

**Robert Jocelyn 2nd Earl of Roden, 3rd Baron Newport,**  
**6th Baronet of Hyde Hall (1756 – 1820)**

*Rebellion in Ireland and Hyde Hall internally altered*

*This article is the sixth in my series of 'follow-ups' to my earlier article of November 2018 entitled 'Hyde Hall/Great Hyde Hall', in which I have been writing about the residents and owners of Hyde Hall, especially the Jocelyn family.*

Robert Jocelyn was the eldest son of Robert Jocelyn, the 1st Earl of Roden (who was the subject of an earlier article dated January 2019) and his wife Anne (Hamilton). Robert was born on 19 October 1756 (some records give the date as 26 October) and was baptised on 10 December that year at Dundalk in Ireland.

In 1776, Robert entered Irish politics and became the MP for Mayoborough, a position he held until 1778. After this, Robert became the MP for Dundalk from 1783 until 1797, both seats being in the Irish House of Commons. Robert also became in 1796 the Auditor General of the Irish Exchequer, a position he held until his death in 1820. Additionally, Robert took a seat in the House of Lords at Westminster from 1800 until his death in 1820, as an Irish Representative Peer and was an Irish Privy Councillor.

On 5 February 1788, Robert married Frances Theodosia Bligh, who was the daughter of a senior Irish churchman at St. Andrew's church near Dundalk. They had six children together, four sons and two daughters. Frances died on 22 May 1802 at Hyde Hall and is buried at Great St. Mary's church in Sawbridgeworth.

Robert went on to marry for a second time, this time to Juliana Anne Orde (of Weetwood Hall, Leeds) at Edinburgh on 26 June 1804. She was 20 years his junior and they had two sons together, the youngest of whom, Major Augustus George Frederick Jocelyn, was a founder of the Army and Navy Club in Pall Mall, London.



*Weetwood Hall, now an hotel*

From 1771 until 1797 Robert was known as Viscount Jocelyn, and on 22 June 1797 upon the death of his father, he inherited the titles of Earl of Roden, Baron Newport and Baronet of Hyde Hall and also the property of Hyde Hall itself. Much later in life, Robert declined a Marquisate because, although he was a wealthy landowner with property in Ireland, Essex and Hertfordshire, he was still not wealthy enough to support the title of Marquis.

Robert was a semi-professional soldier and commanded a company of Horse, the 1st Fencible Light Dragoons, who had acquired the nickname of the 'Foxhunters'. The Fencibles were basically reservists, the old equivalent of modern-day Territorials. Under the command of Robert, this particular unit was to achieve notoriety.

In 1797 Major General Sir James Duff was appointed the military commander of Limerick district, which included Robert's troop of dragoons. They were soon to be in action, when between May and September 1798 there was a rebellion by the United Irishmen against British rule.



*Badge of United Irishmen*

The United Irishmen were Republican and took their inspiration from the American and French Revolutions. They were a mix of Protestant and Catholic men (the main leaders were Protestant) but they were staunchly opposed by the Ulster Protestants. Thus, this conflict was a precursor to the later 'Troubles' and assumed the nature of a sectarian civil war, with both sides committing atrocities.

Despite some help from France, the uprising was soon quelled. On 27 May, a very large contingent of United Irishmen surrendered at Knockaulin Hill and this surrender was peaceful. Therefore, when on 29 May a smaller force of up to 2,000 gathered to do the same thing at the Curragh of Kildare under the promise of 'Pardon and Liberty', nobody was expecting problems. What ensued was to become known as the 'Massacre of Gibbet Rath', when Robert Jocelyn's dragoons ruthlessly charged the surrendering and defenceless United Irishmen, resulting in approximately 350 fatalities.

At first glance, Robert Jocelyn's action in ordering the charge appears to be unjustifiable. However, it is wrong to judge historical personages by today's values and standards. Very few historical figures could survive such scrutiny. Also, there do appear to be some mitigating circumstances. Firstly, Robert was acting under the direct orders of his superior officer, General Duff. Nobody at the time would dare to deliberately disobey such an order.

Secondly, General Duff in his (very much redrafted) report stated that the Irishmen fired first. Indeed, there may be some truth in this. Some reports of the time (from the Irish side no less) suggest that the Irishmen were discharging their muskets into the air to avoid handing them over loaded. This could have been mistaken as hostile fire by the British.

Thirdly, the Irishmen had actually gathered to surrender to another British force under General Gerard Lake. Generals Duff and Lake were not in communication with each other and General Duff would have been unaware of the terms agreed for the surrender. Indeed, he may not have been aware at first that the Irishmen were surrendering at all. Likewise, the Irishmen would not have been expecting General Duff's force to have been there, and may have reacted accordingly.

General Duff was a capable officer who went on to greater things and it is therefore sad that the situation was not better controlled. It should be noted, though, that General Duff was later feted as a hero for his actions that day. If his peers did not condemn him, we cannot easily do so either.



*Flags of the United Irishmen*



*Memorial stone to the fallen of Gibbet Rath*

The Gibbet Rath 'massacre' was not the only time that Robert's dragoons would be in action that year. On 8 September 1798, a small force of about 1,000 French troops, who had landed at Mayo, were cornered near the Longford/Leitrim border by a vastly superior British army. There followed a short skirmish with minimal casualties, called the Battle of Ballinmuck. The French then surrendered, their General, Jean Humbert surrendering to Robert Jocelyn personally.

As already stated, in the year 1800 Robert was appointed as an Irish Representative Peer in the House of Lords in Westminster. Thus, for the last 20 years of his life, Robert divided his time between his properties in Ireland and Edinburgh, and Hyde Hall in Sawbridgeworth, where he could stay close to London. Hyde Hall was built in the year 1572 and by 1800 was in need of refurbishment. Thus, between 1800 and his death, Robert made many interior alterations to Hyde Hall, some of which were major, although the exterior remained largely unaltered.

On 13 November 1806, Robert was made a Knight of the Order of Saint Patrick. Robert was a leader of the fiercely Protestant Orange Order and at least one source alleges that he instigated attacks on Catholic homes in the Dundalk area. This, though, seems to be a case of mistaken identity. Robert's son, the 3rd Earl, who was also named Robert, and who became the Grand Master of the Orange Order, definitely was implicated in an event of 1849 when Catholic homes were burned down with some fatalities. It is thus probable that this is the incident which is referred to in the allegation.

On 29 June 1820, Robert died at his home of Hyde Hall. He was buried at Great St. Mary's church in Sawbridgeworth and was succeeded by his eldest son, also named Robert, who now became the 3rd Earl of Roden. Robert's second wife and widow Juliana survived him and lived in the North of England. She died in Northumberland on 29 November 1856.

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