STR/1A/131 Memorandum of John Ross Mahon, land agent, outlining and justifying his management of the Strokestown Estate. 7 Nov 1847

[Memorandum] of the Management of the Strokestown Estate since I became Major Mahon’s Agent on 20th of November 1846.

Having walked over different parts of the property, I made a Report of the circumstances of the tenantry, and of the immense population on it, and informed Major Mahon what measures I thought ought to be adopted to bring the estate into order. Emigration on an extensive scale was the principal feature of my plan – as while the large [and] completely pauperized population which was on the estate remained, rent could not be collected, nor could any system for the amelioration of the condition of the people be introduced. In spring last, Major Mahon supplied me with Funds, and I arranged to give the tenantry of certain townlands a free passage to America, with ample rations, in addition to the Government regulation.

The emigrants were allowed to dispose of all their effects, and were forgiven all rent and arrears. Any persons who could not conveniently dispose of their stock, I bought from, and gave them the money. I think I can safely say, three years rent was due by all, more by some. They expressed themselves much obliged, and went cheerfully.

Knowing the combination which existed against the payment of rent, I drew out lists of persons on several townlands, dividing them into three classes.

From the richest I demanded only one years rent – from the second class only half a year, [and] from the third nothing. I promised them that I would not press for the remainder, but would give time.

With one or two exceptions no advantage was taken of my offer. At this time I had Haberes in my possession, which I shewed the tenants, and told them I could call on the Sheriff to give me possession any day I wished - and that I could not pursue any other course, if they did not shew some disposition to pay – but my remonstrances had no effect until the Sheriff came when some persons paid rent for two years and a half, to May 1846, which was all I demanded, some did not offer me rent until I was actually on the land, when they tendered their rents, which I refused stating that I could not retain persons as tenants who acted so [very] improperly, refusing to pay although they had the means, which they must have had, as the Haberes were executed before the crops were cut. Notwithstanding these persons were allowed to remove their crops, upon paying a years rent of the land actually under tillage. I may now mention that one man who did not pay me till the Sheriff arrived to deliver possession handed me two years and half rent of his holding, and afterwards paid me the rent of his neighbours holding for the same period. His neighbour had plenty of means, but had not ready money. He has since paid me of his own accord half a years rent.

In no case has there been any undue severity used in taking possession, and no fever patients were removed from their houses which are still standing, although the inhabitants promised to remove, [and] take their houses down as soon as the sick people recovered, [and] said they were much obliged [and] grateful – in scarcely a single instance have they done so, and then only because they expected a small pecuniary recompense which they got. During the past year the receipts have not amounted to half a years rent of the estate.

In no case has any person been ejected, and deprived of his crop, although the crop became Major Mahon’s on the execution of the Habere, and as I have already stated the tenants were greatly in arrear. In one instance upon a townland where great opposition was given to the Sheriff, and although protected by a strong Police Force he was obliged to retire, and call out the Military to his

assistance, I determined upon drawing on the crop, and Major Mahon applied for the protection of the Police which the Lord Lieutenant immediately granted, but in order if possible to carry on matters quietly and to shew the people how anxious Major Mahon was to deal leniently, I gave them the price of the seed and also the value of their labor, and paid them liberally for cutting and drawing home the crop. Many of the persons so treated expressed their sense of Major Mahon’s kindness in [very] strong terms – all seemed satisfied. The full value of the crop was given.

The funds Major Mahon supplied me with were not derived from his rents – nor had he asked me for any portion of the rents I received, for his own use. His intention was to lay out all money received, beyond what was required for the payment of the usual outgoings of the estate, upon its improvement, until it was brought into proper order – besides which he intended to raise from £5,000 to £6,000 under the Act of Parliament to facilitate the improvement of Landed property in Ireland, and had instructed me to take the necessary steps for doing so.

Nothing further occurs to me respecting the management of Major Mahon’s property since I became his agent, but previously to my doing so he made himself responsible to the next of kin of the late Lord Hartland for a sum of I believe £13,000 in order to prevent his tenants being harassed by law proceedings for the recovery of this £13,000, arrears of rent due by them. Major Mahon intended to take it from them in the usual course of the payment of the rent of the estate, but they openly declared they never would pay any portion of it, and it was then the combination commenced against the payment of rent which has continued ever since, and is now as strong as ever.

I must remark that this was previous to the Potatoe failure [and] therefore it cannot be attributed to it.