The True Story of
Lady Betty
BY DECLAN DONNELLAN
WITH MUSIC BY PADDY CUNNEEN

CAST IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE
Betty ........................................ Sally Dexter
John ........................................ Tim McMillan
Sarah ....................................... Lucy Tregear
Father Molloy ............................. Gerard O'Hare
Night ....................................... Catherine White
Silence ....................................... Lawrence Evans
Gold ......................................... Phil Mckee
George ..................................... Lawrence Evans
Oliver Betty's Son ....................... Tim McMillan
Morning ................................... Lucy Tregear
O'Leary ..................................... Ray McBride
Captain Mills ............................. Tim McMillan
Mrs Mills .................................. Charlotte Medcaif
Michael Flynn ......................... Gerard O'Hare
Dunne ...................................... Patrick Toomey
Rev. Blakeney ............................. Lawrence Evans
Peggy Hanrahan ....................... Charlotte Medcaif
Liam Hanrahan ........................... Ray McBride
Liamog Hanrahan ..................... Phil Mckee
Christie O'Flaherty ................. Patrick Toomey
Bridie O'Byrne ....................... Catherine White

Music played live by members of the Company

Director .................................. Declan Donnellan
Designer .................................. Nick Ormerod
Music ...................................... Paddy Cunneen
Movement Director .................. Jane Gibson
Lighting Designer ..................... Ben Ormerod
Company Stage Manager .......... Louise Yeomans
Technical Stage Manager ........ Charles Carne
Deputy Stage Manager ............. Martin Lloyd Evans
Wardrobe Mistress .................. Blossom Beale
Casting Director ...................... Edel Mussell
Graphic Designer ..................... Jain Lanyon
Costume Supervisor ................ Angie Burns
Dialect Coach ......................... Sally Grace
Programme Researcher ............ Lucy Astor
London Press ......................... Sharon Kean (01-254 8489)
Photographer ......................... Simon Annand

THERE WILL BE NO INTERVAL
THE PRODUCTION LASTS APPROX 1hr 50mins
The Historical Lady Betty

Lady Betty was probably the executioner at Rooscommon gaol from 1798 to about 1800. Sir William Wilde, father of Oscar, and the doctor at Cisterica 11 news away from her story based on several accounts of people who had known her. Captain and Mrs Mills did build a three-storey thatched mansion at Mary Moylan but the mob who torched it was led by a man named Michael O'Malley who led his friends to destroy it. The O'Connell Bridge Skulls were recently unearthed on the site during excavations of the nearby temple. The incident of the widow stealing the riches of bacon crying "if this be war let there never be peace" is well documented.

P Flynn is based on this O'Malley and Nicholas Hanly, the rosary priest of the Catholic faithful, the whiteboys movement. Sergeant Handish was murdered in a riot in the gaol in 1819, while the Rev. Blakeley was still chaplain.

All the other characters are entirely fictional and no further reference is made to any of the people of Rooscommon living or dead.

‘The Law does not presume any such person to exist as an Irish Roman Catholic’

— The Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chief Justice of Ireland

As one reads history, not in the expurgated editions written for schoolboys and schoolmen, but in the original authorities of each time, one is absolutely sickened, not by the crimes that the wicked have committed, but by the punishments that the good have inflicted, and a community is infinitely more brutalised by the habitual employment of punishment than it is by the accidental occurrence of crime.

Oscar Wilde
The Soul of Man under Socialism 1891

PENAL LAWS

In 1688 the Catholic share of the land had been 22%. Over the next 2 decades severe legislation known as the Penal Laws was passed against all Catholics in Ireland.

They excluded Catholics from all public life, and many normal private and social activities. They could not sit in Parliament or vote. They were excluded from corporations, Poor Law and the magistracy. They could not be sepulchral solicitors or engineers in government. They were excluded from the army and navy and could not carry arms.

LAND OWNERSHIP

The Penal Laws made it illegal for Catholics to buy land in their own name. They could only mortgage or inherit it on the condition that it was divided equally between all his sons. However, if any of the sons turned Protestant he would automatically inherit the land.

WHITEBOYS

"It was in 1792 that the Whiteboy movement, as it came generally to be called, broke out on a large scale. Dozens of armed men, numbering anything from half a dozen or so to over a hundred, again took to riding about the countryside at night with white flags doughter, carrying down fences which enclosed the land for pasture and burning thatch. Those who collected rents for the Protestant church prevented the movement. The people would immediately be taken from their land by which another had been excommunicated, and generally allowing the existence of a rough and ready justice to relieve the grievances of the poor. For the next hundred years of more similar organisations, with names that vary with the years and the locality, operations with similar objectives and a roughly similar degree of success.

Robert Kee
The Most Distressed Country 1972

"Property that has only rights and no duties is absolutely beyond the ken of the Irishman. No wonder that so many Irishmen who are suddenly cast into one of the modern great cities of England and America, among a population with entirely different moral and legal standards, despair of all morals and justice lose all hope and become easy prey to demoralisation."

Friedrich Engels
On a visit to rural Ireland
SIR: And must they all be hanged that swear and lie?

LADY MACBETH: Every one.

SIR: Who must hang them?

LADY MACBETH: Why, the honest men.

SIR: Then the liars and the swearers are fools, for there are liars and swearers enough to beat the honest men and hang up them.

*William Shakespeare* Macbeth
"You can say that this Administration will have the first complete, far reaching attack on the problem of hunger in history. Use all the rhetoric, so long as it doesn't cost any money."

Richard Nixon
from critical minutes of White House Meeting (March 1969)

Poverty

"Living upon the spot, surrounded by their little utter tenants, the middle men prove the most oppressive species of tyrants that ever lent assistance to the destruction of a country. They rent the land at short tenure to the occupiers of small farms, and often leave no lodged all, not satisfied with screwing up the rent to the utmost. Starving they are suspicious and remiss in the collection of it."

Arthur Young during a tour of Ireland in 1776

A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of the Poor People in Ireland from becoming a Burden on their Parents or Country, and for making them Beneficial to the Public.

"I have already computed the charge of nursing a beggar's child on which I reckon all cottages, labourers and four fifths of the farmers to be about two shillings per annum. I have increased and I believe no gentleman would refuse to give ten shillings for the care of a good fat child which I have said, will make four dishes of excellent nutritious meat."

Jonathan Swift 1729

Roscommon was the worst hit of 32 counties by the great famine of 1847, losing 60% of its population.

Anatole France

"The majestic egalitarianism of the law, which forbids the rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread."

Irish Women Before The English Came

"The status of women in ancient Irish law and the social prominence of women in ancient Irish literature have been found remarkable. Certainly, the female has a unique place in comparison with other civilizations. She could be elected as chief and lead the clan to battle or defend their territory both in and out of war. The wife remains mistress of all she brought into the martial partnership. The electoral inheritance system of chieftainship very often passed through the female line as exemplified in the ancient saga of the Ulster Cycle. Women were much protected by law, for a woman died a violent death attributed to malice or neglect by a man various penalties were imposed. Offences against the honor of a woman caused the imposition of heavy fines. The execution of a woman was strictly forbidden even if she had committed a premeditated murder. Women who killed were exiled."

P. Bereford Ellis
A History of the Irish Working Class 1972

A stone double figure on an island cemetery, too isolated inough to take on life. Though thought to be a Celtic cut out.

The map of Ireland shows the location of various towns and cities, including Dublin, Athlone, Galway, and Castlerock. The map is colorful and detailed, indicating the geographical layout of the region.
Roscommon Old Gaol is situated on the highest point of the town on the north side of the market square. It was built on the site of an older gaol in about 1740, probably designed by Richard Cassels whose famous buildings include Leinster House, Powerscourt House and Carton House.

The gaol had 36 solitary cells, in which prisoners were held in iron chains around their bodies, fastened with chains to the walls. The cells were unheated and the windows unglazed.

In 1919 a new gaol was built in Roscommon and the old gaol became a lunatic asylum. In 1833 the old gaol became a market-house and 2 years ago the building was disused and now has hopes of a new life as a shopping complex.

Lady Betty's window is marked on the photograph. A balcony was erected beneath the enlarged window and the scree was suspended from a beam above.

Sir William Wilde's account of Lady Betty

"The old gaol of Roscommon stood, and, although now converted to other purposes, still stands, in the market-place in the centre of the town. It is an exceedingly high, dark, gloomy-looking building, with a casemented top, like one of the ancient fortresses that tower above the houses in many of the continental cities. It can be discerned at a great distance, and, taken in connexion with the extensive ruins of O’Connor’s Castle, in the suburbs, and the beautiful abbeys upon the other side of the town, seems to partake of the character of the middle-age architecture. The fatal drop was, perhaps, the highest in Ireland. It consisted of a small doorway in the front of the third storey, with a simple iron beam and pulley above, and the lapboard merely a horizontal door hinged to the wall beneath, and raised or let fall by means of a sliding-holt, which shot from the wall when there was occasion to put the apparatus of death in requisition. Fearful as this elevated gallows appeared, and unique in its character, it was not more so than the finish of the law who then generally officiated upon it. No decrepit wretch, no crime-hardened ruffian, no secret or mysterious personage, who was produced occasionally disguised and masked, piled his dreadful trade here. Who, think you, gentle reader — who now, recollects from the unpleasant but truthful minstrel — officiated upon this gallows high? — a female — a middle-aged, stout- made, dark-eyed, swarthy-complexioned, but by no means forbidding-looking woman — the celebrated Lady Betty — the fineness of the law — the unfeeling presence of the executioner for the Connaught circuit, and Roscommon in particular, for many years. Few children, born or reared in that county thirty, or even five and twenty years ago, who were not occasionally frightened into being good, and going to sleep, and not crying when left alone in the dark by nisath ‘a Pooka, or, ‘here’s Lady Betty.’"

Sir William Wilde. 1852

Roscommon Today

The town has shrunk to a population of 2,779 and is still dominated by the huge prison. Lady Betty’s window has been filed in to be indistinguishable from the others, but traces of the balcony can still be seen.

Emigration now stars the town. One 22 year old told us that only 1 out of his class of 120 remained in Roscommon.

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