

involvement with secret societies and it is doubtful if their aspirations extended to the total abolition of landlordism.

Charles Stewart Parnell MP (1846 - 1891) was born at Avondale, Co. Wicklow, the son of a landlord. He entered the House of Commons in 1874 with John O'Connor Power. Parnell was a leading campaigner for Home Rule for Ireland, albeit not greatly concerned by the plight of tenants. He possessed the leadership qualities and commanded the public respect which Davitt considered a prerequisite of any new movement for land reform. Parnell led a campaign of obstruction at Westminster.

Matthew Harris (1825 - 1890) a native of Ballinasloe, Co. Galway was a successful building contractor and chief gun-runner of the I.R.B. in Connacht. Harris was campaign manager for John O'Connor Power in his election to Westminster in 1874.

PART 4. THE BACKGROUND TO THE NEW MOVEMENT

Walter Bourke of Oldtown Cottage, Ballindine, was a respected Roman Catholic landlord of a heavily mortgaged estate of 1400 acres straddling the Mayo-Galway border. He died in 1873 and his estate fell to his elder son Joseph, (nicknamed "Mad Doctor Joe" by the tenants of the estate). Joseph was an army surgeon stationed at Fareham, Hampshire, England. Very Rev. Geoffrey James Canon Bourke (1823 - 1890), the local Parish Priest was a brother of Walter Bourke and acted as Joseph's caretaker. Some of the tenants in the townland of Quinaltagh, just over the Co. Galway border, were threatened with eviction in January 1879 for rent arrears. Canon Bourke was perceived locally as being unsympathetic to the tenants' grievances (but less than two months later he was on the public platform advocating land reform⁶). The Bourke's agent was James Daly of Kilvine who resigned his position because he was not willing to evict tenants whom he knew had not the resources to clear their debts. On the initial advice of their former agent, a group of tenants from the Irishtown area met with James Daly of *'The Connaught*

⁶ Meeting at Claremorris, July 13th, 1879.

Telegraph' in Claremorris in January concerning their predicament. consulted a number of local people in Thomas Sweeney, a shopkeeper Claremorris, John O'Kane of the James Daly, the former Bourke agent Daniel O'Connor of Knockadoon matter. They agreed to hold a public meeting in Irishtown. John O'Connor Power agreed to speak at the meeting. The meeting was announced in *'The Connaught Telegraph'* on 15th February 1879. Daly had expected that the meeting would concern itself with the plight of tenants of the estate.

One of Bourke's tenants in Quinaltagh employed in McDonald's Store, MI. His co-workers there included Joseph D'Alton, and John Corr of Burris, Irishtown brother of Pat 'Crop' Corr. Pat 'Crop' and a band of farmers from the Irishtown area' comprising of James Daly (who resigned as agent of the Bourke estate), brother John, Pat Ronayne of Burris, Rattigan, Pat Huane of Rockfort, Thomas Daly and John Bourke of Boleyboy with Michael Davitt in Nally's House, James Street, Claremorris. Most of the Irishtown men were members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

By the end of 1878 Davitt had decided that land agitation could become the vehicle of furthering I.R.B. objectives.

Davitt, John O'Kane and John W. V. resolved that the meeting at Irishtown should demand rent reductions on the Bourke Estate and, more significantly, also denounce the entire system of landlordism.

Davitt, together with John W. V. persuaded Daly that the meeting should focus on the central issue of tenant ownership rather than the issue of rent. The meeting was held at a central location, close to where the boundaries of Counties Galway, Roscommon and Mayo meet, was an ideal venue for a mass rally⁸.

The men who had met with Davitt in Claremorris erected the platform and organised the other local requirements.

⁷ 'A History of Irishtown, Co. Mayo', P. 2

⁸ See 'Davitt and Irish Revolution', P. 2