaking and that no shopkeeper in the town would replace them (this is a common enough theme in folklore where an innocent person is involved). Others said Birchall was an outcast and was not wanted by the wealthy and influential of the area.

The Daniel Grose account, written within ten years of this tragedy, bears out the sentiments and the facts as in two verses of 'Birchall's Lamentation' *Page 94* of the Grose MS has the following verbatim account:

Many persons were taken up on suspicion of this murder, some were discharged. At length, one man turned King's evidence, who together with the watchman and his wife, succeeded in fixing the guilt upon, and convicting two men, one of whom they proved had fired the fatal shot that had deprived Mr Cox of life and were executed accordingly and who died vehemently declaring their innocence. After some stay in England, where he was employed by the Company to keep him out of harm's way, the watchman was again sent down to the Ironworks 1 and continued there for some time, until suddenly taking ill, he on his death bed under all the horrors of remorse, and a guilty conscience, confessed publicly that he himself had been the perpetrator of this murder, assisted by his wife and others, that he was the man who fired the shot at Mr Cox and that, after the murder and robbery were committed, he and his wife were left bound in the watchman's house, as they were found in the morning.

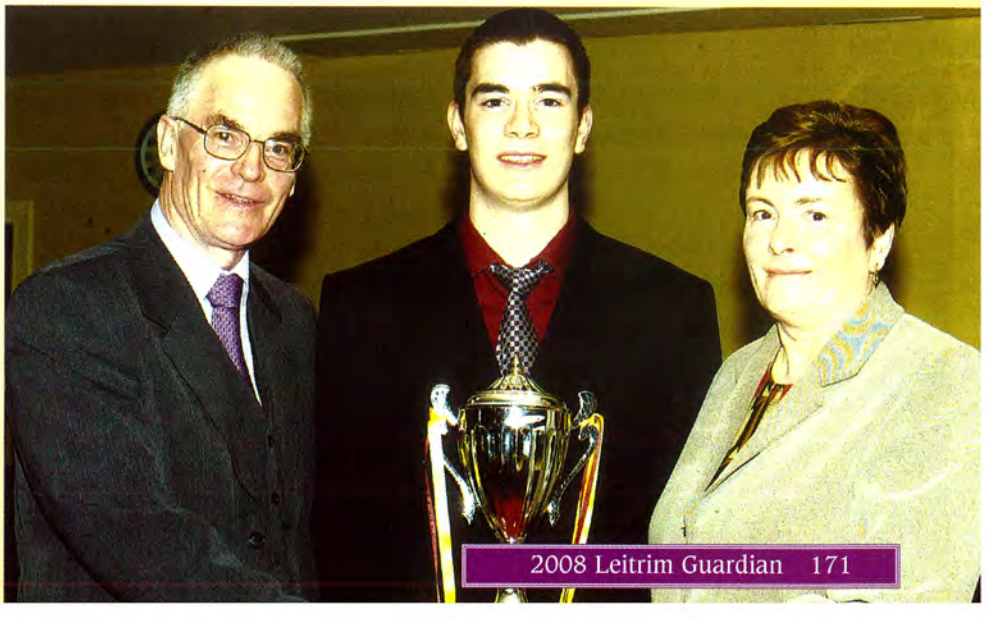
Let it here be remarked that conscience was busy with this atrocious villain, even on the trials, for he never came on the table to give evidence against the unfortunate men who were convicted, without falling into fainting fits in so much that on the first assizes these men were tried at, he was incapable of giving testimony and the proceedings were postponed to the next.

This wretch further confessed that the allurement to this murder, were the hopes of possessing themselves of a sum of money, it was reported Mr Cox had received from England, but in this they were disappointed, and the villains machinations against the two men were in order to possess themselves of the great reward offered for the conviction of the murderers by Government.

How he managed with the Approver was never known, but it is more than probable that he divided with him the promised rewards. Thus three innocent souls were deprived of life and sent to their great account through the nefarious artifices of this ruffian and his less guilty wife. Grose, at the end, had added his initials (DCG).

Des Guckian believes that it is possible that some of the plot of *The MacDermots of Ballycloran*, by Anthony Trollope, was inspired by the story of the trials and execution of Jack Birchall.

Trollope, while living in Drumsna, wrote The MacDermots in the early 1840's. The story of the wrongful hanging of Jack was still fresh and much discussed in the Drumshanbo, Gowel and Drumsna areas. The late Packie Gralton, a native of Gowel, always maintained that the MacDermots was based on fact. Maybe he was right.



Des & Myra Guckian with their son Brendan who holds the Minor Cup 2004