

LORD LUCAN may or may not be dead, but either way he has now eluded the sleuths from Scotland Yard for four years.

Yet he continues to extract rents from his Irish tenants to pay his gambling debts....

The bizarre Lucan saga began the night his children's nanny was found battered to death in London. An inquest jury declared the 44-year-old seventh Earl responsible, and the police have been hunting him ever since.

His tenants in Castlebar, Co. Mayo, also became anxious to meet him. For without his signature, they could not sell their houses which stand on freehold land owned by Lucan, yielding him £10,000 a year in ground rents.

The first Earl of Lucan was given extensive estates in Ireland for his services to the British Crown 400 years ago. The "service" was in subjugating the Irish, depriving them of their lands and living off their labours ever since.

By the 1870s the Lucan estates totalled 63,000 acres.

THE IRISH fought hard for their independence. They finally secured it, but made the curious decision to compensate the English landlords who gave up their land!

The Irish Government claims that the constitutional rights of private property forbid the abolition of existing rents.¹

The Lucans did not relinquish all of their holdings, which is why the present Earl – according to British bankruptcy law, he is officially alive – continued to hold sway over the leases at Castlebar.

Tenants of 1,200 houses were unable to dispose of their property, for Lucan's signature was required on legal documents.

Meanwhile, the trustees have continued to receive the ground rents, and have paid out £60,000 to creditors on the assumption that the Earl is alive.

How a land lord's ghost still haunts his Irish tenants

The tenants were not amused by the idea that they were paying rent to a man who could not be found, dead or alive....

A councillor, Richard Morrin, urged residents to stop paying the rent.² "In many cases this money is coming from very poor people," he declared.

"Lord Lucan and his family have got enough money from the people of the town down the years and it has been more than enough to keep them in comfort."

But worse than the rental payments was the legal barrier faced by tenants who wanted to sell their houses for redevelopment. For once developers discovered the legal complications, they withdrew.

Which is why Morrin returned to the attack last year, declaring that Lucan's trustees ought to apply for legal power to sign away ground rents.

"We feel that after years of bleeding us dry, the least they could do is give us back our property," declared Morrin.³

Or, as the Republican MP for Castlebar, Padraig Lynn, put it: "... it was the people of this town who kept him in gambling money." Threateningly, Flynn issued Lucan – who has been reported as being sighted in South America and Australia – with this challenge:

"If Lord Lucan presents himself in person to

collect the money owing to him as a landlord, we will deal with him in the way any English absentee landlord should be dealt with."

He would not reveal precisely what he meant by that.

FINALLY, last November, the Dublin Government changed the law.

The Landlord and Tenant (Ground Rents) Act made it possible for tenants to buy out ground rents in circumstances where the consent could not be secured from a missing landlord.

The U.S. courts are currently trying to decide if the Earl is dead, for he has been left \$15,000 in the will of his godmother, wealthy philanthropist Marcia Brady Tucker.

According to American law, such a legacy is null and void if the beneficiary is dead. Lucan's solicitors argue that their client is alive, and that the money should be handed over.

But if he is dead, according to U.S. law, Lucan's ghost will have the last laugh: for even from the grave, the Lucan family continues to torture the value of the land out of the Irish....

1. *The Guardian*, 26.5.77.
2. *Daily Mirror*, 29.11.76.
3. *Sunday Times*, 3.9.78.

