

**THE MAAMTRASNA  
MASSACRE :  
IMPEACHMENT  
OF THE TRIALS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649753437

The Maamtrasna massacre : impeachment of the trials by Timothy Charles Harrington

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**TIMOTHY CHARLES HARRINGTON**

**THE MAAMTRASNA  
MASSACRE :  
IMPEACHMENT  
OF THE TRIALS**



## INTRODUCTION

---

MAAMTRASNA, the scene of the barbarous murder, whose strange history is treated of in the following chapters, is situated in the County of Galway, at the head of a rugged glen, running up from one of the inlets of Lough Mask. On the night of August 17th, 1882, a party of men broke into a house in this village, occupied by a man named John Joyce, murdered him, his mother, wife, and a young daughter, and inflicted upon his two sons, the only other occupants of the house, injuries so severe, that one of them died on the following day, while the second lay for some time in a precarious condition.

Acting on the information of two brothers named Anthony and John Joyce, the police arrested, on the 20th, ten men, all of whom resided at a considerable distance from the scene of the murder—some at a distance of seven miles. The story related by those two brothers, supported by the son of one of them, was of so extraordinary a character that no one but the Crown officials seemed to credit it, and the suspicion very generally prevailed that the brothers Joyce had themselves more to do with the murder than the men they accused. However, after the customary remands and inquiries, the ten men were duly returned for trial at the Galway Assizes.

The "Prevention of Crimes Act" being in force at the time, the Crown availed of its provisions to have the venue changed to the City of Dublin, though there was no suggestion in the evidence of the witnesses, and nothing in the circumstances of the case to warrant the belief that the murder was of an agrarian character.

Some days previous to the trial, which commenced on 13th November, 1882, before a Special Jury of the City and County of Dublin, in Green Street Courthouse, it became known that Anthony Philbin, one of the accused, had become approver, and would be produced by the Crown to corroborate the three Joyces.

It is needless to say that such an announcement caused a complete change in the public feeling with regard to the story related by these witnesses, and everything in their evidence which had appeared absurd or incredible was forgotten in view of the declaration by one of the accused, that he was a participator in the horrible tragedy and could corroborate their testimony. On the first day of the trial another of the accused offered his services to the Crown and was accepted.

Portion of the revelations and arguments which the reader will meet with in these pages goes to prove that the first of the two approvers knew nothing of the murder, and was terrified into corroborating upon oath, a story which, even with regard to himself, was absolutely false; and that the second, Thomas Casey, though an actual participator in the murder, and willing as well as able to testify the truth, yet had no other means open to him to save his wretched life except by corroboration and perjury.

Applications on the part of prisoners' counsel for postponement, and for what is known as a "view jury," were refused. The juries were packed after the manner of all political and agrarian trials in Ireland. Eight minutes' deliberation sufficed to satisfy the mind and consciences of the first jury, and Patrick Joyce was adjudged guilty and sentenced to death. Patrick Casey was then immediately put upon his trial on the same evidence, and the jury gave 12 minutes' consideration to



his fate. The learned judge, when passing sentence of death upon him, used the following words:—"But the evidence has established clearly and conclusively, and so as not to leave a doubt of your guilt upon the mind of any sane person who has heard or read that evidence, that you not only murdered Brigid Joyce, but four other persons on that one occasion." No sooner was he cleared out of the dock than a third prisoner, Myles Joyce, was ushered in to be tried, on the same evidence, and before jurors who were in court listening to the judge's characterization of it.

Six minutes' retirement satisfied the jury, and his death also was decreed.

The fate of the three decided the issue for the remainder. Overtures were made to them to plead guilty on promise of escaping capital punishment. Some refused stoutly, and still protested they knew nothing of the murder. But their clergyman was called in, and he, by pointing out to them that if they were innocent their vindication might come in good time, induced them to accept the terms held out to them.

The next episode in the ghastly drama was the execution, at Galway Jail, of the three men who had been found guilty. A day or two before the execution two of the condemned sent, by direction of their spiritual adviser, for a magistrate, and made before him dying declarations, wherein each admitted his own guilt, and both protested that the third man, Myles Joyce, was innocent of the murder.

The Lord Lieutenant disregarded these declarations, and on the 15th December, 1882, the three men were brought forth together to execution. The scene was a painful and a shocking one. Two men walked calmly to their fate, but the third, Myles Joyce, turned to

every official of the jail he met, as he passed to the scaffold, and, with all the fiery vehemence of the Celt, declared, in a language which nearly all those who surrounded him were strangers to, that "he was innocent. He feared not to die. But he felt the indignity of being put to death as a murderer." The scene on the scaffold itself was shocking beyond description. Even with the cap drawn over his eyes, and the executioner standing, rope in hand, to hurl the three wretched men together into eternity, Myles Joyce still declared his innocence; and, as if eager that his very last breath on earth should be a protestation to that God whom he was so soon to meet, he turned again in the direction of the few bystanders, and "called God to witness that he knew no more of the murder than the child unborn;" and with that solemn declaration on his lips he sunk from view. His last effort had somewhat displaced the arrangements of the executioner. The rope caught in the wretched man's arm, and for some seconds it was seen being jerked and tugged in the writhing of his last agony. The grim hangman cast an angry glance into the pit, and then, hissing an obscene oath at the struggling victim, sat on the beam, and kicked him into eternity.

It is needless to say that the publication of these harrowing particulars would, in themselves, have produced a sensation, but the fact which chiefly seized upon the public mind in Ireland was the declaration of innocence made by the man in his dying moments, and the public conscience already felt ill at ease as to the justice of the act that had been done.

At this time the fact that the other two men made dying declarations regarding him had not leaked out beyond the confines of the jail. Soon, however, the writer of these lines became aware of it, and asked a



question upon the subject in the House of Commons. The reply of the Chief Secretary was evasive, beyond admitting that the depositions had been made. Again and again a question as to the contents of these documents was repeated in one form or another, but Mr. Trevelyan steadily refused to give any information, and the Prime Minister when finally appealed to only availed of the question as an occasion to pay a compliment to the "discretion and clemency with which he knew his noble friend Earl Spencer discharged his duties."

But yet the depositions which might be supposed to be the best testimony to the noble earl's discretion, &c., were denied to Parliament and the public. The denial of them strengthened suspicions already entertained, and gradually the feeling spread that Myles Joyce's death was a "judicial murder," and it was so characterised in Parliament by the present writer and others during the Session of 1883.

The witnesses who gave evidence for the Crown have been all living in the locality since the trial under the protection of police. In the month of July last it was noticed that Thomas Casey, one of the approvers, had presented himself at the confessional in the church of the parish to which he belongs, and the fact was of course regarded as significant, inasmuch as it was known that none of the other witnesses had ever presented themselves for Sacraments since the murder.

On the 8th August His Grace the Archbishop of Tuam visited the parish on his annual confirmation tour. Casey sought an interview with His Grace, and informed him of his desire to make reparation by a public confession for the double crime of murder and perjury committed by him in connection with the Maamtrasna trials. The revelations made by him before the archbishop, priests and

congregation assembled in the church were immediately brought under the notice of Parliament, and a promise was extracted from the Marquis of Hartington that if they were brought officially before the Government by the Most Rev. Dr. M'Evilly an inquiry would be instituted.

Philbin, the other approver, reluctantly confessed to the truth of Casey's revelations.

His Grace, the Most Rev. Dr. M'Evilly brought the facts under the notice of the Lord Lieutenant, and requested an inquiry. Earl Spencer replied by a memorandum (to be found in the annexed Appendix), prepared evidently by the incriminated officials, and endeavouring to show that there were no grounds for suspicion, and no need of inquiry. This reply did not meet the case, and His Grace again pointed out the necessity for satisfying the public mind with an impartial inquiry.

To this communication Earl Spencer directed a curt refusal "to re-open the subject."

Such, briefly, is a history of the events which led to the preparation of the following chapters. If they do not obviate inquiry on the part of Earl Spencer or the Government, it is hoped at least they will help the public to see some of the ugly facts which an inquiry would serve to bring forth.

Owing to the frequent recurrence of the names Casey and Joyce, which are the names chiefly prevailing in the district, some confusion of persons will be inevitable to the cursory reader. Where, however, different persons possess the same Christian and surname a glance at the following list will be useful in distinguishing them :—

## LIST OF NAMES.

## ARRESTED FOR THE MURDER.

Patrick Joyce, Shanvallycahill,	executed, guilty
Patrick Casey,	executed, guilty
Myles Joyce,	executed, innocent
Michael Casey,	penal servitude, guilty
Martin Joyce (brother to Myles),	penal servitude, innocent
Patrick Joyce, Cappanacraha (another brother),	penal servitude, innocent
Tom Joyce (son of Patrick),	penal servitude, innocent
John Casey (little), Cappanacraha,	penal servitude, innocent
Anthony Philbin,	approver
Thomas Casey,	approver

## THE ACTUAL MURDERERS (NOW ALLEGED).

John Casey (big), Bun-na-cnic,	supposed leader, at large
John Casey, Junr. (his son), Bun-na-cnic,	at large
Pat Joyce, Shanvallycahill	executed
Pat Casey,	executed
Pat Leyden,	now in England
Michael Casey,	penal servitude
Thomas Casey,	approver

## INDEPENDENT WITNESSES.

Anthony Joyce  
 John Joyce, Derry (his brother)  
 Patrick Joyce, Derry (John's son)

## OTHERS.

John Joyce, Maamtrasna,	the murdered man
Michael Joyce (boy), do. (son),	who died of wounds
Patrick Joyce (boy), do. (son),	who recovered

John Joyce (young), Bun-na-cnic, the man whom the murderers  
 called out to join them