

Hayden, John Patrick

by Paul Rouse

Hayden, John Patrick (1863–1954), nationalist MP, newspaper proprietor, and editor, was born 25 April 1863 in Roscommon, son of Luke Hayden. After attending a local school he went to work for his brother Luke P. Hayden, proprietor and editor of the *Roscommon Messenger*. In September 1882 he founded the *Westmeath Examiner* in Mullingar, which he edited for the remainder of his life. A passionate follower of Charles Stewart Parnell (qv), his newspaper was avowedly nationalist in outlook. In 1894 the *Examiner* was condemned as 'sinful' by the bishop of Meath. Appeals to Cardinal Michael Logue (qv) and to Propaganda in Rome on the issue were rejected, and a decision was read from diocesan pulpits. Hayden believed that his earlier opposition to a water scheme proposed for Mullingar had aroused the hostility of the bishop, who was merely using the *Examiner's* policy on land to refight previous battles. An early member of Associated Irish Newspapers, Hayden was a life member of the Guild of Irish Journalists and used his premises to print books, including poetry by John Betjeman. He edited the newspaper for more than seven decades and was often termed 'the grand old man of Irish journalism'. His offices were retained much as they had been from the beginning as he worked behind a huge black, high-sided typewriter with his extensive beard falling on to the keys.

He also enjoyed an eventful political career. On the death of his brother (1897), he was elected nationalist MP for Roscommon South and served until 1918. In the aftermath of the 1903 land purchase act he worked effectively for the small farmers of his constituency, supported land reform, and was a member of the Irish board of agriculture. His political beliefs, although constitutional-nationalist, brought him into conflict with the authorities and he was arrested and imprisoned on several occasions in Westmeath in the mid 1880s. A close friend and confidant of John Redmond (qv), he was consulted on his speech to the house of commons when he declared his support for Britain at the outbreak of the first world war.

A genial man who was well liked in his town, he was an early benefactor of the Meath Historical and Archaeological Society, as well as an active supporter of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. He died 3 July 1954, after being taken ill at his typewriter, and was buried at Ballyglass cemetery after mass at Mullingar cathedral. He married (1912) Henrietta Hill of Green Island, Co. Antrim; they had one son, who retained a shareholding in the paper after his father's death.

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*Freeman's Journal*, 29 Sept. 1879; *Thom IWW*; *Ir. Times*, 5 July 1954; *Westmeath Examiner*, 10, 17, 24 July 1954; *WWW*; *Studia Hib.*, xxii–xxiii (1982–3); Hugh Oram, *The newspaper book* (1983); Marie-Louise Legg, *Newspapers and nationalism: the Irish provincial press 1850–1892* (1999)

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