

The Hon. Percy Jocelyn (1764-1843); Bishop of Ferns, Ireland.



The Right Rev. and Hon. Percy Jocelyn was Bishop of the Diocese of Ferns from 1809-1820. Percy's mother, Lady Anne Hamilton, was a member of the Clanbrassil Hamiltons, on whose land the Battle of Ballinahinch was fought in 1798, and her distant kin included the United Irish leader, Archibald Hamilton Rowan. In 1752, Lady Anne Hamilton married Robert Jocelyn, son of the Lord High Chancellor of Ireland. Through his father's political success and his wife's aristocratic connections, Robert Jocelyn attained high honours and became Earl of Roden. A year before the Rising, in 1797, Lord Roden's eldest son, Robert Jocelyn (1756-1820), succeeded as the second Earl of Roden. The second son, George Jocelyn (1764-1798), was the father-in-law of both Walter Hore and James Boyd. But it was the third and youngest son, Percy Jocelyn (1764-1843), who proved to be the most interesting character in that generation of the family.

He graduated with a BA from Trinity College Dublin. At Trinity, he was regarded as something of a bookworm, spending much of his time in his rooms on Library Square. He was later described as "a tall thin young man with a pale, meagre and melancholy countenance, and so reserved in his manners and reclusive in his habits that he was considered by every body to be both proud and unsociable". Percy Jocelyn was born on 29 November 1764. Immediately after graduating, he was ordained deacon at the age of 23 and then priest. He quickly acquired a number of ecclesiastical positions, not because he was able and capable, but due to the cunning ambition that had made him a corrupt pluralist who amassed many posts, enriching himself with the income from accumulated tithes and endowments. For all the offices he held from a young age, Jocelyn gave very little back in return to the parishes that sustained his lifestyle. He failed constantly to provide for the pastoral care of his parishioners or to take services in the churches and cathedrals to which he had been appointed. Between 1787 and 1809, he was Treasurer of Saint Fin Barre's Cathedral, Cork (1787-1795); Rector of Creggan, near Dundalk, Co Louth, and Rector of Tamlaght, Co Derry, two parishes at opposite ends of the Diocese of Armagh (1788-1790); Archdeacon of Ross, Co Cork (1788-1790); Treasurer of Armagh Cathedral (1790-1809); and Rector of

Disert, Co Waterford, in the Diocese of Lismore (1796-1809). Not even the holiest and most energetic of men could give due attention to these posts in four dioceses spread across five counties and three provinces while maintaining a city residence in Dublin at the same time. Jocelyn's contemporaries realised that he was incapable of giving due attention to his pastoral responsibilities and that he was idle to the point of negligence, seldom taking services and never preaching. Rev Thomas Hore said Jocelyn that he was the "most idle of all reverend idlers" and asked him rhetorically: "Do you ever write a sermon? Most worthy Rector of Creggan – not you."



As a consequence of the events in 1798, Percy Jocelyn was elevated to the bench of bishops in the Church of Ireland. During the Rising, the Bishop of Killala, Joseph Stock, had suffered bitterly at the hands of the rebels, the French invading force, and the British authorities in Co Mayo. Once the Rising was over, Stock was naturally disillusioned with his see and was soon pursuing every vacant episcopal appointment. However, Stock was disappointed as he was passed over for preferment when the mad Bishop of Ferns and Leighlin, Euseby Cleaver, became Archbishop of Dublin in 1808. Stock had hoped to become Archbishop of Dublin, but now resigned himself to moving to Co Wexford, writing to his son: "If I cannot be Dublin, I shall be content with Ferns." He must have been convinced of his chances of moving to Co Wexford, for four days later he wrote in similar terms: "I think I must have a chance of Ferns." Despite his expectations, all Stock received was a polite note from the Lord Lieutenant, the Duke of Richmond. Instead, he was transferred to the Waterford and Lismore, and eventually, in 1809, the See of Ferns, vacated by Cleaver, passed to Percy Jocelyn. When he became Bishop of Ferns, Percy Jocelyn found himself in good company alongside the scandalous Chancellor of Ferns, Sir Henry Bate Dudley. But Jocelyn, for his part, spent very little time in his dioceses, seldom visiting those parishes in counties Wexford, Wicklow and Carlow that formed his diocese.

In 1811, Jocelyn's brother John's coachman, James Byrne, accused him of "taking indecent familiarities" (possibly buggery) and of "using indecent or obscene conversations with him". Byrne was sued for criminal libel by Jocelyn and on conviction was sentenced to two years in

jail and also to public flogging. In court, the bishop's counsel was Charles Kendal Bushe (1767-1843), Solicitor General of Ireland and later Chief Justice of the King's Bench, who was a clergyman's son. Bushe confounded Byrne's allegations by claiming the sexual practice the Bishop of Ferns was alleged to have indulged in was a "contagion" that had never reached Ireland. "There is no instance of its existence in the memory of any professional man," Bushe told the court. Therefore, by deduction, the bishop must be innocent. At the trial, Byrne hardly bothered to defend himself for making what the judge called "so wicked a calumny that no idea is too horrible to be informed of you." Jocelyn was described as "an exalted and venerable character, who, though raised to one of the highest dignities of the Church, is still less exalted by his rank than he is by the uniform piety of his life." The bishop was virtuous, pious and devout, Mr Justice Fox agreed. Regretting that he could not pass harsher sentence, he jailed Byrne for two years and ordered that he should be whipped three times through the streets of Dublin. Byrne was whipped to within an inch of his life, and also spent the full two years and an extra 85 days in jail. Recanting his allegations at the prompting of the bishop's agent, the floggings were stopped. A public subscription was raised in 1822 to raise money for Byrne to try to make up for this miscarriage of justice.

Soon poor Percy put all these sordid events and Byrne's allegations behind him. Others appeared to have had short memories too, including family members, and when the bishop's nephew, also Robert Jocelyn, succeeded as third Earl of Roden in 1820, he actively sought the promotion of Percy from the Diocese of Ferns to the See of Clogher. Despite the image that had been bolstered by his family and in court, by the time Jocelyn moved from Ferns to Clogher there were rumours that the bishop was mentally imbalanced. Within weeks there were reports that he was selling off the furnishings of his new palace, a four-storey Classical mansion built only a year earlier by his predecessor, Lord John George Beresford. Worse was to come.

On 19 July 1822, at the age of 58, Percy Jocelyn was caught in a compromising position with a Grenadier Guardsman, John Moverley, in the back room of The White Lion public house, St Albans Place, off The Haymarket, Westminster. Jocelyn tried to escape, but his trousers were still down around his ankles, and he was arrested. Although dressed as a clergyman, he refused to reveal his identity. However, once in custody his name was soon discovered and the news of his arrest caused an immediate sensation in London's clubs and coffee houses. He and Moverley were released on bail, provided by the Earl of Roden and others. The 22-year-old John Moverley was eventually committed to jail. The sordid details surrounding Jocelyn's arrest were conveyed to the newly-appointed Archbishop of Armagh, Lord John George Beresford, by George Dawson, private secretary to the Home Secretary, Robert Peel. Only after lively correspondence involving the viceroy, the prime minister, the chief secretary, and Archbishop Beresford, was an ecclesiastical court summoned. The court, consisting of four bishops, George Beresford of Kilmore, William Knox of Derry, James Saurin of Dromore and William Bissett of Raphoe, met in Armagh in October 1822. Citations demanding Jocelyn's appearance were posted on the doors of Clogher Palace and Cathedral, and on the doors of his townhouse in Dublin, but when he failed to appear in court, the process was begun to deprive the bishop of his ecclesiastical office.

But, even while the trial was proceeding, Jocelyn's capacity for corruption remained unbounded. When he should have been appearing before the four bishops in Armagh, he was auctioning off the last remaining contents of his palace, so that the court ruefully recorded: "That splendid appendage of his dignity has been left as naked as a ruin." Jocelyn was

declared deposed by the Metropolitan Court of Armagh in October 1822. He was deprived of his bishopric, his holy orders and his authority “on account of divers crimes and excesses and more especially for the crimes of immorality, incontinence, sodomitical practices, habits, and propensities, and neglect of his spiritual, judicial, and ministerial duties.” It is, perhaps, the only example ever of a bishop in the Church of Ireland being reduced to the lay state. James Byrne, once flogged and jailed for his allegations against the bishop, now felt vindicated. The Times of London demanded he should receive public indemnity, a great dinner was organised in his honour in London, and a public subscription raised £300 for him.

Moverly had disappeared by now, and there were rumours that Jocelyn’s nephew had him bought off or even had him murdered; other reports said he had been executed. However, the records show that Moverly deserted on 7 August 1822. There is reason to believe that the government, rather than to have a bishop found guilty of the crime of sodomy, was willing to let him escape. There appear to be no documents in the regimental archive relating to a courts martial so possibly he was never caught. Meanwhile, Jocelyn had broken bail. The fugitive bishop first fled to Scotland and from there to Paris with the money he had extracted from his Episcopal Palace, and perhaps with the help of his nephew, Lord Roden. Two years later, in December 1824, the disgraced bishop was formally declared an outlaw.

The last days of Percy Jocelyn were spent as a character who, by some standards, might be more pitied than despised. It is generally accepted that he ended his days in Scotland, working as a butler under the assumed name of Thomas Wilson. He died in Edinburgh in December 1843, and was buried there in the New Cemetery, with only five mourners present. The Latin inscription on his coffin is very telling: “Here lie the remains of a great sinner, saved by grace, whose hopes rest in the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

However, a contrary end is provided by the English writer, Rictor Norton. After he writing a short sketch of the bishop, Norton was contacted by the Hon James Jocelyn, a brother of the current Lord Roden, who claimed that Percy Jocelyn did not die in Scotland as a disguised butler, but returned to his family in Co Down to live a quiet life. The bishop left most of his fairly large estate to his sisters, but his will also contained a dozen bequests to named individuals ranging from £100 pounds to £2,200, including £300 “to my good friend and relation The Reverend James Hill Poe of Nenagh ... as token of Remembrance for all the Kindness and attention which my beloved sisters and myself have uniformly experienced from him for many years past during a period of extreme calamity and misfortune.” The will includes the following clause: “I desire and request that my remains may be committed to the Grave in the most private manner at a very early hour in the morning and that no Publicity whatsoever may attend my funeral, also that no name be inscribed on my Coffin and my age. And I desire no publication of my death to be inserted in any public paper.” Some years ago, the Jocelyn family vault at Kilcoo Parish Church in Bryansford, Co Down, was opened for structural repairs to the church, and when James Jocelyn went inside he found one more coffin than the number of grave markers indicated. This extra coffin was unmarked, and he argued that this belonged to the former Bishop of Ferns.

REPORT THIS ADPRIVACY

It is not surprising that Bishop Jocelyn never married. His closest family relations were the daughters of his nearest brother, George Jocelyn, and two of them married into prominent Co. Wexford families during Percy’s eleven-year tenure as Bishop of Ferns. In 1812, Harriet Jocelyn married the Rev Walter Hore, Rector of Ferns. Walter Hore, who was the son of

Walter Hore of Seafield and grandson of Walter Hore of Harperstown, died on 28 September 1843. In December 1813, Georgiana Jocelyn married Major James Boyd of Rosslare, Co. Wexford. She died in July 1819, and Boyd died forty years later in 1859.

Jocelyn's arrest sent ripples through both state and church. Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh, who was both the Foreign Secretary and Leader of the House of Commons at the time, had an audience with King George IV on 9 August 1822 to reveal the fact that he was being blackmailed, and confessed: "I am accused of the same crime as the Bishop of Clogher." The King is said to have advised Castlereagh to "consult a physician." Instead, he went to his English country seat in Kent, and three days later he slit his throat with a pen-knife. The reputation of the Irish clergy suffered as a result of the case, and Peel wondered whether it was advisable to appoint any of the Irish clergy to a vacant bishopric in the future. Shortly after Jocelyn's arrest, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Charles Manners Sutton, claimed "it was not safe for a bishop to shew himself in the streets of London." The former Bishop of Ferns was the most senior churchman in either Ireland or Britain to be involved in a public homosexual scandal in the 19th century. Initially, there was reluctance to discuss the case in the media, and a writer for *The Times* of London noted that "[m]ingled feelings of sorrow, humiliation, and disgust" had almost prevented him from writing at all. But Jocelyn was soon being ridiculed as the "Bishop of Sodom" and he became a subject of crude satire and popular ribaldry, resulting in more than a dozen illustrated satirical cartoons and numerous pamphlets and limericks. However, it is agreed generally that the case had many positive consequences, for it strengthened Archbishop Beresford's hand in enforcing higher standards and instituting reforms of abuses brought about by lax and worldly clerics in the Church of Ireland. Nevertheless, the indiscretions of this former Bishop of Ferns have remained an embarrassment for generations. Percy Jocelyn rates a short and dismissive three-line entry in Leslie's list of the Bishops of Ferns. Leslie's separate eleven-line entries for him in the Armagh and Clogher lists of clergy and parishes merely state that he was deprived for by a court without hinting at the nature of his offence. There is no separate entry for him in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and he is seldom referred to in the *Roden pedigrees* in Burke's and other peerages.

The Jocelyn case was a sensation at the time, as it would be even now, and researchers might expect to find details of the scandal in church archives. However, the Clogher Diocesan archives in the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland in Belfast, are essentially a record of the day-to-day running of the diocese and are silent about the deposition of Percy Jocelyn. For almost two centuries, the relevant papers in the Armagh Diocesan Registry Archive remained under an interdict imposed in 1822 by Primate Beresford. In the 1920s, Archbishop Charles Frederick D'Arcy, a former Bishop of Clogher, asked for the papers to be burned, although his instructions were never carried out, and the papers were released from closure only recently. An ecumenical but oft-forgotten twist to the tale is that Clogher Palace, which was quickly pillaged by Jocelyn after this move from Ferns in 1820, served as a convent for the Sisters of Saint Louis for most of the 20th century.

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