

Feargus O'Connor and Louisa Nisbett

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Published by Catherine Howe 2016
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A pamphlet of this text is available
designed and printed by Aspect Design
89 Newtown Road, Malvern, Worcs. WR14 1PD
United Kingdom
Tel: 01684 561567
E-mail: allan@aspect-design.net
Website: www.aspect-design.net

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ISBN 978-1-912078-00-4

FEARGUS O'CONNOR AND LOUISA NISBETT

The relationship between Feargus O'Connor, Chartist leader, and Louisa Nisbett, actress is a point of interest to Chartist historians but not one which has been researched until now. There is mention of Louisa in Read and Glasgow's *Feargus O'Connor, Irishman and Chartist*, and in Paul Pickering's *Feargus O'Connor, A political life*, but the relationship between Feargus and Louisa is worth a closer look.¹ In his lifetime (1796-1855)² Feargus O'Connor was described as a demagogue, the 'Great I Am' of politics, a liar; balanced on the other hand by his self-advertisement. The trouble with detractors is that their judgments are ungenerous and the trouble with self-advertisers is that no-one ever quite believes what they say. What is generally agreed about Feargus O'Connor is that he was a blue-eyed, red-haired, 'big, burly, brawny, round-shouldered,' quick witted man.³ His dress could be interesting. He was bold. He was passionate, quick feeling, incensed by injustice, horrified by cruelty. He inspired extreme reactions to himself. This is the man Louisa Nisbett would have met and come to know before his Chartist days. He also was a man who courted fame. He nurtured celebrity then expended it on an objective which drove him from his early boyhood right through until his mind was gone and his final days were spent on a bed in an upstairs room of a house on Albert Terrace, Notting Hill. That objective was an Ireland free from the 1801 Act of Union and political advancement for the working people of Britain.

Feargus felt that he had an affinity with his uncle Arthur, United Irishman and participant in the Irish rising of May 1798. Edmund Burke thought Arthur had a mind, 'of great energy, and was capable of much good or of much evil.'⁴ As a boy Feargus was told the story of violent British soldiers entering the family home in County Cork in the 1790s, and stories of horrific military brutalities against his less well-placed neighbours. 'They sacked men's houses,' he later wrote, 'ravished their wives and daughters, and hung their husbands and brothers at their own doors if they dared to complain.'⁵ As a young man he would see the decline of Irish society under direct British rule, repeated famines and systemic social iniquities. It was all to be put right and if no-one else would do it then Feargus O'Connor would.

Feargus's mother died when he was twelve years old. His father Roger O'Connor's life was so fractured by imprisonment, exile, adventures, widowerhood and his own

eccentricities that his children had little security. When very young something was so seriously wrong that Feargus ran away from home, under the wing of his older brother Francis, to London. No comfort was to be found there. Francis's godfather, Sir Francis Burdett, returned them home to Dangan Castle in County Meath. Feargus's relationship with his father was not a happy one and, if he is to be believed, he was especially picked out for his father's cruellest treatment.⁶ Yet no set-back or heartache would suppress the youthful Feargus O'Connor. 'I am the most agreeable man I ever met, when I am dressed for it,' he said at the time. He could, and whenever possible did, make others laugh. The whole O'Connor family was 'comically conscious – at least some of them – of their entertaining qualities', said one who knew them all.⁷

Feargus O'Connor described himself as, 'a very wild devil.'⁸ On a sexual level women would assuredly have been susceptible to his celebrity, charisma and good-humour, both before his fame as a Chartist leader and during it. It has been suggested by historians of Chartism that through the years appreciable O'Connor progeny was scattered throughout Britain, and perhaps that was so. He never married although as a very young man he had wanted to – to his school master's daughter at Portarlinton, County Laois, Ireland. Eliza Willis was probably her name and Feargus travelled far distances to meet her in the garden house in the night-time hours. Roger O'Connor broke the connection between them through threats of disinheritance and disavowal on social grounds – a young man of Feargus O'Connor's social standing did not marry his school master's daughter. There really was very little felicity in Feargus O'Connor's early life.

Louisa Nisbett (née Macnamara) also had a busy and interesting childhood but unlike Feargus O'Connor there was much felicitous affection and judicious friendship available to her. The eldest of six, she was nurtured by loving and encouraging parents and grandparents and, very much like Feargus, she was wilful; it proved 'useless to send her to school.'⁹ Instead she toured the provincial theatres in her very early years with her actor father, Frederick Macnamara, before making her London début at Drury Lane in 1829 when she was sixteen. By the time she met Feargus she had already married and lost in a riding accident a young husband, John Alexander Nisbett, son of Sir John Nisbett.

Louisa Nisbett was more than a fit match for Feargus O'Connor. She was tall. She was beautiful. She was one of the most successful actresses of her time and beloved of

her colleagues – all accounts claim her to be a lovely woman. ‘There was Nisbett as Rosalind!’ exclaimed Samuel Phelps, actor and manager of Sadlers Wells theatre. ‘Having not seen her, ye don’t know what beauty is. Her voice was liquid music – her laugh – there never was such a laugh, her eyes living crystals – lamps lit with light divine. Her gorgeous neck and shoulders, her superbly symmetrical limbs, her grace, her taste, her nameless but irresistible charm . . . Aye, aye; ye may rave about Helen Faucit’s Rosalind, but ye never saw the Nisbett.’¹⁰ Beautiful and much more. Louisa Nisbett, according to William Macready, London’s greatest actor-manager of the mid-1800s, was one of the warmest-hearted women he had ever known. Yet she was no-one’s fool: ‘I have but to obey, but I *shan’t*, unless I like,” she wrote in response to a professional request.¹¹ These two actor-managers, Samuel Phelps and William Charles Macready, were famously irascible and exacting, yet they did greatly admire and respect Louisa Nisbett. Another said of her, tellingly, that as Lady Teazle: ‘she is the lady playing the maid when, generally, we see the maid playing the lady.’¹² And surviving portraiture proves without doubt her physical beauty. The painting by James Godsell Middleton of her as James Sheridan Knowles’ Constance, a part she played in 1837, says it all.

Louisa was sixteen years younger than Feergus. On first meeting he was thirty-eight, she twenty-two. If a report in *The Belfast News-Letter* is to be taken at face value, they first met early in the summer of 1834 when sharing the same boarding house on Craven Street by Charing Cross. The date is useful but Louisa would not have been living in a boarding house at this time for she was then, as later, the head of her immediate family, so this can be read as a reference to their ‘meeting place.’¹³ At this time Feergus was sitting on the same St John’s Hospital charity committee as Louisa’s sister-in-law’s husband, Count Motara, but as relations between Louisa and her deceased husband’s family were strained she and Feergus might more likely have first met in the greenroom of the Theatre Royal Haymarket where Louisa was playing, or in the greenroom of Madame Vestris’s Olympic Theatre which stood at the junction of Drury Lane and Wych Street. The worlds of theatre and politics were close then as now. Lucy Vestris was a friend and once lover of Thomas Slingsby Duncombe, Radical Member of Parliament for Finsbury and a regular greenroom visitor. Duncombe and O’Connor were to become friends and close colleagues, and Louisa Nisbett stood in for Madame Vestris at the Olympic when ‘The Vestris’ and her husband toured America in 1838. It was on the second row of the dress circle at Madame’s Lyceum theatre, nineteen years after their first meeting, that Feergus O’Connor’s tragedy was to unfold, where, as the overture

struck up, he began to imitate the instruments, jiggling up and down, waving his arms like a violin player then boo-booing like a drum and refusing to quieten.

But in the autumn of 1834 all was well. Feargus had occupied his parliamentary seat as member for Cork County for nearly two years where he had spent his time as he had intended: trying to improve the situation in his native land. 'Rather than see my country oppressed I would expose myself to pistols, guns, bayonets or blunderbusses,' he had said in his maiden speech. And more discreetly a year later: 'Ireland free, [is] the right arm of England, but Ireland bound to her, [is] as though heavy chains were on both.'¹⁴ Later he said how he then had, 'hated, abhorred, and detested the very name of England and everything English.'¹⁵ Louisa Nisbett had more than a drop of Irish blood in her. Her father was a County Clare Macnamara, an actor who had worked under the name of Mordaunt. However, by 1834 it appears that her father Frederick Hayes Macnamara had died and the immediate family members remaining to Louisa were her mother Jane, her three younger brothers Frederick, James and another untraced (possibly Henry), also her two younger sisters, Anne, rarely mentioned in records and who is said to have married the son of 'a Scotch lord of session,'¹⁶ and Jane, still a young girl in 1834. Her maternal grandmother was a significant presence also. All four Macnamara females were actresses at one time or another. Frederick was a painter and James was to become a lawyer.

In 1834 Feargus was making himself felt in the House of Commons. Louisa was playing at the Theatre Royal Haymarket in company with Ben Webster, Julia Glover and James Anderson while in the Vice Chancellor's Court the settlement of the estate of her dead husband, Captain John Alexander Nisbett of the Life Guards, was being pursued by her sister-in-law, Lady Motara.¹⁷ It will have been known within these circles that she and Feargus were lovers and likely to marry. Feargus very likely appreciated Louisa's large and fully-functioning family. From the start he was involved in the comings-and-goings of her extended family for on 19th October 1834 he arrived at Birmingham expecting to stay with her uncle and aunt, Thomas and Mrs Lumby, on The Square. As it turned out, on the morning of that very day, Thomas Lumby was arrested at his office of the Birmingham and Staffordshire Gas-light Company for the felonious transfer of shares in that company. Feargus did all he could to support Thomas Lumby in these first days of his fall and Louisa travelled up from London to comfort her aunt, the theatrical season having just ended.¹⁸

So, according to reports, the ‘very wild devil’ of an Irish bachelor, dashing Member of Parliament who held a fine estate in County Cork was about to marry, and his fiancée’s family was happy about it. What went wrong? Louisa left no memoir or letters which might tell, just one heavily bound novel called *Leonora, A Love Story*. This novel was written in the mid-1840s, so the references within it attach to events which were yet to happen yet it is a useful insight into how she might have viewed her friend and lover Feargus O’Connor. In *Leonora* Louisa extols the classical human virtues in the kind of (good) prose which strongly suggests these matters were of importance to her. Her heroine Leonora reasons with herself into an ambiguous feeling towards the hero, wrestling with her scruples until it becomes neither love nor quite friendship. Her hero: ‘a mere child in heart. He was led away by his fervent and glowing imagination, and by his ardent temperament from the narrow but safe paths in which reason alone would have guided him.’ It is the 16th century Italian poet Torquato Tasso she is imagining but Louisa could just as easily be referring to her lover and friend Feargus O’Connor. At one point Louisa has Tasso argue for holy war. Her heroine is against. ‘Can the end justify the means?’ she asks. ‘No, but they were the only means,’ says Tasso. ‘Then it was sinful in Christians to resolve upon rescuing the Sepulchre if it could be obtained only by unchristian means.’¹⁹

Louisa might have been drawing directly on her knowledge of Feargus and on her own feelings, she might not, but it resonates. She has Tasso say: ‘We must have defenders, while there are aggressors, of our peace.’ This could be Feargus speaking in 1839 for physical force: ‘an army not of offence, but of reserve, which though it might not aggress, would be quick to return an assault . . .’²⁰ In Louisa’s mind Torquato Tasso was a flawed and doomed heroic figure and, in his own way, so was Feargus O’Connor. All his life he defended the under-dog – literally when, as a boy, he was flogged then expelled from Dr Leney’s school near Dublin for exacting revenge for the life of a dog which had been treated cruelly.²¹ He would grow furious at injustice towards those unable to defend themselves. If self-absorbed he was not boringly so; he was ‘the most amusing companion.’²² Ready to speak up for what he believed to be right at the expense of position, and seeming to possess what is now called a strong feminine side (always appealing to women) – he was empathetic. Any man not possessed of great charm and likeable heart would not have won a woman like Louisa Nisbett who, by all accounts, was warm-hearted and level-headed and at whose feet London lay. And being an actress she was perfectly used to semi-megalomaniacal personalities. But in 1834

Feargus was fully occupied with his parliamentary career. He wrote that during the recess he, ‘devoted every hour to procuring petitions upon the subject [of Repeal] as Mr O’Connell declared that he required a vast number before he could go to work.’²³ It is possible also that Louisa felt herself unable to commit to a Radical politician beyond the pale of established politics. Feargus assured an Irish audience that Louisa was a repealer but, beyond the slender indications taken from *Leonora*, this is all that can be said of her political views; the rest must be surmised from her professional and social position.²⁴ She had married a soldier, her mother had married a soldier before he turned actor, her sister Jane was to marry a soldier, and her career, which for its entirety provided for her family, necessitated regular amicable association with every hierarchy of the English ruling elite, civil and military. One thing is certain: her attachment to Feargus may have been settled and widely known in 1834 and early 1835 but they were not destined to make a life together, and when Feargus returned to parliament in 1835 he returned as a bachelor.

And he had been thinking of other things. Irish Catholics were obliged to pay tithes to the Protestant Irish Church: ‘I shall pay no tithes,’ O’Connor said, himself a non-religious Protestant, ‘. . . they shall have my bed before they have my voluntary contribution for the support of a system against which the voice of justice is raised in every clime.’²⁵ Then at Rathcormac men were shot to death by a British army troop for saying the same. Back at London early in 1835 in Westminster Hall where MPs met, the Houses of Parliament having just burned down, he protested that: ‘The only mode for punishing soldiers for misconduct is by bringing them to a court martial,’ for which the House shouted him down.²⁶ So early in 1835 Feargus was out on that farthest limb which he always tended to occupy but on this occasion, as on others, he quickly demurred to the House. Worse was to come, although if Louisa and he ever were to marry they would have been by this time: the loss of his seat in parliament to his relative, Richard Longfield. It was a cruel rejection and it profoundly upset him. It put him even farther beyond the pale. None of this was conducive to a settled domestic life.

There is no readily found record of their relationship between 1835 and 1838. In 1835 Louisa was managing the Queens Theatre on Tottenham Street and Feargus experienced his epiphany at Manchester when he saw England, ‘for the first time with the naked eye . . . the pallied face, the emaciated frame, and the twisted limbs, wending their way to the earthly hell,’ and so found his, ‘field for philanthropy.’²⁷ This

unexpected sight of Manchester's workers making their way to the mills affected him deeply and would be comparable in his mind to the desperate poor of Ireland. Thereafter he was absorbed for the next three years in the formation of Radical Associations and his progress within the ranks of reformers Richard Oastler, Joseph Rayner Stephens, John Fielden, and his continued association with London-based activists which included William Lovett, James Bronterre O'Brien and George Julian Harney. Louisa worked in the Theatres Royal of London and drove her two-horse chariot through the capital's West End streets. This fiery young woman had not married Feargus O'Connor but she had not married anyone else.

Feargus's constant travelling, especially after he lost his seat, may have been another barrier to their marriage. It took him away from Louisa and it gave every incentive to and opportunity for infidelity. He would, in all likelihood, have had many amours while spending so much time in the north. At Leeds, whether due to personal reasons or pure fury at the injustice, he drove himself into the ground defending a pregnant woman called Brigit Cone who had been struck by a policeman then thrown against a shop's window shutters for speaking up for her husband in colourful language. It was a double outrage to O'Connor who thought it victimisation of the Irish and of working people. The magistrates' court fined her for her misdeed so exonerating the policeman; exactly the kind of thing to fire O'Connor into passionate indignation. He took out a warrant for the arrest of the policeman for aggravated assault but lost his case.²⁸ As always, he was fighting for right against the system of might, 'The Thing' as William Cobbett called it.

Then comes evidence in 1838 of a continuing, or renewed, relationship between Feargus and Louisa. Coincidental with the commencement of the Chartist movement, the success of the *Northern Star* newspaper alleviated any financial problems Feargus had had to live with and it propelled his fame into the stratosphere. Louisa had been fully occupied working under Ben Webster at the Haymarket in 1837, then at Drury Lane before returning to the Haymarket that autumn for the great success of her career. On Monday 9th October 1837 Webster's Haymarket staged for the first time Sheridan Knowles' *The Love Chase* and Louisa's Constance received 'thunders of applause'; her acting 'was a triumph throughout – archful, playful, buoyant, and elegant.'²⁹ She was favourably compared with Mrs Jordan. Her position in the English theatre was unassailable after this and she never played in the traditional after-pieces from this performance onwards. She is said to have found this time in her life the most enjoyable. These were heady months for both her and Feargus.

In April 1838 Louisa Nisbett, accompanied by her mother, embarked upon a provincial tour opening on the 23rd at the Theatre Royal, Hawkins Street, Dublin in *The Love Chase*. She played a varied repertory during her two weeks' stay at Dublin which included the M.P. Edward Bulwer's recent great success, *The Lady of Leon*, and she and Jane were courteously entertained there by an aged Macnamara uncle from Cork.³⁰ When, in the second week of May, Louisa arrived at Liverpool to play at the Queens Theatre, Feargus was there. The People's Charter had just been published through the London Working Men's Association. On 19th May she opened at Manchester's Theatre Royal with *The Love Chase* and on 26th May was at Leeds where it appears she stayed for some weeks. Feargus was with her during this time while attending various meetings elsewhere in the northern towns. He did not attend the great Glasgow meeting of 28th May when Thomas Attwood presented the Charter to the people there.

Louisa appears to have remained at Leeds from late May until late June. Perhaps she went to the Hunslet Moor meeting attended by Birmingham's John Collins who arrived straight from Scotland, and where O'Connor established his Great Northern Union. One local working man on that day said how cheering it was, 'to see his native town, for the first time, thus responding to the general call made upon the working classes. Yes, he had no doubt that their strength merely required to be marshalled; their cause was good, and what power could arrest their progress!'³¹ This is the work that Feargus O'Connor was doing, the marshalling of his troops, always with a weather-eye on Ireland.

In late June they travelled to Newcastle from Leeds, Feargus to speak on 28th June (Queen Victoria's coronation day) at the meeting held on the moor outside the town, Louisa to open at the theatre there two days later. By this time it was becoming evident that the Whig government was growing uneasy about the Radical meetings. Soldiers were present. Thereafter Louisa went to Hull before returning to London having been three months away.

It can be safely said that Louisa Nisbett craved the quiet country estate life and as one of the leading actresses of her day she was in a perfect position to achieve it. She had already lived it in 1831 with her young husband, Captain Nisbett, at Brettenham Park in Suffolk, but only until his death seven months after their wedding. Upon her marriage she had left the stage where she so evidently shone. She was not especially ambitious, one trip to Dublin, none to America. And she was not a social climber. Her maternal grandfather, Thomas Williams, was a London city merchant and her paternal grandfather, John Macnamara of County Clare, had lived, 'in a very luxurious and

prodigal manner, keeping almost open house, and boasting of the Irish hospitality,³² but it is safe to say that a quiet, comfortable life away from the stage was what she wanted. By 1838 the wild devil Feargus O'Connor was not then likely, was in fact unable in light of his public life, to embrace a quiet, country estate kind of life although had he done so much suggests that he and Louisa would have retired, perhaps to Fort Robert in County Cork, and been happy together.

Almost immediately upon Louisa's return to London the Chartist movement began to gain momentum. Demonstrations and northern torchlight processions began in earnest. The canny hands-off approach of the Home Secretary, Lord John Russell, to Chartist activity could not hold and meetings which were not sanctioned by the authorities were made illegal. People were arming. Law and order became an issue. Not a very quiet-country-estate scenario. But in the midst of all this Louisa and Feargus are said to be engaged to be married. At least it was so according to a "Memoir of Mrs Nisbett" in *Actors By Daylight* issued on 2nd February 1839.³³ Feargus was unromantically laid up in Leeds with a burst blood vessel at this time. The *Daylight's* reporting was fanciful; there was no marriage although Louisa had, unaccountably, ceased her appearances on the London stage by this time which signals something.

Louisa kept away from the stage for almost the entirety of the National Convention's sitting. This was uncharacteristic behaviour. In previous years she had rarely ceased from appearing at one or other of the provincial or London theatres but in 1839 she did not appear professionally until June when she and her sister Jane set out on a summer tour.³⁴ In these early months of Queen Victoria's reign the monarch fairly frequently attended performances at one or other of the royal theatres. Greenroom or salon audiences were sometimes held after royal attendances. Webster, Macready, and other theatre managers might have thought it inappropriate for Louisa to be present for these events while she was again so close to Feargus, now a recognised Chartist leader. On the other hand, it might have been Louisa's own choice to rest, but rest she did for the first six months of 1839. An *Essex Standard* reporter of dubious wit recorded a conversation which is supposed to have taken place between Feargus and Louisa at this time in which Feargus explains to the 'fair widow' that the object of the Charter is 'jst to refine the Constitution a bit.'³⁵ This article serves as the only direct evidence of their being together at this time. In June, following the presentation of the Charter to parliament and at a time critical to the National Convention which had raised great hopes and was now unsure of its tactics and feeling its difficulties, the sisters opened at Newcastle in a week

when Feargus was touring in the vicinity. Louisa and Jane's tour took in South Shields and Scarborough at the time of the Birmingham riots and during Feargus's appearance at York to defend himself against the charge of libel. There is every possibility that Louisa could have come to York as there was a rest of some days between engagements at this time. In early November, barely two weeks after the Convention had dissolved itself, Louisa was back at Covent Garden, then managed by Lucy Vestris and her husband Charles Mathews; thereafter her appearances on the London stages resumed in fairly unbroken manner.

By this time Feargus and Louisa's relationship was into its fifth year. Had there been a second possibility of marriage in 1839, the National Convention's business would probably have overwhelmed any thought of it. Feargus O'Connor was to say that he had sacrificed the comforts of home and domesticity for the sake of his social principles. This might as readily be taken as a simple statement of fact as an example of a propagandist's plea for sympathy. It says something about his and Louisa's relationship at this critical time.

Feargus resolved his solitary private existence in time honoured manner, evidently so in the birth, in 1844, of a son to Emblon Terry, a married woman of thirty-three living south of the river from London. A few months after Edward O'Connor Terry's birth Louisa, who had remained a single woman for thirteen years and who, earlier that year, had sanctioned public denial of marriage rumours,³⁶ married again to Sir William Boothby. In October 1844 she went as the new Lady Boothby to Ashbourne Hall and seems to have taken to her new life well. It is now that she began the writing of *Leonora*, probably aided by Lord Boothby's grandfather's library. Her husband was forty years her senior. A widower. He was Lord Receiver and General of her Majesty's customs, and Paymaster of the Corp of Gentlemen-at-Arms. He was the Deputy Lieutenant of Derbyshire and had a house on Clarges Street in London. He would have made this marriage amidst astonished noises off stage but it suited him and it suited Louisa.

While at Ashbourne Louisa, 'endeared herself to . . . the poor,' by whom, 'her memory was cherished long after the leaving it.' This was not conventional or empty praise. The man who said it, James Planché, could vouch for it, 'from personal experience when visiting in that locality in 1851.'³⁷ Ashbourne Hall stood at the north-eastern end of the town's main street and a short distance from the homes of Ashbourne's working families living in Pig Market and Mutton Lane. Louisa would

have communicated much more easily with working families here at Ashbourne than in the anonymous vastness of London had she chosen to, which it seems she did. She lived with her husband Lord Boothby at Ashbourne Hall for only eighteen months, from October 1844 until April 1846 when her husband died suddenly. The will he had made in 1833 had not been changed. His daughters and sons received what remained of the family fortune and the estate was promptly sold. The story is that William Boothby left Louisa without provision for her future but others say that it was obvious to those most intimate with her private concerns that, 'her means were increased at death of Sir William.'³⁸

Very soon after this, Feargus's letter to Thomas Allsop written one 'Saturday evening' (very likely Saturday 2nd May 1846) in his own difficult hand, regrets that he cannot make one of his friend's 'merry circle' and explains why:

54 Great Marlbro [sic] Street

Saturday evening

. . . I have just spent a horribly miserable week. On my return from Bridge Green on Monday last I found a letter on my table announcing the death of Sir Wm Boothby and now you may ask what is that to me. Hear the following sad and sorrowful narrative and the question is answered. His wife comes back to the world in the following painful and trying circumstances. Within the last two months, she has lost a Grandmother of whom she was most fond. Two uncles of whom she was very fond. Two of her brothers one of whom she created an opening for the Law have been committed to the Queens Bench. Her first cousin has been consigned to a mad house from railway speculation [*indecipherable*]. Her whole fortune which she left to the management of her mother as provision for her brothers and sister has been spent in 18 months, her favourite brother the barrister the hope and prop of the family, has been shattered by a succession of domestic afflictions as to unfit him for himself and now her husband has died suddenly, without will or settlement I believe in her favour. Thus at 32 she is a widow a second time. Reflection upon these unremitted sufferings [... *indecipherable*] I have been in bed almost all the week and have in vain tried to divest myself of the old recollections. I intended to have gone to Watford this morning but have put it off . . . It is a horrible picture is it not? ³⁹

This is Feargus O'Connor prostrated by the troubles of someone he loves. Gone to bed over it. Trying to divest himself of 'the old recollections.' Cognisant of every detail of Louisa's domestic losses and feeling for her unbearably keenly. It is Feargus O'Connor the Irishman whose emotions flow as freely as they do in his public writing and who would cry as he hands the land at O'Connorville over to the lottery winners come there from across the country to take up their new lives as free men, women and children.

The 'two brothers committed to the Queen's Bench,' James and Frederick Macnamara, had been committed in February 1846 and for some weeks were held at the Fleet at Southwark. They twice appeared before Commissioner Pollock at the debtors' court on Portugal Street before eventually being released, James a few weeks before Frederick.

After her husband's death and after a few weeks spent at Brighton, Louisa returned to London, this time to a house in Brompton, and in April 1847 to the stage playing the role of Constance at Ben Webster's Haymarket theatre. She was not the luminously beautiful young woman of ten years earlier – she was past thirty and growing a girth! Feargus, on the other hand and with characteristic wishful thinking, had not long before assured his beloved brother Francis in a letter: 'I am as well in health and constitution as when you and I used to jump over the six feet poles . . . [at] a hopping match at the Pigeon Ground at Battersea . . . I did 306 feet in thirty consecutive hops, never putting the second foot to the ground.'⁴⁰ Despite the likelihood of Feargus taking on the responsibility for, and sometimes cohabiting with his difficult sister Harriet Bernard Browne O'Connor, the years between 1845 and 1848 were some of the best for him. It was the early success of the Land Plan which brought him his greatest pleasure. In 1847 he spent many happy long weekends and parliamentary recesses at Snigs End and Lowbands raising pigs, planting pear and apple trees and overseeing drainage and road laying.⁴¹ He had his estate to manage again, as once he had in Cork County, and this made him happy. Ernest Jones, 'always found him in the most joyous state of excitement at its [the Land Plan's] success.'⁴² From Lowbands in February 1847 Feargus wrote, 'It is very cold and snowing, and I am very anxious to be in it again.'⁴³ What is more, by 1848 his great desire to create an Irish and English alliance of working people had grown considerably more realistic. He and John Mitchel were now on friendly terms, and on 17th March came the Manchester meeting held with Michael Doherty and Thomas Meagher of the Irish Confederacy. John Mitchel had struck out on his own and was calling for land

reform and disobedience against English rule.⁴⁴ And perhaps most wonderful of all, Feargus was, unexpectedly, a Member of Parliament for a second time having won a seat at Nottingham in the 1847 general election.

Louisa's younger brother James did not flourish as a lawyer until, in January 1848, the London Chartists set about establishing their own assembly hall. James Macnamara was appointed as the committee's solicitor.⁴⁵ Thereafter events would bring James more work than he could handle. The French revolution of 1848 came just as the Chartists were about to present their third and greatest petition. It was thought England would follow France as did much of Europe. Feargus O'Connor's idyll had ended and his nightmare begun.

When news of the uprising in Paris reached London in late February 1848, George Julian Harney, a great lynch-pin between the Continental and British political activists, ran through London's streets upsetting a street seller's stall in his excitement. The time had come! Thomas Allsop, friend of Feargus, had already written to Robert Owen then in Paris: 'Great changes, events, are approaching and it will grieve me if you cannot be on the spot.' And again to Owen in April of 1848: 'any attempt to stop short will be suicidal . . . The revolution must be accomplished.'⁴⁶ Feargus O'Connor, though, would not be pleased by any of this. And he would not have welcomed knowledge of his Chartist colleagues' and the Irish Confederates' journeys to France at this time. In 1843 he had written to Thomas Allsop: 'Throughout my whole life I have been haunted by a dread of foreign interference of one sort or other with questions of our domestic policy,' and, 'I know of no other circumstance that would induce me to take up a musket, but I . . . would do it to meet froggy on British or Irish ground.'⁴⁷ The revolutions of 1848 were not what Feargus O'Connor sought for Britain. He did not believe in them. He was as much concerned at this crucial time with reform of the Friendly Society Act in an attempt to put the Chartist Land Company on a safe footing.

In 1848, George Grey's Home Office, fearing insurrection at a time of widespread revolutions on the Continent, prepared for the Chartists' Kennington Common rally with extensive security measures and banned the planned march to Westminster with the National Petition of five million signatures calling for parliamentary reform. When everything passed off so easily for the authorities on 10th April, the arrests began. In London it was Louisa's younger brother, James Macnamara, who bore the responsibility for the defence of the arrested men during these weeks. He spent hour upon hour at Bow

Street lock-up as legal representative to any number of arrested Chartists, and he assisted Sergeant Wilkins at Ernest Jones' trial in July.⁴⁸ Everything points to Feargus having introduced James Macnamara to the Chartist Defence Committee in an effort to advance the young lawyer's career but the Committee was low on funds and there came a point when Feargus told James in a letter to take instructions only from him. The implication is that Feargus O'Connor would, or was advancing his own money towards the defence of the Chartists arrested during 1848. James's final outstanding bill to the Chartist Defence Committee exceeded £100 and when the Committee could not, or would not pay the outstanding sum, James promptly sued his erstwhile mentor for payment. He took Feargus to the Queen's Bench and won his case.⁴⁹ Feargus called James, 'a young shark.' Samuel Kydd, the Chartist lecturer, went so far as to call him 'a rat.'⁵⁰

Feargus O'Connor comes out well from this story but Louisa was strongly attached to her family and this event would have been a strain on their long friendship. The event was disruptive for James also. He disappeared from the Law Lists after 1848, quit his rooms at 58 Lincoln Inn Fields, and removed himself to live with his wife at Tranmere, Chestershire.⁵¹

Physically Feargus O'Connor was declining by this time and everything he most cherished was being dismantled before his eyes. The Land Plan had failed, Chartism was in disarray, *The Northern Star* was declining in popularity, and his friendship with Louisa had undergone a great upheaval because of the dispute with her brother James. But their relationship went deep enough to survive this rupture. Two years later, the parliamentary select committee of 1851 which directly preceded the Act to Dissolve the National Land Company was attended by Henry Tyrwitt Jones Macnamara as counsel for the Bill.⁵² Henry Macnamara was closely related to Louisa, possibly another younger brother, and his presence at this select committee is additional evidence of the closeness of Feargus O'Connor to Louisa Nisbett's family. Although 1851 was the year in which Feargus began to demonstrate his mental decline because of untreated syphilis, his responses to Henry Macnamara's questions during the committee meeting on 11th July were lucid. But he was under great emotional strain. In the previous two years he had had to endure many parliamentary committee meetings to examine the running of the failed Land Company and he had suffered the rumour of financial greed, proven to be empty and replaced with the reverse: the acknowledgement that he had advanced funds to the Land Company. Then, after the 1851 Act to Dissolve the National Land Company, came the days in the Court of Chancery. Feargus was required to unravel the

financial situation of the Land Company to the satisfaction of the court which was quite beyond him, and anyone else. That he was still able to make the court laugh, even if it was in embarrassment, when everything he had achieved had been destroyed before his eyes is a testament to his endurance.⁵³

‘Pinked with rapiers . . . Feargus O’Connor is as good tempered as if he had only fenced with foil. True to the character of an adventurer . . . he rubs his hands, laughs, and thinks, when his adversaries have done their utmost, they must stop, and then all will start on equal terms’.⁵⁴ Here is a picture of the man who by 1847 had driven Bronterre O’Brien half to madness.

In the Allsop Collection are letters from James Bronterre O’Brien to Thomas Allsop, then trying to bring the estranged men together, which paint a very different picture of Feargus O’Connor. ‘. . . O’Connor – that man whose generosity you would make me the recipient of – and for which I should before seven days have to pay the penalty in the loss of whatever little credit and respect I may still retain from the wreck of the past – oh No! My dear Mr Allsop, it is too late in the day for that . . . You know not the man!!!!’⁵⁵

Leadership was not the issue: ‘not all the money in England would make me take the leadership if thrust upon me.’

‘No! – the quarrel between us was and is simply this – I have wished as a public man to be able to subsist my family [indecipherable] without prostituting my convictions, and to enjoy a freeman’s right to promulgate my own views upon public matters without being obliged to take out a license or permit from Feargus O’Connor or anybody else – that right O’Connor would not suffer me to exercise except on pain of starvation for my family and ruin to myself in name, fame, conduct and fortune . . . It is enough to say that the result of all has been that he has inflicted upon me more misery than I hope will ever befall another man . . . He has made it impossible for me to benefit myself or others for 10 long years. . . . He caused the failure of all my publications, and involved me in debts, difficulties, embarrassments and mental suffering indescribable.’

This is the man whom O’Brien’s biographer Alfred Plummer describes as precursor of and likely inspiration to Karl Marx.⁵⁶

‘In pursuance of his general policy of driving every man out of the movement that he could not make a Connorman of, or whose influence he thought stood in the way of his making the Chartist Body a mere mob, to be under his sole direction – he . . . fell foul of me and of all my political and personal friends throughout the country who took a part in public affairs – with me and with these men he . . . condescended to argue and explain matters in a [princely?] way. His plan was to foment cabals and trump up charges against and publish lies of them in the Northern Star and . . . get mobs of infuriate fanatics to denounce them and as far as possible, deprive them of their means of living by cutting off their customers, friends and supporters – a thing not difficult to manage, seeing that my friends were for the most part working men and tradesmen whose zeal and principles naturally made them obnoxious to the higher and middle classes.’⁵⁷

O’Brien presents O’Connor as malignant, careless and condescending yet he is writing of a man who cared acutely for Louisa Nisbett and who knew when to demonstrate modesty and when to stand aside: Feargus O’Connor called Thomas Slingsby Duncombe his ‘Beloved General’ and offered him not just his service but life itself.⁵⁸ When Thomas Duncombe wrote to him four days before the 1848 April rally on Kennington Common, ‘I can, of course, make every allowance for reasonable excitement, but I cannot reconcile to my mind the folly of jeopardizing the good and just cause by extravagant language and foolish threats, which, as of old, can only have the effect of disarming progress, and disarming its best friends . . . THINK! THINK! THINK!’ Feargus O’Connor would have taken note.⁵⁹ He enjoyed other mutual relationships with men of similar ilk to Thomas Duncombe: W.E. Roberts, Thomas Allsop and the interesting George Reynolds, short-lived Chartist, author of popular novels and publisher of *Reynold’s Newspaper*. But prominent Chartist figures, William Lovett, G.J. Harney and Thomas Cooper, grew to dislike him as deeply as did O’Brien. Although O’Brien’s letter asserts that leadership was not the cause of the division between them, it strongly indicates that it was O’Connor’s style of leadership which produced his fury. As its leader O’Connor financially supported Chartism’s strategies and preached his own course for the movement through the pages of the *Northern Star*; there is ownership in this. His leadership, James Epstein observes, was conducted in the tradition of the ‘independent gentleman,’ which is to say that O’Connor felt himself at one remove from the general class of Chartist.⁶⁰ At best this manifested itself in his overt paternalism. This attitude

and the manner it produced seems to be the significant element in the rift with O'Brien. Feargus's manner would be a constant irritant, it would rankle daily. And Thomas Duncombe's, 'THINK! THINK! THINK!' reveals something else in Feargus's character which exasperated Duncombe as thoroughly as it would others.

Feargus O'Connor came from an eccentric landed Irish family with grandiose notions of itself; he believed himself descended from ancient royal blood and he identified very strongly with this. He was not an ideological revolutionary like Bronterre O'Brien, he was more a putter-right of injustice and a great bringer-together of people. Like his uncle Arthur, he had a 'light touch'.⁶¹ He spoke with 'funny self-complacency' and with a vocabulary which included 'buggaboo' and 'nicknackory.' He was careless with other people's possessions. He would use trickery to get his way.⁶² In other words, he saw himself as above others, albeit in a friendly, enabling way. There was no viciousness there but it seems that he was not sufficiently checked by consideration of the consequences of his actions to temper them. Judging by O'Brien's letter, these traits rankled deeply in the hearts of many of his close Chartist colleagues and produced dislike and distrust of him beyond Chartist circles; politically established radical figures, Joseph Hume and J.A. Roebuck, despised him equally.⁶³ This is the man whom Louisa Nisbett loved.

Louisa also possessed a strong personality and appears to have enjoyed to the full everything that life has to offer. She was as wilful and energetic as Feargus. She was 'gay and laughter-loving'.⁶⁴ They would have enjoyed each other's qualities, the spark and spontaneity, but only up to a point. By all accounts Louisa had a natural grasp of the social proprieties, an innate understanding of what would be going-too-far which Feargus did not. She was happily described as 'both refined and abandoned.'⁶⁵ O'Connor's temperament (not to mention his addictions to alcohol and snuff) and the difficulties it brought him stood against a satisfactory resolution for them. His position as a politician, 'belonging to no party . . . tossed from one set to another,' would have been a great obstruction to his life as husband to Louisa.⁶⁶ His happiness when working at the Fort Robert estate as a young man and later at the Worcestershire and Gloucestershire settlements suggest that, had he chosen it, the life of the gentleman farmer would have suited him and Louisa admirably, but he chose the high-profile public life and the fight against 'The Thing'. He probably lost her without realising it was happening until it was too late but their friendship survived their romance. They remained friends for some twenty years. Feargus was involved in her family's progress from the outset of their

relationship and, as his own was so widely scattered and of no succour to him, Louisa's large and close-knit family seems to have played an important part in his life.

O'Connor's biographers Donald Read and Eric Glasgow wonder if Louisa was there to help Feargus during his fatal illness. 1850 shows the first real cracks in Feargus's spirit when he left the settlers of Minster Lovell in the hands of the mortgagees. His physical and mental decline was relentless after this time. At the very least the warm-hearted Louisa would, surely, have been concerned in his welfare despite the unpleasant and lengthy upset over her brother's fees the year before, but in the months following this event her own health broke down so that eventually she was obliged to give her last public appearance mid-season, as Lady Teazle, on 8th May 1851, at Drury Lane. This is the very week that Henry Macnamara first appeared in the committee room at the Houses of Parliament as counsel for the Bill to Dissolve the National Land Company. Louisa left London three weeks later for Brighton and stayed there until the end of October. She would almost certainly have known all that was occurring in Feargus's life. These were months when a great change came over him. He was transformed from a man, 'always observant of the courtesies of life and of a peculiarly gentle turn of mind,' into someone whose behaviour was offensive and better avoided.⁶⁷ Untreated syphilis was the cause of this derangement but no-one knew it then. The symptoms Feargus displayed were diagnosed as paralysis of the insane and were yet to be connected to the ravages of neurosyphilis.

Through 1851 he maintained a scant semblance of normality and retained his seat in parliament while being assailed by parties from all sides. Not only was the Land Company in process of being wound-up but the Land and Labour Bank had stopped payments to its 60,000 depositors and one working man, known to have been visiting the premises on Oxford Street, violently attacked Feargus outside his house on Notting Hill Terrace late one night, three weeks after Louisa's final public appearance. The assailant tried to break into the house and when Feargus came out his neck was grabbed, his eye-glass smashed and his watch chain snapped. 1851 would be a terrible year for him. By its end he had lost everything, even the *Northern Star* was sold for £100 at the year's end to its printer Dougal McGowan who, until his death in 1854, was responsible for Feargus's welfare together with Roger O'Connor, Feargus's nephew. By the autumn of that year the beleaguered and bewildered Feargus must have been wondering what was happening to him. 'I was very ill last night,' he wrote in the *Northern Star*, 'and am still

very poorly.⁶⁹ He might already have been developing the strange gait associated with syphilitic decline. By now Louisa, like everyone else, would have thought that her old friend was succumbing to madness due to the catastrophe of the Land Plan failure.

It was at Lucy Vestris's Lyceum Theatre, on the night of 7th February 1852 that a solitary Feargus O'Connor struck a police officer while being removed from the dress circle for causing a disturbance and was taken to Bow Street then Clerkenwell House of Correction – this five days after having been questioned for five hours before the Master of Chancery.⁷⁰ He had gone to the Lyceum to see George Henry Lewes' comedy *The Game of Speculation* but never got beyond the overture. Lucy Vestris and her husband Charles Mathews were backstage that night. After his arrest and a few very bad days at Cold Bath Fields, Clerkenwell, George Reynolds took him to his own house for a short while and supported him as best he could while Feargus's life followed the inevitable downward spiral of the untreated syphilitic. He could have contracted the disease at any time up to four years before its effects became evident. There is no published record of Louisa donating to the O'Connor fund set up at this time. Records of small donations to the fund, some of just a few pennies from people around the country and listed in the *Northern Star* week-by-week, are many. It is likely that Louisa would have helped in any way she could in a private capacity. There is evidence to show that she was ready to give aid in far less personal instances.⁷¹

Louisa sought the pleasures of the south coast and by June 1853 was living at 7 Maze Hill, St. Leonards-on-Sea. St Leonards is where she lived for the remainder of her life and here is where she was during Feargus's final months, when he was in the safe keeping of Thomas Harrington Tuke at the Manor House Asylum in Chiswick; and then his terrible last two weeks in the upstairs room of his sister Harriet's lodgings in Notting Hill, attended to by a local surgeon. Louisa had troubles of her own. Her brother Frederick developed tuberculosis at this time and she would have watched him waste away before he died in October 1856, fourteen months after Feargus, at her house Rosemount, on Archery Road, just up from the sea at St Leonards. Frederick was thirty-nine years old when he died. There is also the possibility that her sister Anne died at much the same time and third-hand but contemporaneous reports say that Louisa, 'succumbed to the anxiety and exertion of her affectionate personal attendance on them.'⁷²

Feargus O'Connor died on 30th August 1855. His sister Harriet O'Connor, despite her '*petite* and rather prepossessing person,' could be 'importunate' when denied her

own way and for two-and-a-half years she had pursued the removal of Feargus from Dr Tuke's establishment as she was, 'thereby kept out of property to which she was entitled.'⁷³ In 1854 she had described herself as 'reduced to the lowest state of poverty,' and appeared, 'forlorn'.⁷⁴ Her determination to claim control of the patient was described as 'monomania,' and after appealing to Francis in South America she succeeded in bringing Feargus to Notting Hill where he quickly declined and died, two weeks later, in comfortless circumstances.⁷⁵ His treatment under Harriet's care was challenged by Roger O'Connor, their nephew, who had sight of his uncle's body only through means of securing an inquest into the circumstances of his death.⁷⁶ From a distance it appears that concern for herself was greater to Harriet than concern for her brother. On Monday 10th September, tens of thousands turned out to accompany Feargus O'Connor on his last journey, from Notting Hill to Kensal Green Cemetery. They first gathered in Finsbury Square and Smithfield and proceeded with banners and flags to Notting Hill to meet the cortege. There were a great many friends and some erstwhile foes at Feargus's graveside that afternoon as his coffin was lowered, and over it William Jones, secretary to the Chartist Association said that no-one, neither friend nor foe, had understood his character well.⁷⁷ There is no telling if Louisa was there at Kensal Green to see Feargus's coffin lowered. If she did not make the journey she must, surely, have been there in spirit. The only mention of her in the press at this time is a widely spread rumour that she was returning to the stage, which was quickly refuted.

Feargus O'Connor is viewed in many lights but whatever detractors said of him he succeeded in bringing incalculable hope, a much needed light, to the lives of hundreds of thousands of working people and although his ambitions for them were not realised in his lifetime, he led them through years of effort which focused the nation's attention on the need for political reform favourable to the majority working population. Something kept him at it. It was not just ambition and egotism. It was a drive which gripped him at cost to everything else and throughout it all he displayed remarkable forbearance and perseverance. 'I have passed through an ordeal which no other man would survive,' he wrote towards the end of his life and there is no reason to take this as hyperbole any more than as meant.⁷⁸ His life had been an endurance test from beginning to end yet his relationship with Louisa Nisbett suggests that she and her family brought to it a valuable element of comfort and stability for twenty years.

As a counter balance to the self advertising from O'Connor and the condemnation from R.G. Gammage, William Lovett, O'Brien, Harney and Thomas Cooper, I choose to end with this observation of Feargus O'Connor made in 1848, the year in which he made his will so convinced was he of death from the bullet of an assassin. He was by then, 'pale, almost cadaverous,' but he bore, 'an open countenance, you trace neither cunning nor the ferocity usually ascribed to demagogues . . . No angry feeling, no malignant one.'⁷⁹ Here is a Feargus O'Connor obscured by his Chartist colleagues' denouncements and by his own self-advertising and unchecked behaviour and the man who, probably, was known away from the Chartist milieu by people like Louisa Nisbett.

A year or two after Feargus's death, the playwright, theatre designer and royal court advisor James Planché unexpectedly came upon Louisa at Bodiam Castle: 'a most musical and joyous laugh rang in our ears. "That's Lady Boothby!" . . . she came running out of one of the towers pursued by two beautiful children, their straw hats garlanded with hop-blossoms.'⁸⁰ These were her sister's children. As far as is known she never conceived a child of her own. Louisa died in her mid-forties of apoplexy on 16th January 1858 at St Mary Magdalen, Hastings, less than three years after Feargus, just three months after her mother whose death some thought precipitated her own. Feargus O'Connor, the great Chartist leader, a man who considered himself the inheritor of royal Irish blood, is not mentioned, he is not even alluded to in the notices of Louisa's death. Mrs Cornwell Baron-Wilson's biographical chapter on her friend Louisa Nisbett, written in 1844, makes no mention of him but this was the year of the birth of Feargus's son, Edward O'Connor Terry, to Emblon Terry, and of Louisa's marriage to William Boothby, so the omission is not surprising.⁸¹ It is made clear in Mrs Cornwell Baron-Wilson's writing that Louisa kept her private life private. Throughout their time together she and Feargus kept their relationship as discreet as two highly public figures could. Louisa and Feargus's relationship survived hiatus, national controversy, Feargus's imprisonment, relationships with others, and was to continue from 1834 through the entirety of the 1840s and beyond; it went deep and lasted long. More than enough time has passed to justify its celebration now.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Read, Donald & Eric Glasgow, *Feargus O'Connor, Irishman and Chartist*, p.142, Edward Arnold (1961); Pickering, Paul A. *Feargus O'Connor, A political life*, p.152, Merlin Press (2008);
2. Donald Read and Eric Glasgow, in their 1961 biography of Feargus O'Connor, make the case for 1796 as his birth year and so, although the *Dictionary of National Biography* entry on O'Connor states the year 1794, I here use Read and Glasgow's 1796. I am taking the DNB date of 1812 as Louisa Nisbett's birth year.
3. Daunt, W.J. O'Neill, *A Life Spent for Ireland*, p.160, (1896), Irish University Press edition 1972.
4. in O'Brien, Conor Cruise, *The Great Melody* pp. 526-7
5. *Northern Star*, 7 Jan 1847, p.1
6. O'Connor, Feargus, *National Instructor* Vol 1 p.23-4
7. Daunt, W.J. O'Neill, *A Life Spent for Ireland*, p.9
8. O'Connor, Feargus, *The National Instructor* Vol 1, p.24 & p.25
9. *The Era* 24 January 1858
10. Coleman, J. and E. Coleman, *Memoirs of Samuel Phelps*, p.37. Printed by Lightning Source UK Ltd.
11. Planché, J. *Recollections and Reflections* p.87, online: <https://archive.org/details/recollectionsref02plan>
12. *Public & Private Life, Secret Amours, and Wonderful Intrigues of Mrs N-t*, 1835, held at the British Library, shelf mark 10825.cc.7.
13. *The Belfast News-Letter*, 10 October 1834. Everything indicates towards Louisa Nisbett having enjoyed a happy sexual relationship with her fiancé and later husband, John Alexander Nisbett, and she presumably found the same happiness with Feargus O'Connor. Bridge Street is also mentioned as an address for O'Connor in 1834-35 (*National Instructor Vol II* p. 503)
14. *Hansard* 8 February 1833 vol 15 cc453-454; *Hansard* 14 February 1834, vol 21 c354
15. *Northern Star* 16 January 1841, p.7
16. Planché, J. *Recollections and Reflections* p.213
17. *Morning Chronicle*, 12 November 1834
18. *Morning Chronicle*, 25 October 1834, 'Police Intelligence'
19. Nisbet, L., *Leonora, a Love Story* 1848, p.253. Held at the British Library, Collection N.2688
20. *Northern Star* 6 April 1839
21. O'Connor, Feargus, *National Instructor* Vol 1, p.24
22. Daunt, W.J. O'Neill, *A Life Spent for Ireland* p.89
23. O'Connor, Feargus, *National Instructor* Sept 28, 1850, p.425. Daniel O'Connell, Catholic Ireland's Great Liberator, leader of the Repeal Association and of the Irish presence in Parliament. Within a short time of Feargus O'Connor's first term as an MP the relationship between the two men deteriorated until it became irretrievably hostile. Feargus O'Connor viewed O'Connell as a slippery politician largely because of his pact with the middle-class Whig party.
25. *The Standard*, 11 November 1834, 'The Hour Has Come'
26. *Hansard* 3 March 1834, vol 26 cc523-4
27. *Northern Star* 16 January 1841 p.7

28. *Leeds Mercury* 16 June 1838 'Mr. O'Connor's charge against Mr. Alderman Clapham and the policemen Burwell'.
29. *Morning Chronicle* 10 October 1837
30. Baron-Wilson, Mrs Cornwell, *our actresses or glances at stage favourites, past and present*, p. 86
31. *Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser* 9 June 1838, 'Leeds – Great Meeting on Hunslet Moor'
32. Baron-Wilson, Mrs Cornwell, *our actresses or glances at stage favourites, past and present*, p.68
33. *Actors by Daylight, or Pencillings in the Pit*. Held at the British Library, General Reference Collection P.P.5208.(1.)
34. The exception was 17th January when Louisa played in a benefit at Webster's Haymarket for Mrs Glover.
35. *Essex Standard* 14 June 1839, 'Scrapiana'
36. Baron-Wilson, Mrs Cornwell, *our actresses or glances at stage favourites, past and present*, p. 88
37. Planché, J. *Recollections and Reflections* p.86. An occurrence took place in January 1849 which shows that Louisa Nisbett, then Lady Boothby, would take action when necessary. As she was walking from Brompton along the Great Western Road she stopped at sight of a young woman who was standing at the door of the Hammersmith workhouse. The woman, who was Irish, said she had been trying for admittance for two days to the workhouse but had been refused and had been sleeping in a ditch at the back of the building. Louisa immediately took her to the local magistrate demanding that something be done. The young woman was later reported to have lied about the two days outside Hammersmith workhouse but, whether or not this was so, this event shows that Louisa Nisbett was a woman to act upon need. (*The Era* 7 January 1849; *Daily News* 11 January 1849).
38. *The Era*, 24 January 1858, 'The Death of Lady Boothby'.
39. Allsop Collection, Coll Misc 525, files 1-4, letter 9. Held at the London School of Economics Library.
40. letter of 28 Sept 1843 in Dunkerley, James, *The Third Man: Francisco Burdett O'Connor and the Emancipation of the Americas*, University of London, Institute of Latin American Studies, Occasional Papers No.20, p.18.
41. *Northern Star* 10 July 1847, 'To Members of the Land Plan' is one expression of Feargus O'Connor's pleasure in working on the estate. Thomas Martin Wheeler's "Notes of a Journey" *Northern Star*, 5th February and 12 February 1848 make interesting reading.
42. quoted in Pickering, Paul, *Feargus O'Connor, A political life*, pp. 153-4, Merlin Press (2008).
43. *Northern Star* 6 Feb 1847.
44. John Martin, Charles Duffy, John Blake Dillon, Patrick James Smyth, also were prominent members of the Irish Confederates.
45. *Northern Star and National Trades' Journal*, 22 January 1848, 'Metropolitan Chartist Hall'.
46. letters of 31 August 1847 and April 6 1848, Robert Owen Collection held at Holyoake House, Manchester.
47. letters 2 & 28, Allsop Collection, Coll Misc 525, files 1-4, held at the London School of Economics Library.
48. *Northern Star* June 24, 1848, 'Liberation of Mr Ernest Jones'; and Aug 19 1848, 'Arrest of Armed Chartists in London'.

49. *Northern Star* 14 July 1849; *Northern Star* 10 November 1849; *Northern Star* 24 November 1849, ‘Court of Queen’s Bench’; *Northern Star* 1 Dec 1849, ‘O’Connor & Macnamara’
50. *Northern Star* 8 Dec 1849 ‘Macnamara v O’Connor’
51. Birth certificate of James Cranstoun Macnamara, 29 August 1851.
52. HC/CL/PB/2/19/38 Vol 38 held by the Parliamentary Archives. The Law Society’s Law Lists show two lawyers of the name Macnamara practicing between 1846-1872, one is James Robert Shakspere, Louisa’s younger brother, the other is Henry T.J. Macnamara who appears under the lists of Counsel and whose Date of Call was 22 November 1849. Henry Tyrwitt Jones Macnamara was a close relative of Louisa Nisbett: a younger brother or cousin. As a young man he supported William Ladd’s American Peace Society approach to world peace. In 1852 he represented Mr Salomon in his battle to retain his parliamentary seat at a time when it was asserted that parliament and the legislature was exclusively reserved for the maintenance of Christianity. He published *Law and Practice of Summary Convictions by Justices of the Peace* in 1856. It was Henry who registered Frederick Macnamara’s death in 1856.
53. *Morning Chronicle* 3 February 1852; *Northern Star* 7 February 1852 ‘The National Land Company’.
54. *Fraser’s Magazine*, Vol 3, Jan-June 1848, p173-6, held at British Library.
55. Letter of 1847 (p.6), PA1680 and PA168, Allsop Collection, Misc 525/1.
56. Plummer, A. *Bronterre*, pp.249-53.
57. Letter of 1847 (p.2), PA1680 and PA168, Allsop Collection, Misc 525/1. Held at the London School of Economics library.
58. in Duncombe, Thomas H, *Life and Correspondence of Thomas Slingsby Duncombe* p.373. Although there is always the possibility that Feargus O’Connor’s modesty was canny. His letter to Thomas Duncombe is an interesting mixture of obsequiousness and largesse and W.J. O’Neill Daunt said in 1850: ‘Feargus O’Connor has been praising me extravagantly in his *Life and Adventures*. I cannot conceive why, for he never does anything without a motive . . .’ (*A Life Spent for Ireland* p.80).
59. letter dated 6 April 1848, in Duncombe, Thomas H, *Life and Correspondence of Thomas Slingsby Duncombe* p.375.
60. Epstein, James, *The Lion of Freedom*, Croome Helm Ltd, p.235.
61. Benjamin Constant in Dunkerley, James, p.6, *The Third Man: Francisco Burdett O’Connor and the Emancipation of the Americas*, p.18, University of London, Institute of Latin American Studies, Occasional Papers No.20.
62. Daunt, W.J. O’Neill, *A Life Spent for Ireland* is full of stories of Feargus’s tricks. See pp. 9, 117, 142-3, 161, 182, 184-5.
63. This, of course, was not universal. Other Chartists who had worked closely with O’Connor continued to like and admire him. James Sweet, Nottingham barber and bookseller, is one who remained attached to O’Connor to the very end. (Roberts, Stephen, ‘Feargus O’Connor in the House of Commons, 1847-1852’ in *The Chartist Legacy*, p.104, Merlin Press 1999).
64. Baron-Wilson, Mrs Cornwell, *our actresses or glances at stage favourites, past and present*, p.67, held at British Library, General Reference Collection 1347. e.5.
65. Marston, *Our Recent Actors* Vol 2 Ch.VI-VII, p.154.
66. O’Connor, Feargus, *National Instructor* Sept 28, 1850, (p.425).

67. *The Times*, 19 Feb 1853 'Commission of Lunacy of Mr. Feargus O'Connor'.
68. *Standard* 2 June 1851. O'Connor's attacker was a Scotsman called Thompson whose grievance went beyond the closure of the Land and Labour Bank. O'Connor had earlier remonstrated with him over the fate of a widow.
69. quoted in Roberts, Stephen, 'Feargus O'Connor in the House of Commons, 1847-1852', in *The Chartist Legacy*, Merlin Press 1999, p. 103.
70. *Morning Chronicle* 3 Feb 1852; *Morning Post* 10 Feb 1852; *Times* 13 April 1852; *People's Paper* 16 April 1848. Lucy Vestris's Lyceum theatre was billing a 'Mrs Macnamara' as one of its company during these months. This same actress was given her benefit and retired as a veteran performer one year before Louisa Nisbett's mother, Jane Macnamara, died at Hastings in 1857. However, there is no ready evidence to show that Louisa's mother worked in the theatre. Certainly, those members of the Macnamara family who did work in the theatre, that is Louisa, Jane and Anne, had a close professional relationship with Lucy Vestris for two decades. Madame Vestris gave Jane junior her débute as Juliet (it was a disaster) in March 1840.
71. Undated letter (pre-1844) from Louisa Cranstoun Nisbett to an unknown correspondent, Letter 282, Add Misc 52478 British Library Manuscripts: 'My dear Sir . . . I hope that I need not say how gladly I should give any aid in my power on this melancholy occasion – if possibly able you may of course command me.'
72. Planché, J. *Recollections and Reflections*, p.213. Two months before Frederick's death, Louisa lost her friend and longstanding colleague Madame [Lucy] Vestris in August 1856 when she died after a long illness.
73. *The Times* 16 June 1852
74. *The Times* 5 July 1854.
75. *Reynolds Newspaper*, 26 August 1855.
76. *Daily News* 4 September 1855; *Freeman's Journal* 8 Sept 1855.
77. *Reynold's Newspaper* 16 September 1855; *Cheshire Observer & General Advertiser* 15 September 1855.
78. O'Connor, Feargus, *National Instructor* Vol I, May 25, 1850, (p.10)
79. *Fraser's Magazine for town and country* Vol 3, Jan-June 1848 pp. 173-6, held at the British Library.
80. Planché, J. *Recollections and Reflections*, p.213
81. Baron-Wilson, Mrs Cornwell, *our actresses or glances at stage favourites, past and present*, held at British Library, General Reference Collection 1347. e.5.