

JAMES CALCUTT AND THE MYTHS OF MOUNTMELICK

MARTYN CORNELL

It is, as these stories usually are, a terrific tale. James Calcutt, a Protestant brewer in the 1820s in Mountmellick, County Laois, Ireland, was denounced from the altar by the town's Roman Catholic priest, and after a campaign of violence against him, his family and workers, driven out of Ireland itself, and forced to move 3,000 miles to Ontario, Canada. Calcutt was then followed to Canada by the leader of the agitators who forced him from Ireland, a man of ill reputation called James Demsey, who was looking to continue his campaign of terror against the Protestant brewer. But when the steamboat Demsey was travelling on arrived at Cobourg, the town on the north side of Lake Ontario where Calcutt had settled and opened a new brewery, Demsey fell overboard in an accident and drowned, his body washing up on the shore at the foot of Calcutt's property.¹

Unfortunately, when you start trying to unravel this story, it turns out that while some elements are true, the basic thrust is completely wrong, and much of the tale seems to have been made up. There is no evidence Calcutt was denounced by the local priest, no evidence that he was forced out of Ireland by anyone, and no evidence that his 'chief persecutor' deliberately followed him to Canada.

Most of the more fantastic parts of the tale seem to have been invented for an 'obituary' of James Calcutt printed after his death in 1869 in the *Cobourg Star*, his home town newspaper in Canada, which included claims about events in Calcutt's past that are demonstrably wildly, totally inaccurate. The version of events in the *Cobourg Star* obituary was then taken up by an Irish-Canadian writer called Walter Cavendish Crofton, who turned the tale into a short book, published under a pseudonym, written as if it was by Calcutt's son, and with added made-up sections. Unfortunately, Crofton's fiction has been mistaken for actual fact, and subsequently repeated widely.

It is true that Mountmellick, in what was then called Queen's County, was wracked with sectarian struggles in the

mid-1820s, and the town's Roman Catholic priest, Father Anthony Duane, successfully urged his parishioners to boycott two local brewers, Anthony Pim, a Quaker, and Robert Kenny, a Protestant and magistrate.² The main problem was the 'Orange Pole', a 50-foot-high mast surmounted by images of King William III, whose victory over the Catholic James II 130 years earlier had cemented Protestant rule in Ireland, and George IV, which was a visual pun on the name of the local Tory landowner, William Wellesley-Pole, Lord Maryborough, an older brother of the Duke of Wellington. The pole, or mast, stood in the centre of Mountmellick, and was used by Orangemen, from the fanatical end of the Protestant minority in Ireland, as a symbol of their political dominance over the majority Catholics. The pole had been erected on the town's market house, which was leased by Pim, who had declined to act on frequent calls by Duane and other leading Catholics to take it down. Kenny, in his role as a magistrate, had done nothing to curb the parades by Orangemen around the town, particularly on 12 July, anniversary of William of Orange's victory over the Roman Catholic King James II at the Battle of the Boyne, parades that were accompanied by jeering, the singing of anti-Catholic songs such as 'Croppies Lie Down' and aggression towards Catholics that included firing guns at people and buildings.

The impact of the Catholic boycott on their businesses finally led Pim and Kenny to join the calls to have the pole taken down, something fanatical Orangemen regarded as betrayal, leading to the two brewers being mocked in song:³

It's of Mountmellick town you quickly shall hear,
A comical ditty about Kenny's beer;
Not a drop can be sold throughout county or town
Till Will in the Market-place he is pulled down.

Sing bubbero diddero Anthony Pim,
Put your specs on your nose, and at Will you may grin:
All your barking and biting you may as well stop,
For we'll keep him up there if you ne'er sold a drop.

The month it was August, the day twenty-six,
Which the Papists laid out to kill all heretics;
But if they attempted the game of Paul Jones,
It's with powder and bullets we'll pepper their bones.

Sing bubbero diddero Anthony Pim, etc.

One morning when Kenny and Pim did arise
They looked at King William with spite in their eyes;
'We'll take thee down softly, as sure as we're here,
For whilst thou art there we can ne'er sell our beer.'

Sing bubbero diddero Anthony Pim, etc.

Despite the aggressive stance of the Orangemen, and the pusillanimous behaviour of the magistrates and police in Mountmellick, the authorities in Dublin decided that the Orange Pole was too controversial to be allowed to stand. In June 1826 a battalion of 150 police, mounted and on foot, were ordered by the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland (somewhat ironically this was Richard Wellesley, Marquess Wellesley, William Wellesley-Pole's older brother) to be sent from neighbouring County Carlow and elsewhere into Mountmellick to axe the pole down, against the opposition of a crowd of 200 Orangemen who pelted the police with missiles and attacked them with bludgeons and sabres. More than 20 of the police refused to join in the removal of the pole, and were subsequently dismissed. Four months later, however, when Protestants who had been arrested at a subsequent riot in Mountmellick came up for trial at the general sessions in the county town, Maryborough (today Portlaoise), the two sides, Protestant and Catholic, agreed a truce for the sake of general public peace, with Father Duane leading the conciliatory Catholics.⁵

Two months after the 'battle of the banner', meanwhile, James Calcutt, owner of the town's third brewery, whose business seems to have been unaffected by the boycott that hit Kenny and Pim, advertised his brewery, flour mill and bakery by the Owenass river in Mountmellick as available for lease, 'or the interest sold'. The brewery, mill and bakery were 'all at present at full work', and the brewery could 'with little expense be converted into a commodious distillery'.⁶

Calcutt was born in Derrycanton, just outside Mounrath, County Laois in 1792, the fifth James Calcutt since James Calcutt I, born in Leicestershire, arrived in Ireland with Cromwell's army in 1649. The Calcutts were involved in the manufacture of cotton goods in Mounrath, though in 1814 James Calcutt esq., presumably James V's father, was living at Coldblow, less than half a mile from Mountmellick, a town with its own cotton industry (it was nicknamed 'the

Manchester of Ireland').⁷ The family link is pretty certain: James V called his first beachside property in Cobourg, Ontario 'Cold Blow'. (By 1842, however, when James Calcutt IV died, aged 85, he was back in Mounrath, living at a house called Spring Garden.)⁸

The 1869 *Cobourg Star* obituary claimed that James Calcutt V had started working as a brewer at the age of 14, that is, since 1806. As well as producing cotton and woollen goods, Mountmellick also had five breweries producing 'excellent beer' in 1815,⁹ one of which was run by Anthony Pim, starting from about 1800.¹⁰ James V's mother was a Pim, suggesting he could have begun working in the brewing business as an apprentice in the concern run by his mother's relatives. James V married his cousin Jane Shannon in 1817, and their first son, another James, was born in Mountmellick in 1821. James Calcutt V is listed as one of three brewers in Mountmellick in 1824, along with Kenny and Pim.¹¹

It looks as if nobody came forward to take over his brewing, milling and baking businesses when they were advertised in 1826, and Calcutt added a distillery himself. His brother William was listed as having run a distillery in Mountmellick that made just under 10,000 gallons of spirit between October 1826 and October 1827.¹² In April 1828 James Calcutt put his businesses on the market again, including the bakery, the mill, the brewery 'at present at work', and a distillery 'at full work' that was 'quite new, being only one year at work.' The businesses were being disposed of 'as the present proprietor is about to leave the Country'.¹³

The first move was to England: by May 1829 Calcutt was living in Bedminster, Bristol, where a daughter, Mary Kingsley Calcutt, was baptised, with James's occupation given as 'merchant'. A couple of years or so later, the family was living in or near Roscrea, County Tipperary, 25 miles to the south-west of Mountmellick, where another daughter, Maria Wilhelmina, was born,¹⁴ probably in 1831.¹⁵ (It looks as if the child born in Bristol died soon after birth.) James Calcutt was in a partnership as a miller with Samuel W Neale and William R Neale at Coolrain in the west of Laois, nine miles from Roscrea, which was dissolved in April 1832.¹⁶

The following month, May 1832, James Calcutt and his family left Ireland for good, sailing from Dublin on the emigrant ship *Duncan Gibb*, taking with him his family and, according to a newspaper report, 'all the necessary apparatus already made for carrying on his business at Little York' – the city that would be renamed Toronto two years later.¹⁷ The *Duncan Gibb's* 303 passengers were almost all Protestant émigrés, with just 18 Roman Catholics on board, and the property the passengers took with them was worth

'nearly 20,000', perhaps £1.9 million today. According to James's obituary 37 years later, the Calcutt party included former servants and brewery workers from Mountmellick, while other former employees followed him to Canada later.¹⁸

Calcutt did not, in fact, settle in Toronto: instead, when he and his family arrived at Cobourg, 60 miles to the east, at the end of July 1832, two months after quitting Ireland, he decided to settle there instead, 'if a suitable situation can be procured,' the *Cobourg Star* newspaper wrote.¹⁹ By that December, Calcutt had installed the equipment he had brought with him across 3,000 miles on a site between Hibernia, Orr and Durham Streets and the lakefront, and was advertising that the Cobourg Brewery was now able to supply beer and ale.²⁰

Two months before that, a macabre coincidence occurred that, even without the mythology that has subsequently accrued to it, is remarkable enough. A character named James Dempsey – James Demsey in all the Canadian reports – from Clonaslee, eight miles to the west of Mountmellick,²¹ was a member of the Whitefeet, Roman Catholic agrarian agitators who operating in Kilkenny and Queen's County in the early 1830s, who frequently raided the homes of the Protestant gentry and others in search of arms.²² (The Whitefeet should not be confused, though they often are, with the Whiteboys, an earlier 18th century Irish agrarian movement.) A pistol was stolen from a house in Ballyfin, six miles from Mountmellick, by a Whitefoot named James Scully. Dempsey was arrested with Scully an hour after the robbery, and subsequently turned 'approver', or informer, and at the Maryborough Assizes in March 1832 Dempsey's evidence helped bring a guilty verdict against Scully.²³ Dempsey also gave evidence to the special commission held at Maryborough that summer into the unrest in Queen's County, and four men were charged with 'obstructing' him and other Crown witnesses.²⁴ It appears that Ireland was now too hot for Dempsey the informer, and he fled to Canada after betraying his oath to his fellow Whitefeet by giving evidence for the prosecution in trials against them. The next anybody knew of him was when he turned up dead on the beach at the foot of James Calcutt's property in Cobourg.

Dempsey had been a passenger on the William IV steamer, which travelled 220 miles down the St. Lawrence from the town of Prescott and along Lake Ontario to Toronto, calling in at places such as Kingston and Cobourg on the way — the Calcutts had sailed on the same paddleboat with all the kit for their brewery and distillery three months earlier. According to the report in the *Cobourg Star*, on 23 October the steamboat was leaving Cobourg, having dropped off passengers and goods, and as it reversed out from the lee of

Cobourg's pier, where the water was calm, into rougher seas it was struck by a big wave that washed overboard Dempsey (spelled Demsey by the *Star*) and a crew member who had both been standing in the open gangway. Boats were put out to try to rescue them, but the wind and waves were high, and the two men went under before they could be reached. Dempsey's body was found the next morning 'half buried in the sand' half a mile from where the accident happened. He was described by the *Star* as 'just out from the Queen's County, where he is stated to have borne a very infamous character, having turned informer against his accomplices in a case of attempted assassination, where he himself was a principal'.²⁵

Dempsey had clearly been recognised, and shortly afterwards he was fingered as someone who had, supposedly been involved in forcing James Calcutt to leave Ireland. Three weeks after his death, a 26-year-old local poet, Frederick Preston Rubridge, had a poem published in the *Cobourg Star* called 'The Drowned Emigrant', which includes the lines

On the sands of the shore, a bloated corpse,
He lay where the winds had thrown him;
No wail of the widow lamented his loss,
No friend stood by to own him.

Yet was he unknown? Ah no! For his ways
Had been one wild course of error
And some there were who remember'd the days
When his name was a name of terror.

He fled – for the life his treach'ry prolong'd
From a hundred hands was in danger;
He was cast at the feet of the man he had wrong'd
As tho' heav'n were that man's avenger.

Below the poem was a lengthy report bylined '*Ed. of Star*' which purported to tell the dead man's story. 'Demsey' (sic), the *Star* said,

when in Ireland, we are told, headed a notorious gang of White Feet in the Queen's County, whose ferocity and daring had long been the terror of the neighbourhood. Among other victims of their persecution was a man in extensive business at —, who seemed peculiarly the object of their malice; scarcely a week being suffered to elapse without his experiencing some injury, either in person or in property. His servants were beaten, horses and waggons destroyed, and the goods they conveyed strewed upon the public roads, &c. &c. Things had gone on thus for two or three years, and Demsey was known to be the principal agent of a party who were seeking by such means to obtain an ascendancy in the country, and drive from it every person whose respectability or worth placed a

barrier to their infamous ambition. In this, with the particular gentlemen alluded to, they at length succeeded; for finding it impossible to remain in his native land without involving certain ruin, he last year resolved upon emigrating to Upper Canada — and after the usual vicissitudes, arrived in Cobourg with his family a few months ago. Here, he has purchased a lot of land very prettily situated on the lake shore, immediately in front of the harbour, where he proposes renewing his former pursuits; and we are happy to add with every prospect of a very different and gratifying result.²⁶

There are several odd points about that account. Calcutt is not named, nor is his trade identified in any way, and even his hometown is anonymised with a dash, though presumably most, or all, of the citizens of Cobourg knew who was being referred to. Stranger is the apparent invention of a back-story for Calcutt's arrival in Cobourg: as we shall see, there is no evidence of his business being attacked, his workers beaten or his goods in trade 'strewed upon the public roads,' and no evidence at all that he left Ireland because of any harassment.

The *Star* continued its report with an account of Dempsey's career that is, again, problematic in places. Dempsey, meantime, it said, and his associates

went on increasing in their enormities, toil at length, detected in the very act of assassination, their day of reckoning came, and now, as often it occurs, the most guilty of the whole—the wretch who led them to destruction—was suffered to escape by turning evidence against his comrades—implicating in his treachery many others in the country. Ireland of course was now no longer a place of safety for him, and it became his turn to fly, when by a singular Providence, his steps were directed to the very place selected as the home of him whom he had formerly injured, *within site of whose door he was doomed to perish*— and upon whose land his miserable and ghastly carcass, horribly mutilated by the avenging waters, was afterwards made literally *to bite the dust!*—his face being completely buried in the sand!—Doubtless there is a God who judgeth!

The problems with this account are that Dempsey turned informer in a case of gun theft, not murder, and there is no evidence at all that he was involved in a campaign against Calcutt and his brewery six years earlier.

Nearly four decades later, after James Calcutt's death in May 1869 at the age of 78, the *Cobourg Star* printed an obituary that picked up on the story it had printed in 1832, and distorted and exaggerated the events that, allegedly led to the brewer's departure from Ireland. The obituary suppressed some events and invented others.²⁷ It read:

About 40 years ago, the government of the day decided upon ordering the taking down of the Orange Poles wherever they existed

throughout Ireland, ostensibly to conciliate the Roman Catholics, and in the hope of putting a stop to the agrarian outrages that were rendering life and property extremely insecure. Among other towns, Mountmellick had its 'Pole' and, of course it, with the rest, was to be cut down. The ceremony was ordered to be as imposing as possible. The country people for many miles around flocked into town in thousands. The military and the police were summoned from all the neighbouring garrisons to preserve order and prevent an outbreak.

It was thought the Orangemen would resist the destruction of their time-honored 'Pole', and the hostilities were sure to occur between them and the Roman Catholics, therefore the government were prepared to quell any riot that might take place. Nothing of importance, however, occurred; the loyalty and discretion of the Orangemen was beyond all praise — and but for one event the day would have passed without anything happening to mar the apparent unanimity that appeared to exist amongst the parties on this gala occasion.

Mr. Calcutt was not present to countenance the ceremonial. Why he was there required has always been a mystery: no doubt there was some reason for it. His absence was made a pretext for a protest on the parts of the priests, and messengers were sent to request his presence. He refused and excused himself under plea of business, at the same time stating that, not being an Orangeman or partyman he thought it was none of his affair whether the pole was taken down or not. This excuse was not considered sufficient, and the parish priest went himself and demanded his presence!

He again declined, giving the same reason, and so the matter ended. The day's proceedings were carried on and concluded with great demonstrations of joy and enthusiasm on the part of the Roman Catholics. But this was not the end of it: The following Sunday Mr. Calcutt was denounced from the altar of the R.C. Chapel, by the Parish priest as a dangerous man; for, said the wily gentleman, 'those that are not with us are against us.' In those times a denunciation from the altar meant destruction of property; horrible outrages; murder.

There were numerous persons not slow in taking advantage of the implied permission of their priests, to commit almost any atrocity. The country was overrun with whiteboys, etc., and a band of the former with a desperate character (whom we shall call Phil Cassidy), as leader, soon undertook the task of driving Mr C. from his native land.

The work of destruction began the following morning. Loaded drays containing manufactures of the establishment, going to neighbouring towns, were attacked, the men beaten, the horses killed, and the contents of the vehicles spilled on the roads and destroyed. Day after day, for weeks and months, this system of wanton cruelty and wholesale destruction continued; the Police and

authorities using every effort to discover the perpetrators without success. At last, ruin staring him in the face, Mr. C. decided to leave Ireland forever. Following out his intention he collected what means he hurriedly could gather together from the wreck of his fortune and with his wife and family embarked for Bristol, England, and shortly after for Canada where he settled, in 1832, in Cobourg.

Mr. C., immediately on his arrival commenced his old calling and was the first to establish in that town the system of paying cash for coarse grains, also for paying his men in cash every Saturday. A couple of years after he had established himself in Cobourg one of his men, who had been at the wharf on business connected with the brewery, returned in haste to say that Cassidy was on board a steamer (William the 4th) there and it was thought he was going to land. This news seriously alarmed Mr. C. as he supposed this man had been instigated to come out to complete the work begun in the old country.

It was not an uncommon thing in those days for outlaws to take solemn oaths to accomplish fiendish outrages, and in this instance it was supposed, by Mr. C. and his wife, that Cassidy had crossed the ocean at the bidding of his superiors to finish his work of revenge. But it was not to be. During the time the steamer remained at the wharf the lake became so boisterous that she had to put to sea to prevent being dashed to pieces against the wharf, there being no harbour then. While backing off, the steamer was struck by some heavy seas and two men were washed overboard.

Everything that could be done to rescue them from a watery grave was tried, in vain, but they disappeared under the waves and were drowned. About half a mile from the wharf, Mr. C. had bought some land and built a dwelling; the garden attached running down to low watermark on the beach was only about one chain (66 feet) in width. The morning after the occurrence described above, one of the men drowned the previous day was discovered lying on the beach, at the foot of the garden, and was at once recognized as the outlaw whiteboy, robber, murderer, the terrible Cassidy!

What a wonderful denouement, what an awful retribution! To he brought 3,000 miles from Ireland into the heart of the great American continent, to be cast on the property, at the very feet of him he had so much injured, a ghastly corpse!

The foregoing events, so imperfectly described, occurred many years ago, and were notified in the newspapers of the period, but we deem this a fitting time to reproduce them. We have been at considerable trouble in procuring the materials for compiling this obituary, owing to the reluctance evinced by the relatives of the deceased gentleman to furnish the necessary information in order to have the matter published.

There are, of course, multiple problems with that narrative too, not least with its account of the events surrounding the

taking down of the 'Orange Pole' in Mountmellick (including the odd claim that other towns in Ireland had their own Orange poles), and the idea that the local Orangemen were 'beyond all praise' with their 'loyalty and discretion,' as opposed to the rioting and the attacks on police that actually took place. An even bigger problem is the claim of attacks on Calcutt's drays and draymen 'for weeks and months' after he was allegedly denounced from the pulpit by the Catholic parish priest. There are no references to such events at all in any newspapers at the time, when sectarian interests would have meant that such attacks, had they happened, would have been widely reported. When Guinness's brewery suffered sectarian attacks in 1837, there were stories about the smashings of casks and threats to publicans stocking the firm's porter in newspapers from Kerry to London. We have to conclude that the attacks on Calcutt's drays and draymen never happened.

The claim against Mountmellick's Roman Catholic parish priest as the alleged instigator of the attacks also goes against the evidence. A month after the pole was taken down in 1826, on 12 July, the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, the sacred day of the Orange calendar, there were more riots and assaults in Mountmellick, and 'a great number' of Orangemen were indicted. At the Maryborough sessions the following October, before the opening of the trial of the Orangemen on charges of riot, the defence offered to guarantee future peace in the town if the Catholics withdrew the charges. The Catholic parish priest, Father Anthony Duane, stood up and accepted the offer on the part of the Catholic side, saying: 'I pledge myself that nothing shall be wanting on my part to promote harmony and good will amongst all denominations of Christians.' At the end of the priest's speech, he was 'greeted by loud cheering and clapping of hands, in which the ... Protestant party heartily joined'.²⁸ It seems very unlikely that Duane would have been vigorously applauded by Protestants if he had been involved in instigating violence against a Protestant brewer.

The obituary is also demonstrably wrong in saying that after 'months' Calcutt 'hurriedly' left Ireland, first for Bristol and then for Canada. It was only two months after the 'Battle of the Pole' that Calcutt advertised his brewery and other businesses for lease or sale, and the brewery was described as 'at present at full work', which it surely would not have been had the owner seen 'ruin staring him in the face'. It was another two years before Calcutt announced that he was 'about to leave the County'. He then returned to Ireland in 1831, and did not depart for Canada until May 1832, six years after he was supposedly denounced from the pulpit.

The *Cobourg Star* has been described as 'a newspaper of ultra-conservative allegiance'.²⁹ It must be suspected that its

obituary of Calcutt was written as an opportunity for Catholic-bashing. Its unwelcome partisan intentions may be hinted at by the obituary writer's admission that they had been unable to get co-operation from the Calcutt family for the obituary's production: very probably the Calcutts had been unwilling to see the death of James used as an excuse to attack Catholics, as the death of Dempsey had been 37 years earlier.

Two years later, in 1871, a book was published in Toronto called *The Orange Pole and the Papist White Boy: A Wonderful Retribution* which was clearly based on the *Star's* obituary of James Calcutt, but with added inventions and inaccuracies. Its pseudonymous author was given as 'Erinensis', a pen name used by an Irish-Canadian named Walter Cavendish Crofton, who had died the previous year, and it was 'Dedicated to the Orangemen of Canada'.³⁰ It did not name Calcutt, and it was written as if authored by one of the brewer's sons. It was even more inaccurate about the events of the day the Orange Pole was taken down than the *Star* obituary, including the fictional assertion that a military band was 'playing a lively air'.³¹ It again claimed that Calcutt had been urged by the Catholic parish priest to attend the taking down of the Orange Pole, had refused, and had subsequently been denounced from the pulpit of the Catholic chapel, so that 'bloodthirsty and revengeful' Catholic parishioners took up the task of 'ruining and driving from the country' the supposedly recalcitrant Calcutt.³²

The Monday following the axing down of the Orange Pole, according to Crofton, after the drays drove out from Calcutt's brewery to deliver beer to customers, they were set upon, and reports came back that

all the men had been shamefully maltreated, that at least one was mortally wounded, that several of the horses were killed, the drays destroyed, and the heads of the barrels knocked in and their contents washed on the roads.

The police, allegedly, were unable to trace the culprits, but it was believed that 'Cassidy, the Whiteboy leader' – the name the *Cobourg Star* gave to James Dempsey – was behind the attacks. Those attacks continued daily, according to Crofton, with none of the brewery's beer reaching its customers, until finally the brewer decided to sell up, liquidate his assets and move to Bristol. There the family remained "some years" before returning to Ireland.³³

As with the *Star* obituary, Crofton describes violent attacks on the brewery's drays, horses and draymen over months that could not, in fact, have happened, or they would have been reported in newspapers at the time, and he places the departure of the Calcutt family to Bristol too soon after the

taking down of the Orange Pole. However, Crofton gives details that show some good knowledge of the Calcutt family's movements. He says that when they returned to Ireland briefly, they rented a house named Alta Villa, which is close to Coolrain, and thus fits in both with James Calcutt's partnership in a mill at Coolrain early in the 1830s and the birth of his daughter around that time at Roscrea, nine miles from Coolrain. Crofton also correctly names the ship on which the Calcutts left Dublin for Canada, the *Duncan Gibb*, though he has it carrying 'four or five hundred' passengers, not 300, and he does not mention that almost all the passengers were Protestants.

However, Crofton again has 'Cassidy', the supposed villain from Ireland, and the alias given for James Dempsey by the *Star*, arriving 'several years' after the Calcutts settled in Cobourg, not several weeks, and his description of the way 'Cassidy' was drowned is considerably more dramatic than the version of James Dempsey's death told in the *Cobourg Star*, with 'tremendous seas' hitting the paddle steamer *William IV* and 'sweeping her decks from end to end.'

Even more than the *Cobourg Star* story, *The Orange Pole* is an attack on Roman Catholics depicting them as vengeful and violent. Crofton was born around 1806, almost certainly in Ireland, and came to Canada in 1835, working first as a teacher at the grammar school at Cobourg, and then as editor of the *Cobourg Star* from 1840 to 1845.³⁴ He would thus have known the Calcutts well and been aware of their history. Subsequently he was employed by the Ontario government as a statistician, including as Secretary of the Registry and Statistics Office. an appointment that looks to have been arranged under the patronage of the Canadian Conservative politician William Cayley, before Crofton was sacked in 1859 when Caley was replaced as Minister of Finance.

Crofton, who died in June 1870, was described by one of his bosses in the civil service as 'utterly useless – utterly incompetent and worse than incompetent'.³⁵ He was on the extreme right, politically, and a supporter of the Orange Order, which was a powerful political force in Canadian politics. *The Orange Pole* even more than the *Cobourg Star* obituary, was Orange propaganda, designed to show Catholics in a terrible light. Did Calcutt write the *Star* obituary as well as *The Orange Pole*? Given his links with the *Star* as its former editor, this looks more than likely. But given the ultra-conservative stance of the *Star* anyway, whether Crofton wrote the obituary or not does not ultimately matter. Certainly, the distortions in the newspaper's account of the events of the taking down of the Orange Pole make it untrustworthy on other aspects of the story, such as the alleged attacks on Calcutt and his hounding from Ireland.

Was James Dempsey the ‘Cassidy’ of the *Star’s* and Crofton’s narratives, the man who led the White Feet in a campaign to force James Calcutt out of Ireland? Indeed, was James Calcutt even forced out of Ireland, or did he quit brewing in Mountmellick for other reasons, perhaps because, once the Orange Pole had fallen and the boycotts against Kenny and Pim were over, there was too much competition in the town? (The Pims’s brewery continued to thrive for another 40 or so years.) There is no evidence at all in Irish or British newspapers, in the period following the Orange Pole disturbances or when the Calcutts left for Canada, or from Parliamentary inquiries into the situation in Mountmellick, of any campaign against Calcutt. Several newspapers reported his departure for Canada on board the *Duncan Gibb* with all the equipment to fit out a brewery: none says anything about his being forced to leave. Equally significantly, no Irish newspaper seems to have reported Dempsey’s body being found on the beach at Cobourg.

By January 1835 Calcutt was ready to sell the products of the distillery ‘on the Irish and Scotch plan’ that had been erected at the brewery: "Pure Copper Distilled Malt Whiskey of superior strength and flavor", alongside ‘Superior Pale Ale for Bottling [sic] and Draught Ale’.³⁶ James Calcutt was a witness in a court case in 1842 in which he revealed that he had sold "a great deal" of whiskey at 1s 6d a gallon via an agent in Kingston, 85 miles to the east, in 1840.

James Calcutt was listed as a brewer on King Street, just north of Hibernia Street, Cobourg in 1851,³⁷ and he was still listed as a brewer on King Street in 1857, while his second son William (full name William Shannon Kingsley Calcutt) was given as ‘W.K. Calcutt & Co., brewers, Seminary Street,’ doubtless in the property on Seminary Street (today University Avenue) that the Calcutts acquired early in the 1850s.³⁸ William may have been brewing in his own right even earlier; in January 1852 it was reported that ‘W.S.K. Calcutt of Cobourg advertises a “Temperance Ale,” and offers a reward of £5 to anyone who will get drunk on it’.³⁹

Whether the Calcutts brewed simultaneously at the original Hibernia Street site and in Seminary Street for a while is unclear, but at some point Seminary Street became their only brewing site. A few years before James Calcutt senior died in May 1869, he had handed over the running of the brewery to his fourth son, Kingsley, who advertised in 1865 that he was producing at the brewery on Seminary Street X, XX and XXX ale and beer in casks, XX and XXX in quart bottles, ‘Pic-Nic Ale’ domestic whiskey in casks, ‘Imperial Ginger Pop’ – and also ‘Dunkin’s Ale ... warranted a strictly Temperance Drink. If it can be proved to the contrary he

will forfeit the sum of \$1,000’.⁴⁰ This was named for the British-born Canadian politician Christopher Dunkin, who had introduced a temperance bill in 1864 that became known as the Dunkin Act. Kingsley was listed in the County of Northumberland directory compiled in 1869 as ‘proprietor, brewery, Seminary [street]’ (James Calcutt senior is listed as ‘gent’, living on Green Street.)⁴¹

In 1879 the brewery ‘lately occupied by Kingsley Calcutt’ in Cobourg was advertised in newspapers in Buffalo, New York, 80 miles away, ‘to lager beer brewers’ for sale or rent. Potential buyers were told:

The consumption of lager beer (at present imported from the United States) is largely on the increase and there is no brewery of the kind in Canada nearer than 70 miles on the west and over 100 miles on the east ... The new protective tariff about coming in force will confer great advantage upon Canadian manufacturers.⁴²

However, it appears there were no takers, and the brewery disappears.

It looks as if the Calcutts’ original brewery site on Hibernia Street/Orr Street was acquired by Henry Mackechnie around 1862, who renamed it the Victoria Brewery.⁴³ The business was listed in 1866 as ‘Innes & McKechnie’.⁴⁴ Mackechnie was born in Balgavies, Forfarshire, north-east Scotland in 1824, and arrived in New York in 1845, aged 21. By 1852 he was living in Northumberland County. In 1869 Henry ‘McKechnie’ was listed as a brewer in Hibernia Street, while his older brother Charles was evidently living with him and working as a clerk, presumably in the brewery. Henry Mackechnie was still at the Victoria brewery, the address now given as Orr Street, in 1886.⁴⁵

Some time after, the brewery passed into the hands of Owen Healey, who had run a dairy business in Cobourg, and a partner named Bickle. The two were brewing an XXX stout with an abv of 8.27% in 1898. Early in January 1899 the brewery caught fire and was totally destroyed, at a loss of \$20,000, of which only \$7,000 was covered by insurance.⁴⁶ Only a year earlier, two men, George and Alfred Nicholson, had been put on trial for an arson attack on the brewery.⁴⁷ Bickle and Healey evidently decided the loss was too great, and the brewery never reopened.⁴⁸

James Calcutt’s eldest son, the sixth James, born in Mountmellick in 1821 moved to Port Hope, six miles west of Cobourg (and then in the county of Durham East), where he had a son (the seventh James) born in 1868.⁴⁹ James VI also opened a brewery, and is listed as one of three brewers in Durham East county in 1875-7.⁵⁰ He was still brewing on Mill Street in Port Hope in 1886.⁵¹

James senior's youngest son Henry, born in 1837, moved in 1855 to Ashburnham, 25 miles north of Cobourg, opposite the larger settlement of Peterborough, where he began leasing the brewery started by Arthur Henry Peck around 1850 at Rogers Cove on Little Lake in what was then called Scotch village. (Peck is given as 'Arthur Peck [sic], Brewer' in a directory of 1851.)⁵² Henry is listed in 1857 as a brewer at 'Peterborough East'.⁵³ However, in 1863 the brewery burned down, and Henry built a new brewery on Burnham Street, by the Otonabee River.⁵⁴ (Peck looks to have started brewing again in his own right: A.H. Peck is listed as a brewer in Peterborough East, along with Henry Calcutt, in 1876-7).⁵⁵

About 1871 Henry branched into the steamboat business, founding the Calcutt Navigation Company. Ten years later, for reasons unknown, Henry Calcutt began leasing a brewery almost a thousand miles from Peterborough, at Silver Heights, five miles outside Winnipeg in Manitoba, changing its name from the Assiniboine Brewery (named for the local river) to the Silver Heights Brewery.⁵⁶ The brewery had been making ale since at least the spring of 1875 under its manager, Robert Strang,⁵⁷ but it had come up for lease in January 1881.⁵⁸ In August 1881 Calcutt was advertising ale and porter for sale at the Silver Heights brewery, in barrels and bottles, and also fresh yeast, grain for cows and pigs, and '1,000 barrels of picked Ontario potatoes'.⁵⁹

The Silver Heights brewery was brewing 400 barrels of porter and 400 barrels of ale a week by the beginning of 1883, as well as 60 barrels a week of cider.⁶⁰ Henry Calcutt had already started building a new brewery in nearby St. Boniface in January 1883 to brew ale, lager and porter, and when the Silver Heights brewery burned down in 1883, and Henry Calcutt moved operations to St. Boniface, where he ran the South End brewery from 1884 to 1887, until that operation closed.⁶¹

Meanwhile in Peterborough, Ontario in 1887, Calcutt was advertising ale and porter in barrels and bottles.⁶² Ten years later, the brewery added Trent Valley Lager to its range, after hiring a German brewmaster. Henry Calcutt died in June 1913, and the brewery continued under the control of three of his daughters.⁶³ As late as 1915 the brewery was still making Dublin Porter, as well as Champagne Ale and Trent Valley Lager.⁶⁴ However, in December 1916, it closed down 'owing to the effect of the [Ontario] Temperance Act'.⁶⁵

References

1. McLeod, A. and St. John, J. (2014) *Ontario Beer*. Charleston, SC: History Press, p.42.
2. National Archives of Ireland, ref CSO/RP/SC/1825/319.
3. *Leinster Independent*, Dublin, Ireland, Saturday 11 November 1871, p.6.
4. *The Morning Register*, Dublin, Ireland, Wednesday 14 June 1826, p.4.
5. NAI CSO/RP/OR/1826/185
6. *The Dublin Evening Post*, Ireland, Thursday 3 August 1826, p.1.
7. Leet, A. (1814) *A Directory to the Market Towns, Villages, Gentlemen's Seats and Other Noted Places in Ireland*. Dublin: Breet Smith, 2nd edition, p.122.
8. Reid, W.D. (1980) *Death Notices of Ontario*. Lambertville, NJ: Hunterdon House, p.155.
9. Mason, W.S. (18919) *A Statistical Account, Or Parochial Survey of Ireland, Vol III*. Dublin: Faulker Press, p.327.
10. Hamond, F. (2005) *Mills of County Laois: An Industrial Heritage Survey, Part 2*. Laois, Ireland: Laois County Council, LAIAR-008-0-14.
11. *Pigot & Co.'s Provincial Directory of Ireland*. Manchester, England, (1824) p.172.
12. Accounts and Papers relating to Corn, Grain, Wheat &c, Vol XVIII, House of Commons. London, England, (1828) p.450.
13. *The Dublin Evening Post*, Ireland, Saturday 26 April 1828, p.2.
14. O'Hart, J. (1894) *Irish pedigrees; or, The origin and stem of the Irish nation, 5th ed., Vol II*. Dublin: J. Duffy and Co., p.64.
15. Maria's age was given as 29 in the 1861 Canadian census (Sub-district Bayham, district Elgin, province Canada West (Ontario), p.6, line 9, roll C-1018-101), which took place on January 13, implying a birth between 14 January 1830 and 12 January 1831.
16. *Perry's Bankrupt & Insolvency Weekly Gazette*. London, England, Saturday 26 May 1832, p.5.
17. *The Evening Packet and Correspondent*. Ireland, Saturday 26 May 1832, p.2.
18. *The Cobourg Sentinel*. Cobourg, Ontario, Canada, 22 May 1869, pp.3-4.
19. *The Cobourg Star*. Cobourg, Ontario, Canada, Wednesday 1 August 1832.
20. Milne, C. (2011) 'What's Brewing at the Barracks?', *Cobourg and District Historical Society Historical Review*. Cobourg, Ontario, Canada, March, p.45.
21. Report from the Select Committee on the State of Ireland. House of Commons, London, England, 1832, p.146.
22. Dunne, T. (2020) 'The Whitefeet: Social Conflict in Kilkenny and Laois Before the Famine,' *The Irish Story*. Wednesday 23 December, accessed at bit.ly/whitefeet
23. *The Kerry Evening Post*. Tralee, Kerry, Wednesday 28 March 1832, p.4.
24. *Kilkenny Journal, and Leinster Commercial and Political Advertiser*. Kilkenny, Ireland, Saturday 4 August 1832, p.3.

25. *Cobourg Star*. Cobourg, Ontario, Canada, reprinted in the *Montreal Gazette*, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, 1 November 1832, p.2.
26. *Cobourg Star*. 14 November 1832.
27. *Cobourg Star*. Wednesday 16 June 1869.
28. *Freeman's Journal*. Dublin, Ireland, Friday 20 October 1826, p.4.
29. Curtis, B. (1993) 'Comment dénombrer les serviteurs de l'État au Canada-Uni. Essai méthodologique' ('How to Count Servants of the State in United Canada: A Methodological Trial'), *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*. Vol. 46, No. 4, Spring.
30. 'Erinensis' (Walter Cavendish Crofton) (1871) *The Orange Pole and the Papist White Boy: A Wonderful Retribution*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada, title page.
31. *ibid.*, p.17.
32. *ibid.*, p.21.
33. *ibid.*, pp.28-31.
34. Hodgins, J.G. (1894) *Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada, Vol. II*. Toronto, Ontario: Warwick Bros. & Rutter, p.283.
35. Curtis, B. (1993) *op. cit.*
36. *Niagara Gleaner*. Niagara, Ontario, Canada, Saturday 9 May 1835, p.8.
37. Mackay, R.W.S. (1851) *The Canada Directory*. Montreal, Quebec, p.65.
38. Anonymous (1857) *The Canada Directory for 1857-58*. Montreal, Quebec, Canada, p.104.
39. *The Ottawa Citizen*. Ottawa, Saturday 31 January 1852, p.3.
40. Sutherland, J.R. (1865-6) *Gazetteer and Business Directory of the United Counties of Northumberland and Durham*. Woodstock, Ontario, Canada.
41. Connor, J.C. (1869) *J.C. Connor's County of Northumberland Directory for 1870-71*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada, p.163.
42. *Buffalo Courier*. Buffalo, New York, Saturday 5 April 1879, p.4.
43. Sneath, A.W. (2001) *Brewed in Canada*. Toronto, Ontario: Dundurn Press, p.347, claims that James Calcutt ran into financial problems and sold his brewery to Charles Mackechnie in 1865. This is not backed up by the evidence.
44. Anonymous (1866) *The Mercantile Agency Reference Book for the British Provinces, Vol III*. Montreal, Quebec, Canada, p.91.
45. Anonymous (1886) *Ontario Gazetteer and Business Directory 1886-7*. Toronto, Ontario, p.1,309,
46. *The Evening Record*. Windsor, Ontario, Canada, Friday 6 January 1899, p.5.
47. *ibid.*, Saturday 20 August 1898, p.5.
48. Sneath, A.W. (2001) *op. cit.*
49. O'Hart, J. (1892) *op. cit.*, p.531.
50. *Fourth Session of the Third Parliament of the Province of Ontario, Vol XI Part IV*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 1879, p.90.
51. *Ontario Gazetteer and Business Directory 1886-7*. p.818..
52. Mackay, R.W.S. (1851) *op. cit.*, p.273.
53. Anonymous (1857) *op. cit.*, p.510.
54. Copperthwaite, G. (2008) 'The Calcutt Brewing and Malting Company,' *Heritage Gazette of the Trent Valley*. Peterborough, Ontario, Canada, Vol. 13, No. 3, November, p.32.
55. Ontario Sessional Papers, 1879, No.10-30. pp.94-5.
56. *ibid.*
57. *Manitoba Daily Free Press*. Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, Tuesday 20 April 1875, p.2.
58. *ibid.*, Thursday 20 January 1881, p.4.
59. *ibid.*, Monday 22 August 1881, p.3.
60. *Winnipeg Daily Sun*. Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, Friday 26 January 1883, p.3.
61. Copperthwaite, G. (2008) *op. cit.*
62. *Peterborough County Business Directory*. Peterborough, Ontario, Canada, 1887, p.vii.
63. Copperthwaite, G. (2008) *op. cit.*
64. *ibid.*, p.33.
65. *The Ottawa Citizen*. Friday 29 December 1916, p.11.