

## **The Killings at Coolacrease Complaint of P. Heaney:**

During my on-camera interview lasting about an hour, I explained (over 10 minutes or so) that people connected to the local IRA did not benefit from the Land Commission allocation of portions of Coolacrease after the Pearson land was sold.

I have for many years been active as a local historian and am widely known as such. Whenever I am asked about what became of the Pearson farm at Coolacrease I always, on each and every occasion that it is required, give the following account:

*"The allocation of farms was done by Mr William Blackhall of the Land Commission, in consultation with Kinnitty parish priest Fr Holohan, who had earlier been challenged at gunpoint by the IRA, and had always been fiercely anti-republican. The first three people to acquire farms were ex-British soldiers, and the other recipients were unconnected to the IRA. Almost all these people failed in business because the re-payments to the Land Commission were inordinately large, making these farms uneconomic. I now know that the reason for this was because the Pearsons extorted from the Land Commission a price of £4817 in 1923 for a farm which cost them £2000 in 1911, and agriculture went into steep economic decline at this time. This purchase price had to be recovered from the new landholders in annuity payments. Most of these landholders failed as a result, and the farms went back to the Land Commission. Only at this point, did each of two or three people connected to the IRA obtain a farm, when the previous holders had given up the struggle. So no members of the IRA benefited from the division of the Pearsons' farm when it was divided by the Land Commission."*

I had explained all this many times to the Director Niamh Sammon in our many discussions prior to interview as I showed her the terrain and explained the history; just as I do with the many other callers and visitors to Cadamstown, and in public lectures and talks. So Ms Sammon knew my position very well before the interview. In my interview I was put in a gruellingly disadvantaged position, and taken utterly by surprise by the hostile tone of the interviewing, which was completely the reverse of her attitude throughout our previous acquaintance. Needless to say I was forced into a defensive and challenged tone of response.

The only part of my explanation which appeared in the broadcast version of the documentary was the following:

**"When the land was divided by the Irish Land commission, I think two, maybe three whose people were involved in the IRA received parcels of land there."**

This corresponds to the second last sentence in my explanation above.

These words taken out of context were the only actual evidence given in the documentary that the Pearson executions were in furtherance of a land-grab by the IRA, the interpretation which has been widely understood to be the message and effect of the documentary.

**My Complaint is that my contribution to the documentary was deliberately misrepresented and given the opposite meaning.**

The snippet of my interview that was broadcast reflected my opinion inaccurately. It conveyed the impression that my opinion as a historian was the opposite of what it actually was, and remains, on the question of whether the execution of the Pearsons was motivated by a plan for a land-grab.

By depicting me as a supporter of the land-grab theory the programme harmed my reputation. The programme made it appear that I had given way under pressure to the logic of that groundless and malicious theory. It made it appear that I had abandoned my well known, long time commitment to defending the historical record on that point. The truth is I am as committed now as I have ever been to dispelling falsehoods about how the War of Independence was conducted by the IRA. One of the most blatant of those falsehoods is that members of the Offaly Company conspired to get their hands on parcels of land owned by the Pearsons by somehow instigating and orchestrating the court martial. There is simply no truth whatever to that theory.

That some parcels of the Pearsons' farm were eventually obtained by local families with IRA connections was the result of the unusual and unexpected failure of most of the landholders who directly succeeded the Pearsons, to run their holdings economically. Their collective failure was due to the high annuity payments and the agricultural recession of that time. For the land-grab theory to hold up it would be necessary to show that the IRA somehow orchestrated all these events.

**The programme misrepresented me by taking a statement of mine out of its context in order to give the false impression that the land went straight to the families with Republican connections once the Pearsons left.**