

HISTORIES
OF
PROTESTANT
LIMERICK
1912-1923



Edited by Seán William Gannon & Brian Hughes

HISTORIES OF PROTESTANT LIMERICK 1912–1923

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Limerick City and County Council



An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir,
Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meia
Department of Tourism, Culture,
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Front cover image: Limerick Young Men's Protestant Association premises,
97 O'Connell Street, c. 1902–10
(courtesy Ludlow collection, with thanks to Sharon Slater).

Back cover image: St Mary's Cathedral, c. 1914
(courtesy of the National Library of Ireland).

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Foreword

The objective of Limerick City and County Council’s Decade of Centenaries programme throughout the 2012–2023 period has been the remembrance of local historical events in a factually accurate, accessible, and inclusive way. Our commitment to inclusivity has been demonstrated by an acknowledgement in our outputs of differing and, oftentimes, competing historical perspectives, together with explorations of the experiences of minority groups. This volume underscores this commitment. The ten original essays that it comprises examine the experience of Limerick’s Protestant communities during the revolutionary period, when they formed less than 5 per cent of the county’s population. The authors draw on a variety of archival sources (including largely untapped local collections such as the archives of St Mary’s Cathedral and the Limerick Young Men’s Protestant Association, and the newly discovered Robert Donough O’Brien papers held at Mary Immaculate College) to explore aspects of political, religious, economic, and social life in the city and county between 1912 and 1923. Under this aspect, the essays chart the serious challenges posed to Limerick’s non-Catholic congregations during this time. But they also convey the resilience these congregations displayed to come through and accommodate themselves to a new political order that many members had hitherto feared and opposed. In the words of the then Bishop of Limerick, Ardfert, and Aghadoe, Harry Vere White, they were ‘ready to make the best of it’ as ‘loyal’ and ‘patriotic’ citizens of the Irish Free State.

We are proud to present *Histories of Protestant Limerick, 1912–1923* as part of Limerick City and County Council’s Decade of Centenaries programme for 2023, our third publication produced in collaboration with colleagues in the Department of History at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. This volume forms a rich and important contribution to the literature on the Irish Revolution, and will promote a deeper engagement with, and understanding of, the history of the period in County Limerick.

Damien Brady

*Coordinator - Decade of Centenaries,
Limerick City and County Council*

Introduction

Seán William Gannon and Brian Hughes

On 5 July 1922, the Church of Ireland bishop of Limerick, Ardfert, and Aghadoe, Harry Vere White, delivered the presidential address to the annual diocesan synod. ‘The conditions of the Diocese have gone through a revolution’, he told its assembled members, ‘a revolution still in progress and the end of which we do not foresee’. White was referring to the significant structural and administrative overhaul to which the diocese was being subjected because of what he termed ‘the diminution in our numbers’ over the past fifty years: ‘For every one hundred of our people half a century ago there are not now more than forty to take their places. Many churches which were well filled in the seventies of the last century are now half empty’.¹ White’s remarks find support in the Irish census, in which the number of Church of Ireland members returned for Limerick fell from c. 8,156 in 1871 to 4,866 in 1911, and just 2,976 in 1926. Some two months later, however, when the select vestry of St Mary’s Cathedral met, the business included a report on the Easter general vestry, which had gone ahead in April, and the presentation of various church accounts (deemed ‘on the whole satisfactory’). Enquiries were to be made about one of the large bells, which had cracked. Thus, for many members of Limerick’s Church of Ireland community ordinary church life had carried on. Dean of St Mary’s, Aylmer Hackett, was concerned that ‘many protestants were leaving the country’, but confident that the community would ‘ultimately prosper’. The concern expressed for the ‘neglect of Sunday observance among many of the young people’ might have been a comment on Limerick in 1922, but is also a sentiment that could equally have been expressed in 1902, 1912, or 1932. In January 1923, debate could turn to the angle at which the pulpit in the cathedral stood out from the wall.² There are potentially competing stories of the Protestant experience of revolution here, but each is evident in its own ways.

The idea of a homogenous Protestant community is, of course, problematical; as David Fitzpatrick observed, differences in government and doctrine between Ireland’s Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and others meant that it has ‘always been an aspiration rather than a credible representation of reality’.³ Yet the extent of shared outlook, understanding, and situation amongst these denominations in 1912–23 permits us broadly to treat of ‘Protestant experiences’ of the period’s events. Depopulation necessarily informed these

experiences for, as these essays demonstrate, it affected every area of communal existence. The ‘diminution in numbers’ of which White spoke was not confined to the Church of Ireland. Between 1911 and 1926, the number of Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians in County Limerick also sharply declined (the latter by almost 80 per cent), while the once vibrant Quaker community all but disappeared.⁴ Protestant depopulation was not a localized Limerick phenomenon, but formed part of a wider trend which saw the number in the twenty-six counties that became the Irish Free State fall from c. 313,000 in 1911 to 208,000 in 1926. Its causes have been the subject of often testy historiographical debate in the twenty years since the publication of *The IRA at War* by Peter Hart, whose analysis centered on the other revolution through which Bishop White and his audience had lived – the Irish War of Independence against British rule and its just-opened endgame of civil war. According to Hart, this revolution had a Roman Catholic sectarian bent which had resulted in ‘what might be termed “ethnic cleansing”’ of Protestants through intimidation, attack, and expulsion during the 1919–23 period, and White too referenced the impact of involuntary migration, telling the synod that ‘Ireland is losing many of her best, most patriotic, and progressive citizens, who are forced to leave their native land by economic causes or by political and religious intolerance’.⁵ As many as 67,500 Protestants left what became the Irish Free State between 1911 and 1926. But there remains some debate on the extent to which excess migration influenced by revolutionary violence was a defining contributory cause of Protestant depopulation, with recent estimates ranging from 2,000 to 40,000. The intercensal collapse by one-third was, though, also the result of the longer-term demographic decline that White lamented, one primarily generated by intra-communal factors such as low or negative natural increase and already established patterns of outward migration. Moreover, the precise motivations for the excess emigration that did take place remain elusive to historians, and some who left may have eventually returned.⁶

While Protestant depopulation weaves a common thread through the essays in this volume, which consider various aspects of Protestant life in Limerick during Ireland’s revolutionary era, these lives were not solely defined by migration or flight – voluntary or involuntary. Many stayed the course, carried on, made the best of things. As this volume also demonstrates, Sunday worship continued, broken bells and panes of glass were fixed, choirs and musical societies played away, memorials to war dead were erected, and relief was provided to members in need. Deans and bishops could address their congregations, whether with fear or hope, to denounce or reassure. Limerick’s Protestants also had their own press, the

Population of Limerick city and county by religion, 1911 & 1926 (courtesy Dr John O'Callaghan)

Year	Area	Total Persons	Roman Catholic	Other Religions			Presbyterian	Methodist	Jew	Baptist	Other
				% Total Persons	Actual Numbers	Episcopalian (C of I)					
1911	City	38,518	34,865	9.5	3,653	2,316	847	213	119	79	79
		39,448	37,640	4.6	1,808	1,285	147	104	30	38	204
1926	County	104,551	101,502	2.9	3,049	2,550	136	273	3	17	70
		100,895	98,793	2.1	2,102	1,691	65	206	3	10	127

local *Limerick Chronicle* or the national *Irish Times* and *Church of Ireland Gazette*, to express or reflect their religious and political views.

For Irish Protestants, religion and politics were long intertwined. As the *Church of Ireland Gazette* noted in August 1920, they were ‘baptised not only into a religious faith, but into a political camp’ and, certainly in County Limerick, the great majority amongst all denominations displayed ‘unswerving loyalty’ to the Union and Crown.⁷ The ways in which this inter-identification of religion and politics defined the local revolutionary experience are explored in Section 1. As Ian d’Alton and John O’Callaghan observe in their essays, Protestant and Catholic church leaders did take pains to maintain a respectful, ecumenical front. However, inter-faith relations on the ground could be tested by the advance of revolutionary politics which saw unionism as illegitimate, its conflation with Protestantism in the nationalist public mind exemplified in October 1912 when Protestant business premises were attacked and Protestant clergymen assaulted in protest at an Irish Unionist Alliance rally in Limerick city. Protestants remained what d’Alton terms ‘a visible and often exposed’ community in the decade or so thereafter; their sharp fall in numbers notwithstanding, they ‘were still embedded as a “dominant minority”’ in terms of commerce, the professions, land ownership, and wealth, and this ‘prominent and visible socioeconomic presence only drew attention to [their] unpopular political opinions’. At its extremes, this negative attention took the form of boycott, intimidation, and/or attacks on Protestant persons and property in 1920–23. There were also disavowals of sectarianism from both sides at the time. Yet, as O’Callaghan has noted, the distinction between political opposition and religious intolerance was a fine one during this period, the targets of intimidation and attack being ‘individuals and groups whose Protestantism seemed inseparable from their culture, politics, social position, land ownership, and connection with the old regime’. What is clear is that the perception of a societal sectarianism to which these attacks gave rise fuelled involuntary migration which exacerbated Protestant demographic decline. Indeed, understanding what Protestants in Limerick, or elsewhere, *believed* was happening around them, or might happen around them, is as important as outlining what actually did transpire.

David Fitzpatrick’s own research in this area focussed on the Irish Methodist community, the changing demographic profile of which, he argued, provided ‘a microcosm, however imperfect, of the broader Protestant experience in the wake of revolution’ (others have, though, questioned the extent to which conclusions about Methodist populations can be applied more broadly).⁸ In County

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Limerick, the fall in the number of Methodists that the census recorded (36 per cent between 1911 and 1926) did approximate the national trend. Using contemporary church sources, Robin Roddie situates this decline within broader population trends across the city and county circuits between 1890 and 1930, explaining the comparative stability he finds in the latter with reference to ‘the embedded nature of its membership’ in largely Palatine communities who were ‘tied to the land’ and ‘provided mutual support and resilience’. However, like the city circuit, these communities experienced a sharp fall in membership between 1914 and 1925 which, reflecting Fitzpatrick’s findings on Methodist depopulation, Roddie primarily attributes to negative natural increase and traditions of migration within Ireland and further afield. The extent to which revolutionary violence contributed to this migration is unclear. Roddie finds no evidence that Limerick Methodists were subject to religious hostility and those who did suffer intimidation and/or attack in 1919–23 were targeted, on their own accounts, because of their loyalism. Furthermore, he establishes that none of the known victims of revolutionary violence migrated; all remained on in their homes, their experiences serving to deepen ‘the sense of solidarity among Methodists and [strengthen] their communal resilience’. Indeed, when the Methodist minister Rev. R.J. Elliott left Limerick in July 1922, he was presented with a decorative volume containing three of the works performed by the musical society he had helped to found; offered in thanksgiving and intended to serve as a ‘pleasant reminder of your time in Limerick.’⁹

Communal resilience is a central theme of the essays in Section II which focus on certain of Limerick’s Protestant institutions. In separate contributions, Craig Copley Brown looks at St Mary’s Cathedral and the Limerick Young Men’s Protestant Association (LPYMA), the latter founded in the mid-1850s to provide academic, sporting, and social facilities for Protestant men, and foster good relations between different denominations. Copley Brown uses entries from the minute books of the cathedral’s select vestry to ‘illuminate aspects of the Protestant experience’ during the revolutionary period. Depopulation presented the key challenge, with anxieties on this issue the basis of two of four entries he selects. The first, an address by the cathedral’s dean in September 1922, bemoaned the continuing emigration of Limerick Protestants, expressing especial concern about the reduction in numbers occasioned by the withdrawal of the British Army the previous March and its impact on attendance and finances. The importance of the British Army in Limerick Protestant life is also a key theme of Copley Brown’s discussion of the LPYMA. By 1916, it had become a very popular meeting place for soldiers seeking a recreational space outside of the barracks and they were

occasionally employed there as instructors in sports such as rugby, gymnastics, and cricket.

A second selection from the minute books, an address by Bishop Raymond d’Audemar Orpen in October 1922, laid bare the extent of his own concerns about dwindling numbers. He warned the select vestry that the cathedral could be taken out of Protestant hands by the new Irish government if attendances were not improved and ‘a much greater interest’ taken in its affairs by those who remained in Limerick. ‘It is clear’, Copley Brown writes, ‘that the clergy of the Diocese were very concerned for the position of the Church of Ireland, in what was now the uncertain future of the Irish Free State’. For, as another of his selections – the ‘Order of Service’ for the cathedral’s celebration of the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary in 1911 – underscores, St Mary’s had a been a thoroughly and outwardly loyal institution. The same was true of the LPYMA. It too presented a very public unionist front, emblemized in August 1902 by the draping of the exterior of its O’Connell Street premises with a huge banner reading ‘God Save The King’ to celebrate King Edward VII’s coronation. Then, its long-serving president, Archibald Murray, delivered the association’s loyal address. Shaken by attacks on its premises in spring 1922, however, he heralded the reorientation of its politics in October of that year, telling members that ‘they were ready as an Association to say that they wished every success’ to the new Irish Free State government, and that they ‘would work in every possible way to assist it in all its lawful endeavours’. This accommodation did not necessarily require a complete dismissal of old allegiances either, and the meeting ended with a rendition of ‘God Save the King’.¹⁰ Although concerns about the expropriation of St Mary’s Cathedral now appear overblown, its future as an institution was, to some degree, uncertain in 1922 as, certainly, was that of the LPYMA, which had lost significant membership and revenue when the British Army left. That both institutions adapted to changing circumstances and survived speaks to their resolve and resilience. Neither the British withdrawal nor the establishment of a Dublin government proved fatal.

Copley Brown’s fourth selection from the minute books – a letter from the architect, Conor O’Brien, on his proposed design for the war memorial commissioned from him by St Mary’s Cathedral in 1920 – illustrates the importance of the First World War in the local Protestant imagination. Unveiled in 1922, O’Brien’s was only one of a number of such monuments erected in Protestant churches across Limerick after the Armistice. One was also placed in the LPYMA; 164 of its members ultimately enlisted (representing almost one-third

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of the association's entire membership), thirty-one of whom died. O'Brien's letter also highlights some of the complexity of allegiances that could exist within the Protestant community, dominated as it was by unionism and loyalism. A home ruler who was a fluent Irish speaker, O'Brien was involved in the Irish Volunteers in Clare and captained his own boat, the *Kelpie*, in a gun running that he had helped to finance at Kilcoole, County Wicklow in August 1914. Afterwards, however, he served in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and his January 1921 letter suggests complicated, and possibly conflicted, views towards the memorial he was tasked with designing. O'Brien also had a place in the church community and was drafted in, alongside the artist William Orpen, to offer advice on the orientation of the pulpit at St Mary's in January 1923 (though their counsel appears not to have been heeded).

The First World War and its memorials are central to Patrick Comerford's essay, which takes as its focus Limerick's ordinary churches and their congregations in 1912–23. It is, Comerford argues, impossible to overstate the war's impact on Protestant Limerick. It 'blighted the lives of almost every Protestant family in [1914–18] and in the decades that followed', as the memorials erected still attest. Attacks on Protestant persons and property during the subsequent War of Independence and Civil War, inevitably perceived as sectarian, exacted a further emotional toll. Yet Comerford writes too of communal resilience, outlining how religious life for all Protestant denominations proceeded with a remarkable degree of routine throughout revolution and war. Again, we can see how churches across the city and county remained open for worship, diocesan organisations continued to meet, and social life was largely maintained. This determination to press on culminated in rapid acceptance of the new dispensation, through declarations of loyalty to the Irish Free State.

The essays in this section highlight the fact that Protestant Limerick comprised the full spectrum of socioeconomic class. Copley Brown notes that one of the aims of the LPYMA was to provide a social space for the lower-middle-class and working-class men excluded from more elite local societies such as the County Club. Hélène Bradley-Davies and Paul O'Brien shine a spotlight on the Protestant poor, a demographic also under-represented in a literature preoccupied with the 'crisis and decline' of the gentry. Their particular subject is the Alice Craven Trust which, established in the 1730s, dispensed charity to the 'poor inhabitants and housekeepers of the city of Limerick'. It was one of several Protestant charities operating in Limerick city in the early decades of the twentieth century, most

notably the Limerick Protestant Orphan Society (which emerged out of the cholera epidemic of 1832) and the Limerick Protestant Aid Society (LPAS), established in 1859, in part to provide a ‘shield of protection’ against proselytism by Catholic aid agencies such as St Vincent de Paul which actively ministered in districts where the Catholic and Protestant poor lived side-by-side.¹¹ In 1912–23, the Craven Trust’s primary function was the provision of annuities to needy Protestant widows nominated by either the bishop, the dean of St Mary’s, or the canon of St John’s Church of Ireland. These ‘Craven widows’ were not of necessity destitute; in many cases, they did have other income streams and the annuities were intended to help them maintain a desirable facade of ‘Protestant’ gentility. Like the LPAS, which insisted that recipients of its charity possess ‘a religious and respectable character’ and regularly attend church, the Craven Trust also operated as an instrument of what Bradley-Davies and O’Brien term ‘social control’ by discontinuing the annuities if its expectations regarding the widows’ respectability and religiosity were not met.¹² Despite the decline in Limerick’s Protestant population during the revolutionary period, the Craven Trust continued its work (several of the widows considered here received payments well into the 1920s and 1930s) and it is still in existence today.

No history of Protestant life in revolutionary Limerick would, however, be complete without reference to its landed gentry. For while they comprised but a small proportion of Limerick’s Protestant population in 1912–23, they contributed what Ian d’Alton terms ‘a large part of the noise’ around community affairs. Section III examines their experience of Ireland’s long revolution. Terence Dooley’s essay charts the erosion of their political and social ‘ascendancy’ since the 1880s, through both the inexorable advance of nationalist politics and the revolution in land ownership. This revolution began with the transfer to tenants of relatively small (often outlying) areas of Limerick estates under the terms of the land acts of 1885 and 1891 and culminated in 1903 when favourable terms offered by the Wyndham Land Purchase Act induced twenty-three Limerick families to sell. The 1912–23 period proved particularly tumultuous for the Protestant landed elite. High levels of enlistment meant that few families emerged unscathed from the First World War, and their houses and holdings became sites of contention as the Irish republican revolution gained pace. By the spring of 1920, arms raids on Protestant properties were routine, while violent attacks commenced in June when the first of seven Big Houses in Limerick, Mountshannon House in Lisnagry, was burnt out. These burnings, together with other forms of violence against Protestants in rural Limerick throughout 1920–23, were oftentimes informed by factors other than ideological politics, such as agrarian disputes and personal grievances. But, as

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Dooley observes, the great majority of Limerick's Big Houses were not burned out during this time and the reasons for which they were spared tell us as much about the dynamics between the landed elite and their neighbours in these districts as do the burnings in others.

Conor Morrissey details the manner in which certain members of Limerick's landed elite 'challenged the political and cultural orthodoxies' of their upbringing in attempting to come to terms with their changed situation. First, he examines the efforts of Lords Dunraven and Monteagle to maintain the relevance and clout of their class through the pursuit of 'conciliatorist' politics which sought cooperation between opposing interests – landlord and tenant, unionist and nationalist – to settle Ireland's constitutional crisis. Under this aspect, they abandoned uncomplicated unionist positions to campaign for varying degrees of devolution within the United Kingdom. While their lack of success in bringing onboard a critical mass of their peers presaged conciliation's failure, it was ultimately undermined by the altered demographic structure which resulted from Protestant depopulation, as the consequent electoral dominance of Irish nationalists obviated any need for accommodation with an increasingly enfeebled elite. Second, Morrissey explores the more radical departure from political orthodoxies effected by the next generation of Limerick gentry in swerving their loyalties to the Irish Republic. 'Republicanism among Protestants at this time was', he observes, 'often influenced by family tradition, and forged by strong ties of friendship and blood' and this was true of Limerick where several members of Monteagle's own family fully embraced its culture and politics. Most notable were his daughter, Mary Spring Rice, who was centrally involved in gun running for the Irish Volunteers at Howth and Kilcoole, and her cousins, the O'Briens of Cahermoyle. These included the above-mentioned Conor O'Brien and his half-sister, Nelly O'Brien, a passionate Irish language activist.

Life was not always easy for Limerick Protestants in the aftermath of the Irish Revolution. Dooley notes that most of the Big House owners who weathered it intact ultimately abandoned or sold up their properties, which became increasingly economically unviable to maintain, while Deirdre Nuttall draws attention to challenges faced by those Eugenio Biagini pithily termed 'small-house Protestants' – the 'small farmers and farm labourers, the urban working-classes, and lower-middle-class families' who formed the great majority of the Protestant minority in County Limerick at this time.¹³ For while wealthy families could remain 'almost entirely within Protestant circles for the purposes of education, business, and social

life’, those of more modest means or living in poverty were more likely to have to contend with lingering societal resentment over the continuing socioeconomic privilege of the former. This despite their ‘having much more in common’ with their Catholic socioeconomic equivalents than with their co-religionists amongst Limerick’s merchant and professional class. The lack of awareness amongst the wider majority population of the existence of working-class or impoverished Protestants contributed, Nuttall argues, ‘to a significant sense of being invisible and unseen’, compounding the marginalisation shared by many Protestants of all backgrounds in early independent Ireland by the overtly Catholic character of the state. The story of Limerick Protestants is, nonetheless, one of resilience during this period. They quickly, and in most cases easily, accommodated themselves to life within the new Ireland and, despite the persistence of sectarian tensions, what Nuttall terms ‘feelings of difference’ gradually waned as the decades progressed.

Today, the extent to which Protestants were once seen by Limerick’s Catholic majority as a community distinctly apart appears ‘quaint and peculiar’, the preserve of a period long past.

Notes

1. *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 28 July 1922.
2. See Chapter 4.
3. David Fitzpatrick, *Descendancy: Irish Protestant histories since 1795* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 7.
4. For histories of these congregations, see Dudley Levistone Cooney, *This plain, artless, serious people: The story of the Methodists of County Limerick* (Unknown, 2000); Hugh Lilburn, *Presbyterians in Limerick* (Limerick, 1946); Hiram Wood, *History of the Quakers of Limerick, 1655–1900* (Cratloe, 2020).
5. Peter Hart, *The IRA at war, 1916–1923* (Oxford, 2003), p. 237; *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 28 July 1922.
6. See, for example, Andy Bielenberg, ‘Exodus: The emigration of southern Irish Protestants during the Irish War of Independence and the Civil War’, *Past & Present*, 218/1 (2013), pp 199-233; Donald Wood, ‘Protestant population decline in southern Ireland, 1911–1926’ in Brian Hughes and Conor Morrissey (eds), *Southern Irish loyalism, 1912–1949* (Liverpool, 2020), pp 27-47.
7. *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 13 August 1920.
8. Fitzpatrick, *Descendancy*, p. 162. See also Eugenio Biagini’s review of *Descendancy*, *Irish Times*, 7 February 2015.
9. See Chapter 3 and Illustrations.
10. *Freeman’s Journal*, 23 October 1922.

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11. *Munster News*, 30 January 1864. Concerns about proselytism were also a motivating factor for the founders of the original Protestant Orphan Society, established in Dublin in 1828. June Eleanor Cooper, 'The Protestant Orphan Society, Dublin, 1828–1928' (Unpublished PhD thesis, NUI Maynooth, 2009), pp 48-9.
12. Mortimer Meehan, 'Philanthropy, self-help and religion in Limerick city, 1850–1900' (Unpublished MA thesis, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, 2009), p. 66.
13. Eugenio Biagini, 'The Protestant minority in southern Ireland', *Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), pp 1161-84, at p. 1172.

I

Politics and Revolution

CHAPTER 1

‘Unswerving Loyalty to the Throne’: Political Unionism and Protestants in Limerick, 1912–1922

Ian d’Alton

In 1912, Protestants outside the Ulster counties and some parts of Dublin formed a highly visible and often exposed minority. Institutionally and architecturally, Protestantism’s buildings were still prominent in the landscape – churches and cathedrals, schools, hospitals, Big Houses. In Limerick, the Protestant Young Men’s Association was located on the city’s ‘main’ street – O’Connell Street (formerly George Street) – a very obvious reminder that this was not a totally homogeneous society. Social and sporting activities were often played out on large and wide canvases – hunting and yachting, for instance. Youth organisations such as the Boy Scouts and the Church Lads’ Brigade often paraded publicly.

Above all, this minority of some 313,000 people – some 10 per cent of the population in what became the Irish Free State – was relatively prosperous and literate (about 10 per cent of Catholics were defined as illiterate in 1911 compared to under 2 per cent for Protestants).¹ In 1911 they comprised 75 per cent of bankers, 50 per cent of lawyers, 33 per cent of doctors, and 25 per cent of land managers, but only around 3 per cent of agricultural labourers.² Even after the demographic upheavals of the revolutionary period, they were still embedded as a ‘dominant minority’ – for instance, in 1926, Protestants, now with a population proportion of 7 per cent, still owned 27.5 per cent of farms over 200 acres.³ Likewise in the commercial world. Of the managerial classes in 1926, over 15 per cent were Protestant, with a heavy over-representation in certain industries, such as brewing and distilling, textiles, and construction.⁴ While dominated in southern Ireland by the Anglican Church of Ireland, Protestantism (a broad ‘church’) contained many smaller denominations and groups – Methodists and Presbyterians, Quakers around

Waterford, and Palatines in Limerick. A mischievous and busy intelligentsia was centred in the Church of Ireland and Trinity College, Dublin. The ghosts of the Irish gentry hovered over all – a minor proportion of the Protestant population, but still contributing a large part of the noise.

Economic, social, and cultural prominence had political consequences. It is not a perfect correlation by any means – like Irish nationalism in this period, Irish unionism was not monolithic or even coherent. Elizabeth Bowen's 'unmartialled loyalists'⁵ of the south and west, predominantly gentry, were quite dissimilar in class structure and outlook to the professional classes in Dublin and Cork, the farmers of Cavan, Monaghan, and Donegal, or the Protestant working class still to be found in Dublin.⁶ Nevertheless the political reality of Ireland before and during the revolutionary period was that, broadly, Protestants were unionists opposed to Home Rule while Catholics supported nationalism in its various guises. That had consequences. 'Keeping the head down' might have later featured as a motto of how Protestants were to conduct themselves in independent Ireland, but it was actually quite difficult to do that in practice. They were relatively easy to identify. A prominent and visible socioeconomic presence only drew attention to the unpopular political opinions of most Protestants.

These southern unionists could feel a chill wind blowing down their backs in 1912. The 1911 Parliament Act had removed the veto of the House of Lords; Asquith's Liberal government had the third Home Rule Bill passed by the House of Commons; and all going well it would become law in 1914. The Ulster unionists were making ominous noises about going it alone, a course of action already signalled as long ago as 1905 with the establishment of the Ulster Unionist Council. But even dyed-in-the-wool southern loyalists were coming around to recognising reality. Arthur Hugh Smith Barry of Cork, one of the landlord leaders against the Plan of Campaign land war in the 1880s and 1890s, spoke in the House of Lords in January 1913: 'We have done all that we can ... we in the South cannot say we will not have Home Rule, because we are in a considerable minority, and if Home Rule is forced upon us we shall have to bow under it and get on as best we can.' But he ended on a note of hope: 'I myself am not so much afraid of Protestants as such being trampled upon in the South as are many of my friends in Ireland'.⁷

Limerick encapsulates the paradox of visibility. Using religious affiliation as a reasonable proxy, we can put some numbers on the 'unionist' and 'nationalist' populations. In 1911, Protestants accounted for some 3,600 inhabitants of the city (9.5 per cent) and 3,000 (just under 3 per cent) in the county, representing about

4.7 per cent of the total population of both areas. This should have rendered the unionists virtually invisible. And the history of a *public* unionism in Limerick in this period – or rather its absence – bears that out. But as Protestants they were very visible indeed. As in southern Ireland generally, they held an economic position out of proportion to their numbers. In the city, large firms like Matterson, Shaw, and Denny were Protestant-owned, as was Cleeve's Condensed Milk Company of Ireland, mainly based in and around Limerick. In 1920 it was claimed that of fifty-six businesses on O'Connell Street, forty were Protestant-operated.⁸ While we do not have a breakdown by religion for 1911, in 1926, 25 per cent of farms in the county over 200 acres in size were still owned by persons of religions other than Roman Catholic.⁹ Relative prosperity was symbolised by car ownership; of seventy-eight motor cars in Limerick city in 1913/14, over fifty were owned by Protestants.¹⁰ All this testified to the relative prosperity of Protestants, emphasising a conspicuousness not immediately evident from the raw population proportions.

One other important element accentuated and amplified political and denominational differences – newspapers. It was common in this period for many towns to have rival 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' newspapers – examples are the *Irish Times* and the *Dublin Daily Express* versus the *Freeman's Journal* and the *Irish Independent* in Dublin; the bitter rivalry between the Protestant *Cork Constitution* and Catholic *Cork Examiner*; and in Wicklow, the *News-Letter* and the *People*. Limerick had the Catholic/nationalist *Limerick Leader* and the Protestant/unionist *Limerick Chronicle* (with directors from the Cleeve and Shaw families).¹¹ The political effect of these partisan papers was to cement and solidify politico-religious boundaries and redoubts and further emphasise the existence of a minority community.

While not representative of the generality of Protestants in the southern counties, another buttress to Protestant (and thus unionist) visibility were the remnants of the gentry and aristocracy – still significant economic and social players, arbiters of style and status. In 1876 eighteen landlords between them had owned nearly a quarter of the county. But things were changing. As a result primarily of the 1903 and 1909 Land Acts, by 1913/14 more than half of tenants had purchased their holdings, and by 1923/24 nearly 76 per cent of Limerick's land was in their hands.¹²

The gentry may have been relatively few in number – prominent members included Lords Dunraven and Massy, and Sir Charles Barrington, a prominent Freemason – but even in 1912 they still commanded a social cachet which saw

them accepted as the ‘natural’ leaders of Limerick unionism. And so it was that on the late afternoon of Thursday 10 October 1912, a ‘Unionist Meeting’ was held in the Theatre Royal in Limerick city ‘to protest against the Home Rule Bill now before Parliament’. It was organised by the Limerick branch of the umbrella group for Irish unionism, the Irish Unionist Alliance (IUA), and was one in a series of IUA-arranged meetings throughout Ireland in late 1912.¹³

The meeting, attended by some 2,000 people, was chaired by seventy-seven-year-old Lord Massy;¹⁴ the speakers were George Wyndham MP (former chief secretary of Ireland), Sir Charles Barrington, and solicitor Francis E. Kearney. The speakers largely rehearsed the economic arguments against Home Rule, which broadly had been the angle of attack from southern unionists since Gladstone’s original proposals on Home Rule. But despite the position of the monarch not being under threat from the bill, it was perhaps significant that Barrington’s anti-Home Rule motion was couched in royalist terms – ‘That we, the Unionists of Limerick, representing all classes and creeds, hereby declare unswerving loyalty to the throne.’¹⁵ Even in 1912 many Protestants may not have been convinced that a Home Rule Act would be a final destination and not just a staging-post on the road to full separation from Britain.

Irish cities and towns were often places of religious and quasi-religious disputation which sometimes led to violence – one example is the attack on Protestant street-preachers in 1890s Cork.¹⁶ And so if Limerick, as evidenced by the 1904 boycott of Jewish businesses, was a location, in Patrick Maume’s words, ‘for the intimidation of Jews and Protestant evangelists’,¹⁷ that did not make it particularly different from elsewhere on the island. In October 1912 this manifested itself in a riot provoked largely by police heavy-handedness after the unionist meeting.¹⁸ The riot died down; but yet again it typified a dangerous visibility for Protestants/unionists in an era of heightened political and religious tension.

As John O’Callaghan has vividly pointed out, Catholics and Protestants ‘often featured choreographed displays of mutual public respect, but also careful avoidance along parallel paths.’¹⁹ And while ‘loud pronouncements of tolerance continued throughout the revolution’,²⁰ at base an undercurrent of sectarianism and bigotry ran through Limerick society. Prominent nationalists condemned Protestant silence on charges of Catholic intolerance, and for not agreeing that ‘home rule had no terrors for them.’²¹ Protestant sponsorship of such as the religiously-oriented and militaristic Church Lads’ Brigade rather than the more secular Boy Scouts did not help.²² On the same day as reporting on the 1912 riots, Rathkeale Board of

Guardians strongly condemned an accusation of bribery, jobbery, and corruption levelled against Irish local government by one of its members, Stephen De Vere, seeing his comments as another way of discrediting Home Rule.²³

There is, however, a parallel narrative – one which goes some way towards explaining how Protestant and Catholic society in independent Ireland managed to reach a *modus vivendi*. This is an underestimated feature of politico-religious life in early twentieth century Ireland – a shared system of ‘Victorian values’, of conservatism in social and economic spheres, of the dangers posed by the dissolute and the radical. One Limerick example: in 1913 a campaign against ‘unwholesome literature’ was fronted jointly by the director of the Catholic Redemptorist Arch-Confraternity and the Church of Ireland dean of Limerick.²⁴

The October 1912 riots left the Protestant community in Limerick badly shaken – they ‘went back into their shell and did not attempt any more public demonstrations.’²⁵ Thus Limerick unionists kept a relatively low profile in electoral affairs when compared with unionist political activity in counties as diverse as Dublin, Cork, and Wicklow where Protestants variously stood for election at parliamentary level (Dublin constituencies), involved themselves in municipal politics as independents and ratepayer candidates (Cork), and were vigorous opponents of the third Home Rule Bill at local level (Arklow Urban District Council).²⁶ Francis Kearney, who attended the 1912 meeting, had stood for parliamentary election in 1900 for Limerick city – his 474 votes as against 2,521 for his nationalist opponent decisively saw the end of the unionist challenge for the seat.²⁷ No unionists stood in the constituencies of Limerick East or West after 1885. By 1916 it was conceded that political unionism at a parliamentary level was ‘practically submerged’,²⁸ with barely a hundred on the register for voters. In this, Limerick unionism was at the lower end of activity in constituencies outside Ulster.

Southern Protestants and unionists often fared electorally better at sub-parliamentary level, where a restricted franchise and sometimes a perceived competence (and just possibly a residue of deference) facilitated their election and appointment to county and district councils and boards of guardians. In contrast to counties such as Cork, Dublin, and Waterford though, Limerick unionists were thin on the ground at local political level. Lady Emly headed the poll for Limerick No. 1 District Council in 1911 – but she was a nationalist and a Catholic. John Barrington, brother of Sir Charles, was a county councillor, elected in 1902 for the relatively prosperous area of Castleconnell. Defeated in 1914, he was nevertheless elected in the same year a councillor for Glenstal on Limerick No. 1 District Council.

The city was barren ground and in the elections for Limerick Corporation in 1911, for instance, no unionists or Protestants were candidates. Only one unionist was elected in 1914 – and he was that *rara avis*, a Catholic, who later served as mayor in 1916 and 1917.²⁹

This was Stephen Quin, a prosperous merchant. His case points up the intertwining of religion and politics. Limerick was by then the sort of place that did not elect unionists. But if it did, they probably had to be Catholic. He was the only unionist on Limerick Corporation during the revolutionary period. He was also the last. Political unionism in Limerick – city and county – had been a frail flower for a long time. As a public political phenomenon, unionism in Limerick was effectively non-existent well before the ‘revolutionary period’ even got under way. What the historian is chronicling, therefore, is largely its absence, not its presence. After the Irish Convention, southern unionism began to split between pragmatists and die-hards.³⁰ That further weakened any political clout it might have been able to wield. With the War of Independence the expression of political unionism in much of southern Ireland went underground. By August 1920 the unyielding unionism expressed in the IUA meeting eight years previously had undergone considerable moderation. Sir Charles Barrington, along with Lord Monteagle (a member of Horace Plunkett’s Irish Dominion League), James Goodbody (president of the Chamber of Commerce), and Frederick Cleeve attended a meeting of Limerick businessmen (but mainly Protestants) calling for the abandonment of the Government of Ireland Bill and a dominion-style settlement, including full control over national finances.³¹

What the War of Independence and Civil War demonstrated was the vulnerability of the minority if the majority was provoked – but that minority was now ultimately defined in religious rather than political terms despite protestations to the contrary from all sides. Thus, alive to previous criticism of reticence on the matter, in April 1922 Barrington called a meeting of Limerick Protestants to condemn sectarian outrages in Belfast, possibly triggered by attacks on the properties of the Limerick Protestant Young Men’s Association in the city.³² There were the usual formulaic expressions of the good relations that existed between Catholic and Protestant communities. This articulation was probably the sensible course of action for a community attempting to preserve its livelihoods and economic position. When the Treaty was ratified, a meeting of the gentry in Dublin recognised the reality of the change of regime; Limerick’s Lord Dunraven said that he supported the provisional government, which stood alone against chaos.³³

Church of Ireland Archbishop Gregg of Dublin was prepared to accept the change on the basis that the old regime had been ‘constitutionally annulled.’³⁴ That was in the Protestant DNA; as the Dean of Ross said in 1933: ‘the Church of Ireland has remained true to the guiding principle of obedience to constituted authority since “the powers that be are ordained of God”’.³⁵

With the Treaty it could be said that southern unionism lost its *raison d’être*. What identity were its former adherents now expected to assume? Some ‘converted’ to nationalism; some withdrew into apolitical ghettos; some were forced out, or just left. But there was another path open to them. ‘Ex-unionists’ were just that, with nowhere to look but in the rear mirror. But as ‘Protestants’, they could chart the road ahead. They had been freed from an albatross of history. They could espouse liberal and moral causes and appoint themselves as the independent conscience of the nation.³⁶ The process was very gradual; residual loyalism still lingered, exemplified by the Limerick Mothers’ Union saying prayers on the death of King George VI in 1952.³⁷ The Limerick Protestant journey during the revolutionary period is a particularly apposite illustration of how that journey developed, from an uncompromising unionism in 1912 to pragmatically recognising the contemporary situation, and adapting to it a decade later. That made sense; it also prefigured how they would comport themselves in the future – not necessarily by flight and exile, but more positively by accommodation and acceptance. Limerick Protestants, like most in independent Ireland, were largely left in peace to get on ‘as best they can’.

Notes

1. Saorstát Éireann, *Census of Population, 1926, General Report, X* (Dublin, 1934), p. 46; *Census of Ireland 1911, General Report* (Cd 6663), p. 52 and detailed tables, no. 131, p. 238.
2. Martin Maguire, ‘The Church of Ireland and the problem of the Protestant working-class of Dublin, 1870s–1930s’ in Alan Ford, James McGuire, and Kenneth Milne (eds), *As by law established: The Church of Ireland since the Reformation* (Dublin, 1995), p. 202; Saorstát Éireann, *1926 Census, General Report, X*, p. 50.
3. R.B. McDowell, *Crisis and decline: The fate of the southern unionists* (Dublin, 1997), p. 5; Saorstát Éireann, *1926 Census, General Report, X*, pp 49-57.
4. Saorstát Éireann, *1926 Census, General Report, X*, p. 52; R.B. McDowell, *The Church of Ireland, 1869–1969* (London, 1975), pp 121-2. See also Ciaran O’Neill (ed.), *Irish elites in the nineteenth century* (Dublin, 2013), p. 26; idem, *Catholics of consequence: Transnational education, social mobility, and the Irish Catholic elite 1850–1900* (Oxford, 2014), pp 206-7.

5. Elizabeth Bowen, *Bowen's Court & Seven Winters* (London, 1984), p. 436.
6. For a discussion of the 'loyalist' classes at independence, see Ian d'Alton & Ida Milne, *Protestant and Irish: The minority's search for place in independent Ireland* (Cork, 2019), pp 6-16.
7. Hansard, House of Lords Debates, vol. 13, cc 770–3, 30 January 1913.
8. John O'Callaghan, *Limerick: The Irish Revolution, 1912–23* (Dublin, 2018), p. 122.
9. Saorstát Éireann, *Census of Population, 1926* (Dublin, 1929), vol. 3, *religion and birthplaces*, table 21, p. 137.
10. *Irish Motor Directory and Motorists' Annual, 1913–14* (Dublin, 1914), pp 329-31 The analysis is based upon 1911 Census returns and on surnames.
11. *Limerick Chronicle*, 5 November 1991.
12. O'Callaghan, *Limerick: The Irish Revolution*, p. 5.
13. See a reproduction of a poster for the meeting, at <https://limerick100.wordpress.com/2012/10/10/limerick-riots-october-1912/> (accessed 29 September 2023).
14. The sixth Baron Massy, 1835–1915, originally owned 8,500 acres in Limerick, as well as substantial lands in Leitrim and Tipperary. *Limerick Chronicle*, 30 November 1915; <https://landedestates.ie/family/574> (accessed 29 September 2023).
15. Quoted in a report of the meeting, at <https://limerick100.wordpress.com/2012/10/10/limerick-riots-october-1912/> (accessed 29 September 2023).
16. Ian d'Alton, 'From Bandon to...Bandon: Sectarian violence in Cork during the nineteenth century' in K. Hughes & D. MacRaild (eds), *Crime, violence, and the Irish in the nineteenth century* (Liverpool, 2017), pp 185-8.
17. Patrick Maume, *The long gestation: Irish nationalist life, 1891–1918* (Dublin, 1999), p. 50.
18. McDowell, *Crisis and decline*, pp 46-7.
19. See Protestant High Sheriff William Halliday moving a vote of congratulations at the Board of the Limerick Harbour Commissioners to Catholic Bishop Edward O'Dwyer on his silver jubilee. *Limerick Leader*, 12 June 1911. See also O'Callaghan, *Limerick: The Irish Revolution*, p. 16.
20. O'Callaghan, *Limerick: The Irish Revolution*, p. 22.
21. *Limerick Leader*, 25 July 1913, comment by the mayor of Limerick, Philip O'Donovan.
22. O'Callaghan, *Limerick: The Irish Revolution*, pp 14-15. In Ireland, the present organisation, with the exception of one branch in the Republic, is confined to Northern Ireland – see <https://www.clcgb.org.uk/index.php/find-your-local-clcgb> (accessed 29 September 2023).
23. *Limerick Leader*, 11 October 1912.
24. O'Callaghan, *Limerick: The Irish Revolution*, pp 18-19.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

26. Wicklow County Archives, Arklow Town Commissioners & Urban District Council Minute Books, 1878–1947: 6 May 1912.
27. B.M. Walker (ed.), *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801–1922* (Dublin, 1978), p. 360.
28. Patrick Buckland, *Irish unionism I: The Anglo-Irish and the new Ireland, 1885–1922* (Dublin, 1972), pp 38-9.
29. For Quin, see 1911 Census, ‘Residents of a house 9 in Ballynacourty (Castleconnell, Limerick) (<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Limerick/Castleconnell/Ballynacourty/622>) (accessed 29 September 2023); <https://humphrysfamilytree.com/Kickham/quin.html> (accessed 29 September 2023); *Limerick Leader*, 5 January 1914, 24 January 1916; R.B. McDowell, *The Irish Convention, 1917–18* (London, 1970), p. 175.
30. On the labyrinthine machinations within southern unionism in this period, see Buckland, *Irish unionism I*, pp 146-85.
31. *Limerick Leader*, 25 August 1920. Barrington’s daughter, Winifred, was shot in an IRA ambush in May 1921 when travelling with an Auxiliary friend. O’Callaghan, *Limerick: The Irish Revolution*, p. 95’.
32. Brian Hughes, ‘Unionists and loyalists in Limerick, 1922–23’ in Seán William Gannon (ed.), *The inevitable conflict: Essays on the Civil War in County Limerick* (Limerick, 2022), p. 93.
33. *Irish Times*, 20 January 1922.
34. Quoted in F.S.L. Lyons, ‘The minority problem in the 26 counties’ in Francis McManus (ed.), *The years of the great test, 1926–39* (Cork, 1967), p. 96.
35. C.A. Webster, ‘The Church since Disestablishment’ in W.A. Philips (ed.), *History of the Church of Ireland from the earliest times to the present day, vol. 3* (Oxford, 1933), p. 422.
36. See Ian d’Alton, ‘Constructing citizenships: the Protestant search for place and loyalty in post-independence Ireland’ in Steven Ellis (ed.), *Enfranchising Ireland? Identity, citizenship and state* (Dublin, 2018), pp 71-88.
37. *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 22 February 1952.

CHAPTER 2

‘We Were Obligated to Leave Our Beautiful Home’: Protestant Experiences of Revolution in Limerick, 1912–1923

John O’Callaghan

In 1911, the vast majority of Limerick’s population was Roman Catholic: 97 per cent in the county and 90.5 per cent in the city. Most Protestants were urban dwellers. There were 2,316 Episcopalians (almost exclusively members of the Church of Ireland) in the city, 847 Presbyterians, and 213 Methodists. There were 2,550 Episcopalians in the county, 136 Presbyterians, and 273 Methodists. Among Limerick’s small Quaker cohort, numbering twenty-five, the death rate had exceeded the birth rate in every decade since the 1830s. Of Limerick’s adult male Protestants, 23 per cent served in the Crown forces. The Protestant minority had been dwindling for decades and Protestant emigration was a long-term demographic trend that intensified in the crucible years of the War of Independence and Civil War. Between 1911 and 1926, the overall population of Limerick fell by 2 per cent. But its non-Catholic population dropped by 42 per cent, halving from 3,653 to 1,808 in the city and reducing by a third in the county, from 3,049 to 2,102. When British-born Protestants serving in the armed forces (1,010 people) are removed, the decline of the Protestant population in Limerick is still a striking 27 per cent. The decrease in urban areas was proportionately greater because the military were stationed in towns and cities, along with their families. The longer-term view is even more bleak: the Protestant proportion of the population of the city went from 11.5 per cent in 1871 to just 3.1 per cent in 1936.¹

As well as British withdrawal and emigration, land reform, negative natural change (a higher death rate than birth rate), and the disproportionate commitment of Protestant Ireland to the First World War were all relevant. There

was also anxiety among some Protestants about their place in independent Ireland. Emigration could be a personal preference, an economic choice, or a reaction to harassment or anxiety. Violence, whether minor or major, has the power to produce disproportionate emotional responses and levels of fear. Limerick Protestants did not suffer anything like the terror inflicted on Catholics by loyalist mobs and state forces in the new Northern Ireland, but some perceived themselves as victims of sectarianism at various points. The revolution was deeply unsettling for those who had an emotional or other practical attachment to the unionist – British – imperial dynamic. Not all Protestants were unionists or loyalists of course (and a small number were among the ranks of the Limerick IRA), but in certain instances, individuals and groups whose Protestantism seemed inseparable from their culture, politics, social position, land ownership, and connection with the old regime, suffered boycott, intimidation, and physical harm because of that status. And despite some common dynamics, Protestant experiences of the Irish Revolution were personal and localised more so than uniform.²

In 1876, just eighteen landlords owned 167,000 acres or 25 per cent of Limerick land between them. More than half of Limerick tenants (about 10,000 farmers) had purchased their land by 1913/14. This revolution in land ownership was eclipsing Limerick's old landlord class, the bastion of Ascendancy wealth and power. The political trappings of the old order were increasingly ornamental, decades of democratic reform having diluted and then dismantled their privileges. The Church of Ireland had been disestablished. Control of local government had been taken out of minority hands. The extension of suffrage had benefitted the Catholic majority. The landed gentry had always been a minority of the minority, and stereotypes of bogeyman landlords and Big House unionism and loyalism are of limited value in understanding developments in Limerick and elsewhere between 1912 and 1923. Most Protestants were not separated from their Catholic neighbours by estate walls. Rather, they lived and worked beside them in towns and cities.

Relations between Catholics and Protestants in Limerick often featured choreographed displays of reciprocal public respect. This relatively steady ground shifted dramatically when unionism became suspect, even treasonous in some eyes. Unionists and loyalists in Limerick and elsewhere in the south lacked the strength in numbers, social networks, and political power of their counterparts in more northern counties. Military connections or judicial appointments, for instance, rather than being sources of strength, became points of vulnerability. In Limerick,

these fault lines were sorely tested during the Home Rule crisis and further exposed during the War of Independence and Civil War.

There was little open dissonance on matters of public policy between the Catholic and Protestant church hierarchies in Limerick. Religious leaders, certainly those on the Protestant side, seemed to place a premium on harmony. Limerick's civic leaders, most of them Catholic nationalists, were also interested in presenting a united front, but strictly on their terms. They were more likely to demand confirmation of their generosity to the minority than to relax their political posturing. The Home Rule crisis of 1912 to 1914 reinforced the polarisation, siege mentalities, and mutual distrust often evident in local politics. Matters reached a significant escalation point on 10 October 1912, shortly after hundreds of thousands of Ulster unionists signed their Solemn League and Covenant and Women's Declaration against Home Rule. Then, senior Tory MP and former Irish chief secretary George Wyndham addressed 2,000 Munster members of the Irish Unionist Alliance at the Theatre Royal on Henry Street in Limerick city. Limerick's unionist community was not equipped to resort to the extra-parliamentary tactics adopted by their Ulster brethren, nor did they show any desire to do so. Whereas Ulster's Covenant had committed to using 'all means' necessary to defeat Home Rule, Limerick unionists would apply 'every legitimate means'. Charles Barrington of Glenstal Castle, provincial grand master of the Freemasons of Munster, opined that while 'the green flag' was 'in our hearts', 'sentiment will not pay the butcher's bill, or put money in our pockets, or buy boots and shoes for our children'. The Union guaranteed 'prosperity and contentment which is everything'.

The nationalist *Limerick Leader* had ratcheted up the tension beforehand, highlighting the unionist majority's persecution of Catholics in Belfast while lauding the tolerance afforded to Limerick's Protestants, and two nights of rioting followed the Theatre Royal rally. Protestant clergymen were assaulted. Business premises, mainly Protestant-owned, were attacked. Every window in the Protestant Young Men's Association (LPYMA) premises at 97 O'Connell Street was broken. Still, the unionist *Limerick Chronicle* suggested that 'here, all classes and creeds live on terms of the utmost amity and good will.' Limerick MP Michael Joyce's only parliamentary contributions on Home Rule occurred directly after this episode, and amounted to defences of the city against what he considered as slurs on its good name. The violence played into the hands of advanced nationalists; in the words of Irish Volunteer Jeremiah Cronin, Limerick's unionists 'went back into their shell and did not attempt any more public demonstrations'.

The perennial public validation of Limerick's ecumenical credentials meant all sides endorsed the fanciful notion that Limerick was free of prejudice, even in the face of cases of 'blind, stark, mad bigotry'. This was how a judge at Limerick Quarter Sessions in late 1916 described the objection by the select vestry of St Munchin's Church of Ireland to a Catholic headstone in its graveyard, the inscription on which carried a 'whiff of Purgatory'. He was overruled by an appellate judge at Limerick Assizes who saw no sectarianism. So, officially at least, there were no bigots in Limerick. Assertions of tolerance were loud and frequent. Discordant notes were struck more regularly by representatives of the majority, usually when they felt that Protestants were not strenuous enough in condemning bigotry on the part of their co-religionists elsewhere.

Many of the vexatious issues that troubled revolutionary Ireland are present in the sorry story of Peter Switzer, which involves a long history of local antagonism. The Switzers belonged to the Palatine farming community, who had come to Limerick from Germany in the eighteenth century. Most Palatines were Methodists but some, like the Switzers, had joined the Church of Ireland. The Switzers had lived in the townland of Moig, Pallaskenry, since the 1700s. Peter was born there in 1847. The family home was raided for arms by agrarian activists on at least three occasions in the 1800s.³ The Switzers' involvement in a 'land grab' in the late 1890s (purchasing a property in Castletown, Pallaskenry, from the bank after a farmer was evicted) did nothing for their popularity locally. In 1911, Peter, then sixty-four, lived in the family home with his sisters Susan (60) and Eliza (58). When the IRA raided the Switzers for arms in 1920, Peter shot and killed Ballysteen Volunteer Dan Neville, who was initially buried secretly on his own land before being interred in Castletown cemetery. IRA chief of staff, Richard Mulcahy, ordered that no reprisals be taken against Switzer, but his reprieve was only temporary. In January 1922, Peter was fatally wounded in a gun attack on the way to his sister Susan's burial at Castletown. He was buried in an unmarked grave in the grounds of St Mary's Cathedral. No one was charged with his killing. The Switzers were targeted in the first place for guns, but questions about land, politics, allegiance, identity, and religion all intermingled in this case – these were fine lines to tread. In early 1922, in a vacuum of law and order and a febrile political atmosphere of turmoil over the Anglo-Irish Treaty, whoever killed Peter Switzer did not care about trading softly. Eliza died in 1929, the last of the Switzers of Moig.

By mid-1920, many Limerick unionists were reconciled to the idea of

change in the nature of the Union. Prominent local Protestants followed Lord Monteaigle (Thomas Spring Rice of Mount Trenchard, Foynes) in opposing partition and calling for a 'full measure of self-government on Dominion lines within the Empire and with complete control of finance'. They once again registered their stance 'against any form of religious intolerance which has happened in other parts of Ireland, which, happily, does not exist in the South.' The interests of the middle classes of both denominations were gradually converging. Some of these individuals were cocooned by privilege and anxious perhaps to ensure that their economic interests remained as insulated as possible against the chaos whirling around them. Charles Barrington suffered his own terrible loss when his daughter, Winifred, was killed in an IRA ambush of her companion, a member of the Royal Irish Constabulary's Auxiliary Division, in May 1921.

At a Limerick Corporation meeting on 28 March 1922, Councillor Patrick O'Flynn singled out the Protestants of Limerick city (as he had done before), making the tiresome and inaccurate claim that not one had condemned the anti-Catholic violence occurring in Belfast. The LPYMA pavilion at Farranshone was burned down on 29 March; its O'Connell Street premises was damaged by gunfire on 30 March and a bomb on 2 April. Liam Forde, officer commanding the IRA's Mid-Limerick Brigade, denounced the attacks, as did the Corporation. On 1 April Barrington, as vice-lieutenant of the county, called on Limerick Protestants 'to condemn the outrages which have been perpetrated in Belfast'. The minority had 'thrived', he said, thanks to a tolerant environment. This was the same routine that had played out repeatedly over the years. It was perhaps motivated by some combination of genuine sentiment, a desire to pacify the majority, and an element of coercion. When Harry Vere White became Church of Ireland Bishop of Limerick, Ardfert, and Aghadoe in 1921, however, he was outspoken about the wrongs done to his congregation. He 'refuse[d] to be grateful to anyone other than the Almighty for permission to breathe the air of my native land'. The killing of thirteen Protestants over a few days in west Cork in April 1922 was 'a grim reminder of our helplessness', the bishop told his parishioners.

The outbreak of the Irish Civil War further complicated matters for Protestants. After Barrington and his peers realised in 1920 that the end of the Union was nigh, they did not abandon their old allegiance. While they supported the Treaty and the new regime, they were still wont to sing God Save the King when the opportunity arose in safe settings.⁴ West Limerick anti-Treaty IRA Volunteer Mossie Harnett recalled automatically equating Protestantism as antagonistic to

republicanism: ‘It was not a nice thing to do [seizing cars from worshippers at a church service in July 1922] but at this time we thought the Protestants were our enemy and on the side of the Free State’.⁵ The distinction between political and religious intolerance was a fine one and it would have meant little to those who were targeted. But the most frequent Protestant targets in Limerick during the Civil War were those who had previously expressed their loyalism through service in the Crown forces. By summer 1923, the amalgamation of parishes in Vere White’s diocese was necessary owing to loss of numbers through, he claimed, burnings and intimidation. Cara Griffin, wife of Major P.J. Griffin, left Riddlestown for England with her children in 1919. Major Griffin was serving abroad and Cara and the children were ‘constantly threatened and persecuted on account of our loyalty’; ‘we were obliged to leave our beautiful home & that caused my nervous breakdown ... & my boy’s breakdown.’⁶

A regular target of IRA violence was the Big House. In 1919–21 the logic for such attacks was clear – as a response to British burning of republicans’ houses; to prevent their use as a barracks for Crown forces; to force the enemy to allocate resources to their protection; and to undermine the old order and one of its most potent symbols. Two of the largest mansions in the country, Mountshannon House in Annacotty, and nearby Lord Massy’s Hermitage, Castleconnell, were burned down in June 1920, as was Doon’s Glebe House rectory in June 1921, in each case to deny potential use of the property to the Crown forces. Protestant landlords having mostly been bought out already, religion was a peripheral factor in the land division campaigns of the early 1920s, but they did feature populism, ideological and class-based violence, and some settling of festering personal scores. There were often a complex range of motives or conditions determining a particular action rather than a single defining feature. Military circumstance dictated that anti-Treatyites burned Glenduff Castle, near Broadford on 29 June 1922, after dislodging pro-Treaty National Army troops. But land hunger compelled the subsequent sale of the estate; a local woman reportedly commenting to the steward of the estate that the ‘Old Bitch [Frances Ievers] ... had the place long enough ... it was about time to get it divided up’.⁷ On the same day, the station-master’s cottage of Protestant unionist railway worker Edward Scales was burned in Foynes. This was part of the republican war on state infrastructure, but Scales believed his religion and politics were factors.⁸ Likewise, John Holmes, a court clerk from Galbally, felt that he was victimised because of his religion and his politics simultaneously, as if the two were one and the same: ‘I am a member of the Church of Ireland and it was because of my being a member of this church and being loyal to the British government that

I was boycotted'.⁹ When an attempt was made in March 1922 to burn Kilpeacon Rectory, the home of ex-army chaplain Canon Charles Atkinson, he assumed it was because he was 'loyal to the British Connection'.¹⁰ There does not appear to have been any such impetus, however, for the destruction by fire of the Methodist chapel at Ballylocknane, near Adare, on 28 December 1922. Burnings were spectacular, but ongoing low-level violence was also effective, gradually wearing down victims.

Both Catholic and Protestant communities in Limerick paid a heavy toll in the First World War, but joint sacrifice did not unite orange and green. Sectarian rather than civic markers continued as the most reliable symbols of identity. From early in the Home Rule crisis, it was made clear to unionists that their form of political dissent was not widely welcome in Limerick. They resigned themselves to this fact, adapted to the fluctuating political climates of the revolution and improvised, rejecting partition, and promoting dominion status for Ireland before pledging their fealty to the emergent Free State. Those who could not embrace the new dispensation after 1921–22 chose to leave Limerick; a number were not given the choice to stay and were forced out. The loss of so many Protestants, and their combined acumen and culture, was a tragedy for Limerick.

Notes

1. The source of much of the primary information in this essay, including the demographic detail here, is John O'Callaghan, *Limerick: The Irish Revolution, 1912–23* (Dublin, 2018).
2. For a wider discussion of this point, see, for instance, Brian Hughes and Conor Morrissey (eds), *Southern Irish Loyalism, 1912–1949* (Liverpool, 2020).
3. John Lucey, 'The shooting of Peter Switzer', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 53 (2013), pp 237–40.
4. Brian Hughes, 'Unionists and loyalists in Limerick, 1922–23' in Seán William Gannon (ed.), *The inevitable conflict: Essays on the Civil War in county Limerick* (Limerick, 2022), p. 98.
5. Mossie Harnett, *Victory and woe: The West Limerick Brigade in the War of Independence* (Dublin, 2002), p. 131.
6. British National Archives (TNA), Colonial Office files (CO) 762/116/19, Cara Griffin to the Irish Grants Committee, 5 February 1927. The Irish Grants Committee was a British government body which assessed compensation claims by southern Irish loyalists for losses suffered because of their politics between the Truce and the end of the Irish Civil War.
7. TNA, CO 762/185/6, Martin Kenny to the Irish Grants Committee, undated, enclosed with Frances Ievers to the Irish Grants Committee, 18 November 1928. See also TNA, CO 762/114/24, Ada Staveley: Irish Grants Committee application.

8. Gemma Clark, 'Everyday violence in Civil War Limerick' in Gannon (ed.), *The inevitable conflict*, pp 100, 102.
9. TNA, CO 762/177/4, John Holmes to the Irish Grants Committee, 20 August 1927.
10. TNA, CO 762/184/3, Charles Atkinson to the Irish Grants Committee, 17 July 1928.

CHAPTER 3

Limerick Methodism During the Revolutionary Years, 1912–1923

Robin Roddie

The Limerick Synod of the Methodist Church in Ireland ... is deeply convinced that the supreme public need of Ireland is peace, founded upon justice. The Synod, therefore, condemned [*sic*] all acts of violence by individuals or associations as being contrary to the law of God, entailing also in many instances the infringement of personal liberty, the destruction of property, and the death of men, women and children. The Synod deploras these acts, not only on account of the misery and ruin caused throughout Ireland, but because of the reproach which they bring upon a Christian nation.¹

At its May Synod of 1922, the Limerick Methodist District made a rare foray into public affairs by releasing a press statement in response to a period of violence that had escalated during the revolutionary period. ‘The members of the Methodist Church’, it said, ‘are a small minority of the population of Ireland, and it is with gratitude the Synod recalls the confidence, kindness and cooperation, which have been extended so generally to them by the majority of their fellow countrymen in the years gone by. The Synod earnestly trusts that the honourable, neighbourly relations that have existed in the past will be perpetuated in the Ireland of the future’.²

There is in this resolution barely concealed nervousness. References to acts of violence, infringement of liberty, destruction of property, and death, all preface a plea that ‘neighbourly relations’ would be maintained during a time of uncertainty. The events that led to the birth of the Irish Free State came as an existential challenge

for the majority of southern Irish Protestants, not least Irish Methodists whose links to Britain and particularly to British Methodism were especially strong.³ Despite some notable exceptions,⁴ the majority of Irish Methodists opposed Home Rule. As the ground shifted, Irish Methodists initially looked to their British colleagues to support their anti-Home Rule stance in the British parliament, but were shocked to discover that elements of British Methodism favoured Home Rule and a proportion actively favoured the nationalist cause.⁵ For those in the south of Ireland, the sense that they were on their own was exacerbated by the knowledge that their co-religionists in the north were abandoning them. To quote Desmond Bowen, ‘the people who took the Ulstermen seriously ... were the southern Protestants ... and they feared greatly the threat of partition’.⁶ During the revolutionary years, this apprehension was heightened by fear and alarm engendered by republican violence. Writing in retrospect in a book of essays by various ministers published in 1931, the Rev. Robert H. Foster, who had served with the Royal Army Medical Corps from 1915 until 1919, concluded his chapter on ‘Irish Methodism and war’ by turning to the position of Methodists in Ireland during the revolutionary years:

Not only had we had enough of war to last us a lifetime, but we had no sympathy with violence, or the achievement of any political status by non-constitutional methods ... We stood for Law – British Law – as long as England was constitutionally our ruler and on the changes of 1923, our people almost without exception stood for loyalty to the newly-constituted Governments of Ireland.⁷

This chapter will examine the impact of the revolutionary period on the rural and urban Methodist communities in Limerick.

The Limerick Synod at that period embraced counties Limerick, Clare, Galway, and Tipperary but, for the purposes of this essay, the focus is on Limerick. Although the county never had a large Methodist population, historically it played a significant role in national and global Methodism. John Wesley, Methodism’s founder, held his first Irish Conference in Limerick in 1753 and again in 1758 and 1760. It was from County Limerick’s Palatinate that the earliest Irish Methodists emigrated and contributed to the founding of American Methodism. In addition, several early important recruits to the ranks of Methodist preachers came from Limerick, such as the Irish-speaking former Catholic, Thomas Walsh (1730–59), and the first historian of Methodism, William Myles (1756–1828).

There are two main sources of published information on Methodist population

figures for the early twentieth century. These are the censuses of Ireland for 1901 and 1911, and the official membership returns in the Methodist Church in Ireland's annual *Minutes of Conference* for 1890–1930. In addition, there are manuscript roll books held at the Methodist Historical Society of Ireland (MHSI) archives that give the names of members recorded in each quarter for each congregation.⁸ Taken together, these sources provide complementary but differing perspectives on the makeup of the Methodist community of the period. At first sight, the number of Methodists returned in the 1901 census figures appears greatly in excess of the Church's own records. The 1901 census shows a total of 731 Methodists in County Limerick, compared to the Church's own record of 444. Some of this discrepancy is accounted for by the inclusion in the census of 121 Methodist soldiery in the city barracks of whom only five officers and four privates appear on the local Methodist class lists. More significantly, official Methodist membership only records adult communicant membership. So, for example, in 1901 the Holliday family of 33 South Circular Road in Limerick city is shown on the census as numbering ten Methodists, including eight children aged from three to fourteen years, but the official Methodist statistics list only the two adults as members.

Within County Limerick, Methodist families gravitated round two main areas, Limerick city and the Palatine communities of Rathkeale, Adare, and Ballingrane, and these two clusters provide contrasting patterns of membership growth and decline.

Rural Methodism

Compared to Limerick city, the membership of the Rathkeale, Adare, and Ballingrane Methodism societies remained relatively constant over a forty-year period between 1890 and 1930, except for the decade 1914–25. In 1890, there were 241 adult members and, twenty-four years later in 1914, there were 244. It is likely that this comparative stability was due to the embedded nature of its membership in communities tied to the land that provided mutual support and resilience. Of the sixty-one families recorded as Methodist in 1901, forty-three lived on farms or were engaged in occupations related to farming. Only three of the families included members born outside Ireland and a further four had members born in other Irish counties. The pattern changed, however, during the 1914–25 period, which saw membership drop from 244 in 1914 to 169 in 1924, before stabilising again. The imperfectly kept membership rolls are difficult to decipher and there is no single

cause to which the reduction of numbers can be attributed. Deaths, removals within Ireland, and emigrations to the USA and Canada are among the most frequently noted causes. In one instance, John Walter Teskey, younger son of a farmer, is listed as emigrating to Canada in June 1912, returning to Rathkeale in 1913, and emigrating again in 1915, having in the meantime married a Limerick girl – a necessary period, perhaps, of gentle persuasion.⁹



That there were underlying tensions during the revolutionary period is evident from the number of successful compensation claims made to the Irish Grants Committee (IGC) by Methodist families living in the Adare-Rathkeale-Ballingrane area.¹⁰ Each suffered some degree of loss through a mixture of malicious damage to crops, theft of food or of horses (in one case substantial loss of stock from a shopkeeper), and frequent instances of stolen bicycles.¹¹ Added to this was a sense of isolation due to the use of the boycott weapon against farms and businesses. More alarming were acts of violence against two families whose homes were attacked and, in the case of one of these, the Sparling family, two brothers held hostage overnight and a sister wounded. All who made claims to the IGC stated their belief that they were targeted because they were known to be loyalists. Despite the trauma experienced and, in one instance, long-term psychological damage as a result of the attack, none of the families who suffered were among those who emigrated.¹² Genealogical checks sought through various websites for family history indicate that all self-proclaimed victims of terror during this period continued to live at home and died eventually of natural causes. The experience instead appears to have deepened the

sense of solidarity among Methodists and strengthened their communal resilience. In a chapter devoted to his experience among the Palatines, the Rev. J. Arthur Hynes, who was stationed in Rathkeale and Adare from June 1924 to July 1927, never mentions the violence of the years just past, but records a time of spiritual renewal among his congregations.¹³

There is no suggestion in contemporary accounts that Methodists were a particular target of hostility during the revolutionary period. Nevertheless, it was within this closely-knit County Limerick community that the only example occurred of Methodist property being targeted. It took place at Newborough Chapel near Adare, which was burned on 28 December 1922. There was curious silence concerning the event, not only in local church records but also in the Methodist press. The only reference was in Dublin's *Freeman's Journal* of 29 December 1922, which reported that the building was gutted, and its harmonium and pews destroyed. Compensation was later claimed, and the chapel rebuilt in 1926.

Limerick City

In comparison with rural Methodism, there was greater fluctuation in membership statistics for Limerick city. Membership was marked by a period of relative growth either side of the turn of the twentieth century, rising from 128 adult members in 1890 to 215 in 1901 before peaking at 237 in 1911. Thereafter there was a continuous decline. Fifteen years after its high-water mark, membership had more than halved, so that by 1930 it stood at eighty-three. More so than in rural Limerick, emigration is recorded as a factor in membership decline. Emigration from Limerick was always a feature of official statistics, but for several generations the loss by emigration was in single figures. During the course of three years, however, between 1911 and 1913, thirty-eight adult members are recorded as emigrating. Amongst later deaths were two young Limerick-born Methodists who were killed during the First World War: Herbert Blennerhassett Mercier, a lieutenant in the Royal Air Force, was killed in action on 3 November, 1918 aged twenty, and Robert Neazor, who had emigrated to Canada in 1914, was killed in action at the Somme on 12 October 1918 aged twenty-four, while serving with the Canadian Cavalry Brigade.



Limerick city, as might be expected, had a much more transient population. Of the sixty-nine Methodist families listed in the city in the 1911 census, fifteen contained at least one member born outside Ireland and an additional twenty-six had members born in other Irish counties. It was largely from among these recently arrived, who had less of a stake in the community, that the first families appear to have left the city. Many of these were apprentices in local drapery firms, teaching assistants, commercial travellers, factory workers, and those employed on the railway or in shipping. There is no evidence that Methodist people were particularly subject to hostility or targeted during the revolutionary era. The one possible exception is the case of an English-born provision merchant, William Collier, who was attacked outside his home at 1 Crescent Avenue, Limerick city. *The Christian Advocate*, an Irish weekly Methodist newspaper, wrote of his death: ‘The life of Limerick city has known many outrages in the past couple of years, but the unwarranted attack on Mr Collier as he came home from work on New Year’s night, and almost outside the gate of his house, can only make one think of the depths to which men may sink’.¹⁴ The official notification of death recorded it as ‘homicidal’ due to ‘shock and haemorrhage following blow by blunt instrument’.¹⁵ No one was ever charged.

There were city Methodists who had an enduring stake in the life of the community and they, for the most part, remained apparently without molestation during the revolutionary years. It is worth noting some of these families as examples of those who thought of themselves as Limerick citizens and who continued to play a part in civic life. Mention has been made earlier of the Myles family. One

member who had dual Church of Ireland and Methodist membership was Zachary George Myles, JP (1812–97). He was a member of the town council from 1858 until 1888, and a member of the Limerick Bridge/Harbour Commissioners between 1868 and 1899. A member of the Bedford Row Methodist Chapel, he represented Limerick on nine occasions between 1834 and 1866 at the conferences in Dublin of the Primitive Wesleyan Methodist Society.¹⁶

The Barrington family had operated a firm of solicitors in the city for several generations and are best known for the founding of Barrington's Hospital in 1829. One of its number, Benjamin Barrington (1848–1919), was solicitor to the Great Southern & Western Railway Company for the district, one of the pioneers of the Free Library and Technical Education in Munster, and vice-president of the Limerick Protestant Young Men's Association.¹⁷ He was a member of the George Street Methodist Chapel where he served as chapel steward.¹⁸ The Christy family, likewise, lived in Limerick for well over a century. William Cather Christy (1862–1938) was head of a coach-building firm that became famous all over the county of Limerick and adjoining counties where the Christy 'traps' were to be seen. His obituary noted that 'when this mode of travelling began to be superseded by motor vehicles, Mr Christy was the first man in Limerick to introduce motor works.'¹⁹ By coincidence, one of the rare occasions that Methodists of the period were recorded as breaking the law was when Arthur Bingham Munce from Templemore, Tipperary, who worked as an engineer at a flour mill in Limerick city, appeared before the Court of Petty Sessions on 19 July 1907, charged with being the driver of a motor cycle driven unlawfully on the public highway at a speed in a manner dangerous to the public. He was fined five shillings with costs of one shilling.²⁰

Limerick benefitted also from Methodists who migrated to the city and made it their home. The Ipswich-born dentist, George Frederick Hare (1837–1908), arrived in the city in the mid-1850s, having married the daughter of a Waterford friend in Dublin in 1856. His first-born son, St George Hare (1857–1933), became a noted London painter, having studied at the Limerick School of Art under Nicholas A. Brophy. Among his works, he exhibited nude studies with religious themes such as 'The Victory of Faith', which may have been influenced by his Methodist upbringing, and that allowed some acceptance among more prudish viewers.²¹

There were others who attended Methodist services regularly and counted themselves part of the life of the Methodist community but who, for various reasons, declined the formal obligations of membership. One such unconventional

Methodist who moved to Limerick at the beginning of the twentieth century was the English-born Ernest Stevenson from Long Eaton. He did so at the invitation of Sir Horace Plunkett, who was then engaged in promoting the Cooperative Movement.²² In 1901, Stevenson became an accountant to the Irish Co-operative Agency Society at Limerick and, in time, its manager. He was elected president of the Limerick Chamber of Commerce in 1930 and of the Association of Chambers of Commerce of Ireland two years later. His obituary records that: ‘He was a noted economist who was consulted by national leaders on financial issues following the setting up of National Government. Though he took no active part in politics, he was on intimate terms with Ministers of State, some of whom he sheltered during the “Black and Tan” trouble’.²³ At his funeral service at Limerick Methodist Church his friend, the Rev. R. McC. Gilliland, spoke of him as a pacifist who abhorred violence. ‘He was’, said Gilliland, ‘labelled Socialist and Nationalist and ... in concern for his adopted countrymen he inaugurated allotment schemes that helped 700 poor families in Limerick to overcome the hardships of wartime’.²⁴

Few reminiscences by Limerick Methodists from the revolutionary period have survived. One who lived in the city from July 1919 until July 1922 was a Methodist minister, the Rev. Robert John Elliott (1873–1958). Two years before his death he gave an interview in which he recalled ‘those years that the Irish War of Independence and the Civil War followed their sometimes painful and sad course ... [his wife] with unruffled calm watching over the children in the Limerick manse as a barracks crackled to its doom in a devastating fire’.²⁵ A volume that belonged to Mr Elliott was received at the MHSI archives in Belfast in 2023. It is a beautifully embossed volume of three oratorios – Handel’s *Messiah*, Stainer’s *The Crucifixion*, and Gaul’s *The Holy City*.²⁶ It was dedicated to the Rev. R.J. Elliott, BA, by the Limerick Musical Society on his departure from the city in July 1922, expressing gratitude for the part he played in the society’s inception and for serving as its first president. It is a tribute to the human spirit that during the revolutionary years of 1912–23, when a large section of Limerick society felt under pressure, it should have seemed to them the right time for the formation of a musical society.

Notes

1. *Munster News*, 3 May 1922.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Nicola K. Morris, ““The band of our union is so close”: The relationship between British and Irish Methodism’, *Bulletin of the Wesley Historical Society in Ireland*, 13 (2007/08), pp 2-17.

4. See, for example, Nicola K. Morris, “‘A rara avis’”: Jeremiah Jordan, Methodist and nationalist MP’ in Ciaran O’Neill (ed.), *Irish elites in the nineteenth century* (Dublin, 2013), pp 248-58.
5. Morris, ‘The band of our union is so close’, p. 16.
6. Desmond Bowen, *History and the shaping of Irish Protestantism* (New York, 1995), p. 374.
7. R.H. Foster, ‘Irish Methodism and the War’ in Alexander McCrea (ed.), *Irish Methodism in the twentieth century: A symposium* (Belfast, 1931), pp 68-84, at pp 83-4.
8. Methodist Historical Society of Ireland Archive (MHSI), IrBE.MS.669.03, Limerick Membership Register and Quarterly Class Roll, 1904–21; MHSI, IrBE.MS.OS60.02, Adare and Rathkeale Membership Register and Quarterly Class Roll, 1901–30; 1901 and 1911 census for Ireland household returns (www.census.nationalarchives.ie).
9. MHSI, IrBE.MS.OS60.02, Adare and Rathkeale Membership Register, p. 25.
10. The applicants were Edward Doupe, John Doupe, Michael Heck Ruttle, Henry Ernest Shier, James Sparling, Arthur Edwin Switzer, and William Switzer Teskey.
11. In the case of Henry Ernest Shier, who had a bicycle worth £8 destroyed in August 1921, and a valuable replacement stolen in September, he resorted to buying an old one for £2 which was not taken. The Shier family had already experienced more substantial loss through the death of a family member, Christopher George, who was killed in action during the First World War, while carrying a wounded comrade under shell fire at Cambrai, France, on 30 November 1917, aged twenty-nine. As far as can be ascertained, he was the only Methodist killed in action from the present-day Adare-Ballingrane Circuit.
12. Sarah Sparling, who ‘became a nervous wreck from shock occasioned by these outrages’, died thirty-six years later on 17 November 1957 in Limerick Asylum. British National Archives (TNA), Colonial Office files (CO) 762/195/16, James Sparling to the Irish Grants Committee, undated, 1929.
13. J. Arthur Hynes, *Signs infallible: Six generations of Irish Methodism* (London, 1949), pp 69-78.
14. *Christian Advocate*, 31 January 1921. Searchable digitised copies of Irish Methodist periodicals including the *Christian Advocate* are available at <https://methodisthistoryireland.org/methodist-church-in-ireland-newsprint-digitization>.
15. General Register Office of Ireland, Deaths registered in the District of Limerick No. 3 (1921), no. 351, 5 January 1921.
16. *Christian Advocate*, 23 April 1897.
17. *Weekly Freeman*, 22 February 1919; *Limerick Chronicle*, 19 February 1919.
18. *Christian Advocate*, 24 January 1890.
19. *Irish Christian Advocate*, 17 June 1938.
20. National Archives, Court of Petty Sessions Order Books, CSPS1 vol. 6303, 10 July 1907.
21. <https://chrisbeetles.com/artists/hare-st-george-ri-roi-1857-1933.html>; <http://artothings.blogspot.com/2008/08/victory-of-faith.html> (accessed 30 September 2023).

22. 'He seemed a very bright fellow. He realised the weakness of the agricultural personnel – God don't I know it! – and the consequent danger to the government's economic development schemes'. National Library of Ireland, MS 49.803/140, Sir Horace Plunkett Papers, 1881–1932: Diaries, 26 May 1927.
23. *Stapleford & Sandiacre News*, 10 April 1954.
24. *Irish Christian Advocate*, 16 April 1954.
25. *Ibid.*, 3 August 1956.
26. MHSI IrBE.MS.669.11, Testimonial 'presented to Rev. R.J. Elliott, B.A. by the Limerick Musical Society, July 1922'.

II

Culture and Society

CHAPTER 4

Religious Life in a Changing Ireland: The Minute Books of St Mary's Cathedral, 1911–1922

Craig Copley Brown

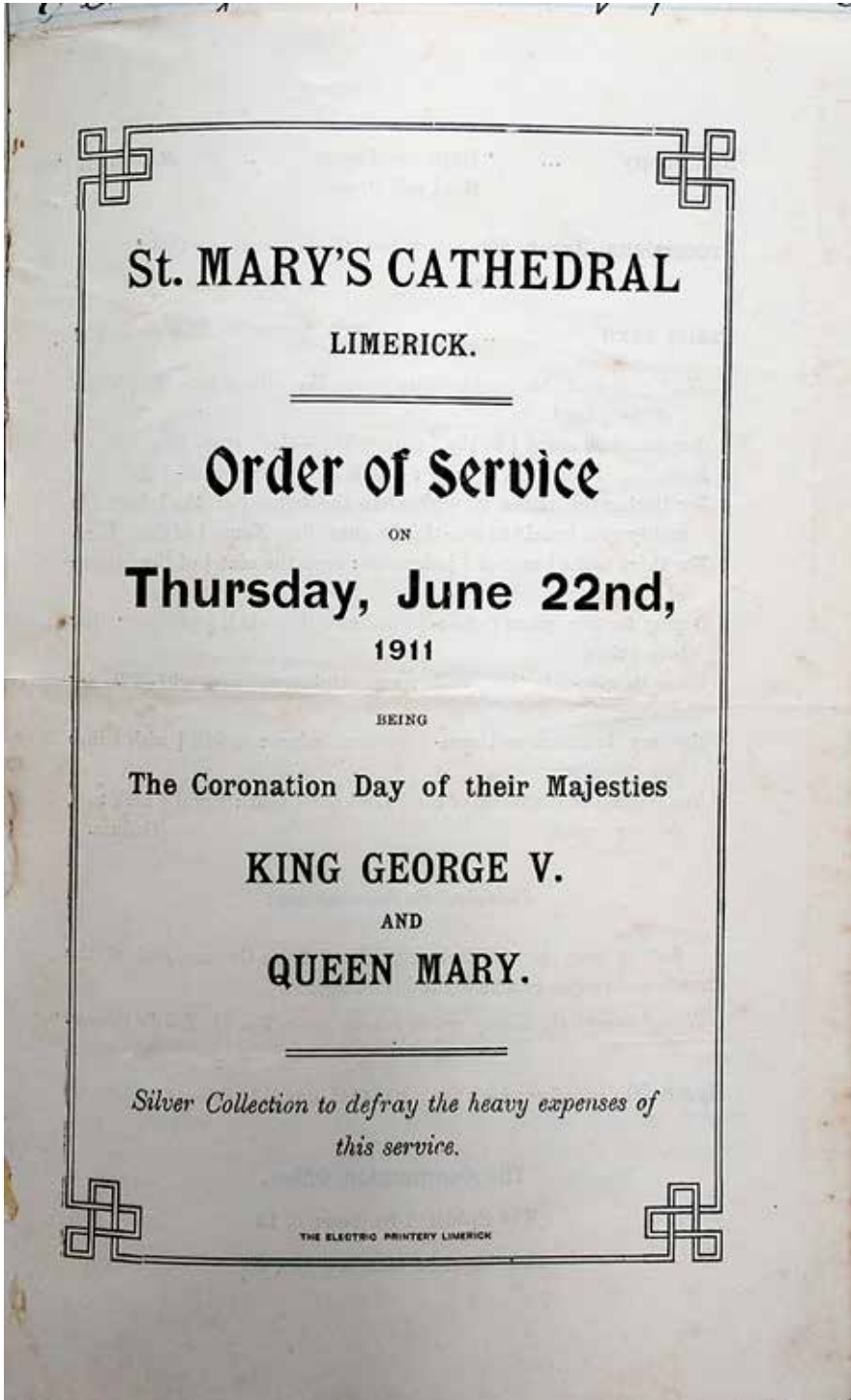
At the turn of the twentieth century, St Mary's Cathedral was the mother church of the Church of Ireland United Dioceses of Limerick, Ardfert, and Aghadoe. As the main seat of the bishop, and the administrative centre of the united dioceses, the cathedral played host to many gatherings, including church services, which engaged with civic, political, and public life in Limerick, and the wider region. This essay will examine a selection of entries contained within the minute books of the cathedral select vestry between 1911 and 1922, which illuminate aspects of the Protestant experience at the time, namely, loyalty to the Union, the First World War and its effects, and the tumult of revolutionary Ireland and its future.

1. Order of Service for the Celebration of the Coronation, 22 June 1911

This service, held to mark the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary, was an elaborate affair, orchestrated to publicly declare the loyalty of the Church of Ireland in Limerick to its sovereign and country. According to this order of service, the dean of Limerick, Lucius O'Brien, a son of the prominent Irish nationalist William Smith O'Brien, had requested a silver collection to help defray the enormous cost of hosting the event. For the occasion, the band of the 3rd Battalion Rifle Brigade performed in the grounds of the cathedral and sounded a fanfare during the service at the point where the new monarchs were proclaimed to the congregation. It was reported in the *Limerick Chronicle* that the dean had devoted a good deal of his sermon to explaining the significance and details of the coronation to the congregation present.¹

Spectacles such as this were not uncommon within the Church of Ireland during this period, with similar services having taken place in the cathedral at Limerick after the deaths of both Queen Victoria in 1901 and King Edward VII in 1910. St Mary's Cathedral, as the mother church of the Diocese of Limerick, Ardfert, and Aghadoe, was the obvious place for Anglicans in the mid-west to host such a public display of loyalty. Similarly, in February 1912, when a thanksgiving service was held in the cathedral with an 'over-flowing congregation in commemoration of the safe return of their Majesties the King and Queen from India'.² For this particular occasion, the band of the York and Lancaster Regiment assisted the cathedral choir in providing music for the service.

The cathedral archive from this time provides a tremendous insight into the relationship between the Church of Ireland and the British military stationed in Limerick city. Many service booklets which were retained for posterity, contain details of the regimental bands and soldiers who were selected to perform at services. Newspaper articles from the time record that soldiers were marched from their barracks to the cathedral each Sunday, often occupying the full capacity of the cathedral's seating galleries.³ The presence of these men undoubtedly contributed to the life of the cathedral, both socially and financially.



Symphony ... "HYMN OF PRAISE" ... *Mendelssohn*
Band and Organ

Processional Hymn 446 "Now thank we all our God."

Psalm cxxii ... *Macfarren in A*

I WAS glad when they said | unto | me : We will go into the | house
| of the | Lord.

2 Our feet shall stand | in thy | gates : 'O —Je- | rusa- | lem.

3 Jerusalem is built | as a | city : that is at | unity | in it- | self.

4 For thither the tribes go up* even the tribes | of the | Lord : to
testify unto Israel* to give thanks unto the | Name | of the | Lord.

5 For there is the | seat of | judgment : even the seat | of the | house
of | David.

6 O pray for the peace | of Je- | rusalem : they shall | prosper · that
love | thee.

7 Peace be with- | in thy | walls : and plenteous- | ness with- | in thy
palaces.

8 For my brethren and com- | panions' sakes : 'I will | wish | thee
pros- | perity.

9 Yea because of the house of the | Lord our | God : 'I will | seek to |
do thee | good. GLORIA.

Then shall the Precentor say :

Let us pray for our Sovereign Lord KING GEORGE, and of the
Church and people committed to his charge.

Here followeth the Litany up to, but not including, the Lord's Prayer.

Hymn 90 (second version). "O God, our help in ages past."

The Communion Office.

The Epistle 1 St. Peter ii, 13

The Gospel St. Matthew xxii, 15

Then followeth the Nicene Creed (Garrett in D)

Short Address by the Dean.

Then shall the Minister say unto the people

Sirs, I proclaim unto you **George**, the Son of His Majesty the late Most Gracious King **Edward**, as our undoubted King.

FANFARE OF TRUMPETS

God Save the King.

God save our Gracious King,

Long live our noble King,

God save the King !

Send him victorious,

Happy and glorious,

Long to reign over us,

God save the King !

O Lord our God, arise,

Scatter his enemies,

Make wars to cease ;

Keep us from plague and dearth,

Turn Thou our woes to mirth,

And over all the earth

Let there be peace.

Thy choicest gifts in store,

On him be pleased to pour,

Long may he reign !

May he defend our laws,

And ever give us cause

To sing with heart and voice

God save the King.

Anthem

... "Zadock the Priest." ...

Handel

Zadock the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed Solomon king, and all the people rejoiced and said Long live the King, God save the King, May the King live for ever. Amen. Allelujah.

Then shall be said special prayers.

Hymn (*during offertory*) "The King, O Lord."

- 1 The King, O Lord, in Thee this day rejoices,
Glad in the grace of Thy abundance poured,
Round him the people with ten thousand voices
Loudly proclaim th' anointed of the Lord.
His heart's desire by Thee is given,
His kingly state is sealed in heaven.
- 2 His head, heart, hands, Thy unction overflowing,
Hallows him now to sit upon his throne ;
Counsel and strength and government bestowing,
Making his kingship shadow forth Thine own :
Thy holy oil his face shall cheer,
And fill him with Thy holy fear.
- 3 A crown of gold upon his head is planted ;
Blessing and goodness on him Thou dost pour :
Life he has asked of Thee, and Thou hast granted
Long life for ever and for evermore :
Glory and worship now are his,
Pledge of an everlasting bliss.
- 4 O Lord our God, be with us for a Saviour,
As with our fathers in the ancient days :
Pardon our faults, and fashion our behaviour
After Thy laws and in Thy holy ways :
So shall the king rejoice, and we,
Thy people, go not back from Thee.
- 5 To God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
Glory and might and majesty belong ;
Praise we ascribe to His eternal merit,
Raising on high a nation's thankful song.
Our adoration we outpour,
Glory to God for evermore. Amen.

Benediction.

(*Stainer's Amen*)

Te Deum Laudamus *Martin*

Recessional Hymn 39 "All people that on earth do dwell."

After the Service

**The Band of the 3rd Bn. Rifle Brigade
will play in the Cathedral Grounds.**

1 Overture ... "Post and Peasant." ... *Suppe*

2 The Reminiscences of Verdi.

2. Letter from Conor O'Brien to Donogh O'Brien, January 1921

One of the more interesting figures in the recent life of St Mary's Cathedral was the renowned explorer, author, and architect Conor O'Brien (1880–1952). The connections between the cathedral and the O'Brien family stretch back over many centuries, and Conor undoubtedly left his mark on this ancient place during his life. In the early 1920s, he was nominated by the cathedral select vestry to design and oversee two important projects; the erection of a stone choir screen in the nave, and a memorial to parishioners who had died during the First World War. Conor O'Brien was born in 1880, the son of Edward William O'Brien of Cahermoyle House, and a nephew of Dean Lucius O'Brien. Having been born into an aristocratic upper-class family, Conor was fortunate enough to study at Trinity College, Dublin and the University of Oxford, before he began practicing as an architect in 1903. Like many of his kin, O'Brien had strong Irish nationalist political views and he supported the Home Rule movement during the early part of the twentieth century. He played a role in gun running for the Irish Volunteers in 1914 aboard his boat, the *Kelpie*; his knowledge of sailing was undoubtedly of great use to this cause. On 18 January 1921, O'Brien wrote to the secretary of the select vestry, Donogh O'Brien, to confirm his plans for the war memorial. He opens his letter by saying:

Here is your beastly war memorial. I had to alter it a bit from the first design – those twenty extra names will cost a good bit of money, and so I made the whole thing simpler and a little smaller. I hope it is no more ugly than is unavoidable.

As a veteran of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, it is interesting to see O'Brien scorn the notion of a memorial to his fellow countrymen in this way, particularly in a letter to the secretary of the select vestry, his prospective employer. His design for the memorial is simple but striking, consisting of an oblong limestone mural tablet with raised stone lettering in a Roman font and two inset bronze panels bearing the names in the centre. In the years after the end of the war, many Protestant parishes across Ireland began fundraising in earnest to erect memorials to parishioners who had served, and who were wounded, or killed. Limerick was no exception to this, with practically every Protestant church in the city erecting either a stone monument, or memorial scroll in memory of their parishioners who had served.

Monroe 13-1-21.

Dear Dough

Here is your beasty war memorial. I had to alter it a bit from the first design - those twenty extra names will cost a good bit of money & so I made the whole thing simpler & a little smaller. I hope it is not so unwearying than is unavoidable.

I think the best & probably the cheapest way of doing the names will be to have them in raised letters on a cast bronze plate. (You may notice the Railway Co's do all their notices this way, for cheapness in painting.) If it is done like this anyone could repolish it in a few minutes, when it gets shabby. Cutting all these letters in stone would be a big job, and gilding them a slow & troublesome one.

It seems to me that it would be much more distinctive to put the people's place of origin rather than their regiments on record. There might have been half a dozen Pot Comells in the regiment, for instance, and if they were only those few only joined up for the war their relatives probably would not have any particular sentiment about the regiment but would like to have them identified by the people of this country who are the ones who would see the Memorial House. I am aware that these things are not dictated by logic & common sense, so if you tell me to put in the regts I will do so, & if you insist that I must be snobbish & give

their rank, I will do even that. But to my mind
we do not want, especially at the present time, to
commemorate the Army, but certain of our neighbours
who have died.

I am going up to Dublin tomorrow & will see the
Gran-founders about the tablet with ~~names~~ the names.
& get an estimate from them. If you happen to be
passing Deane's you might get an estimate for the stone.
He can give it from the enclosed drawing which has all
the necessary details on it.

Yrs

Geo. O'Brien.

Transcription

18-1-1921

Dear Donogh,

Here is your beastly war memorial. I had to alter it a bit from the first design – those twenty extra names will cost a good bit of money and so I made the whole thing simpler and a little smaller. I hope it is no more ugly than is unavoidable.

I think the best and probably cheapest way of doing the names will be to have them in raised letters on a cast bronze plate. (You may notice that the Railway Co's do all their notices this way, for cheapness in particular). If it is done like this anyone could regild it in a few minutes, when it gets shabby. Cutting all those letters in stone would be a big job, and gilding them a slow and troublesome one.

It seems to me that it would be much more distinctive to put the people's place of origin rather than their regiments on record. There might have been half a dozen Pat Connellys in the Munsters, for instance, and if they only joined up for the war their relatives probably would not have any particular sentiment about the regiment, but would like to have them identified by the people of this county who are the ones who would see the Memorial. However, I am aware that these things are not dictated by logic and commonsense, and if you tell me to put in the regiments I will do, and if you insist that I must be snobbish and give their ranks, I will do even that. But to my mind one does not want, especially at the present time, to commemorate the Army, but certain of our neighbours who have died.

I am going up to Dublin tomorrow and will see the brass-founder about the tablet with the names and get an estimate from them. If you happen to be passing Doherty's you might get an estimate for the stonework. He can give it from the enclosed drawing which has all the necessary details on it.

*Yours,**Conor O'Brien*

1. Dean's Address to the Select Vestry, September 1922

At the September meeting of the cathedral select vestry in 1922, the Dean, the Very Revd. Thomas Aylmer Pearson Hackett, made a short address to members on the current political climate both locally and nationally and:

Drew attention to the very critical position of the Church of Ireland at present, and the fact that many Protestants were leaving the country. He said however that in the seventeenth century, the Church of Ireland had also been in a critical position and that he believed that, as had happened before, the Church of Ireland would retain its position and would ultimately prosper.

Continuing his address, the dean expressed concern over the withdrawal of the military from the country, and the knock-on effects of this both socially and financially within the cathedral parish. The most obvious effect of this withdrawal was the reduction in numbers attending the cathedral for worship, the military having contributed considerably to the congregational size over previous decades. As well as this, it was noted by the dean during the vestry's financial report that the estimated loss in church offertory collection owing to the withdrawal was estimated at £100 per annum. One can certainly argue that these changes would have contributed to a sense of anxiousness and unease within the cathedral community, something which is alluded to in the address by the dean. The military, by its very nature as a defensive institution, would have provided a sense of safety and security to the small community worshipping at St Mary's.

Easter Vestry	Easter General Vestry was held on Wednesday, 19 th of April 1922 at 4 o'clock in the chapter room for the combined parishes of St Marys, St Patrick & St Nicholas pursuant to notices posted on the church door on the two preceding Sundays. There were present the Dean in the chair Rev A. L. Henson, Miss Ingram, Mrs Day, Miss G. Hayden, R. Sheen, C. H. Pitt, Mr. Shaw & Mr. O'Brien.
Dean's Address	The Dean in the course of a short address drew attention to the very critical position of the Church of Ireland at present & the fact that many protestants were leaving the country, he said however that in the 17 th century the Church of Ireland had also been in a most critical position & that he believed that, as had happened before, the Church of Ireland would retain its position & would ultimately prosper.
Sunday Observance	The Dean mentioned that he in common with other British clergy was distressed at the neglect of Sunday observance among many of the young people.
Church Accounts	The various Church accounts were then presented & gone into & were considered on the whole satisfactory.
Choir Fund.	Rev A. L. Henson & Mr. Shaw presented the Choir Fund Acct & in connection with
Withdrawal Military	this account the Dean mentioned & there would probably be a falling off in the offertory of nearly £100 a year owing to the withdrawal of the Military.
	Mr. Mr. Shaw presented the Institution Fund Acct. for St. Marys, & Mr. Sheen the Acct. for St. Patrick's.
	Mr. C. H. Pitt furnished the Economy Fund Acct. directions were given that these accounts be printed.
Bells	The Secretary mentioned that one of the large bells was badly cracked, he was directed to make enquires from Messrs

Transcription

Easter Vestry

Easter General Vestry was held on Wednesday 19th of April 1922 at 4 o'clock in the chapter room for the combined parishes of St. Marys, St. Patricks & St Nicholas pursuant to Notices posted on the church door on the two preceding Sundays. There were present the Dean in the chair Rev. A.P. Hewetson, Miss Gwynn, Mrs. Day, Miss J. Haydn, A. Shier, C.H. Fitt, M.D. Shaw, DR O'Brien.

Dean's Address

The Dean in the course of a short address drew attention to the very critical position of the Church of Ireland at present & the fact that many protestants were leaving the country he said however that in the 17th century the Church of Ireland had also been in a most critical position & that he believed that, as had happened before the Church of Ireland would retain its position & would ultimately prosper.

Sunday Observance

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Church Accounts

The various Church Accounts were then presented & gone into & were considered on the whole satisfactory

Choir Fund

Withdrawal of Military

Rev A.E. Hewetson & Mr. Shaw presented the choir fund Acct & in connection with this account the Dean mentioned & there would be probably be a falling off in the offertory by nearly £100 a year owing to the withdrawal of the Military Mr. M.D. Shaw presented the Sustentation Fund Acct. for St. Marys & Mr. Shier the Acct for St. Patricks

Mr. C.H. Fitt furnished the Economy Fund Acct directions were given that these accounts be printed.

Bells

The Secretary mentioned that one of the large bells was badly cracked, he was directed to make enquiries from Messrs. [page ends]

The Lord Bishop's Address to the Select Vestry, October 1922

The Lord Bishop, Raymond d'Audemar Orpen, made a similar, but more pointed, address to the vestrymen of the cathedral at its October meeting the same year:

He pointed out the grave danger that St Mary's Cathedral might be taken out of the hands of Protestants, he emphasised the necessity, if the members of the Church of Ireland wished to retain their Cathedral, of better attendances at services, and generally of a much greater interest being taken by the Chapter, and the parishioners in the diocese generally.

He continued by expressing his concern at the lack of involvement in the cathedral's musical interests, especially the choir. His remarks were stark in their nature and intended to force members of the vestry to consider the immediate future, and the dangers posed by Irish independence to the Church of Ireland, although this is never clearly stated. His presence at this meeting is unusual, since bishops were not part of the administrative structures of parish vestries, reserving their attendance and remarks for diocesan or chapter meetings. Since disestablishment in 1869, the Church of Ireland has been forced to fend for itself both in terms of its own administrative structure, as well as financially, so these comments at any other time may be seen as simple house-keeping remarks from the bishop. However, in the context of the address which had been given a month earlier by the dean, it is clear that the clergy of the Diocese were very concerned for the position of the Church of Ireland, in what was now the uncertain future of the Irish Free State.

October 15th
1922

The Lord Bishop addressed the Vestry & he pointed out ^{the grave danger that St Mary's Cathedral might be taken out of the hands of the Protestants}, he emphasized the necessity, if the members of the Church of Wales wished to retain their cathedral, of better attendance at services & generally of a much greater interest being taken by the Chapter, the parishioners & the ~~the~~ diocese generally. The Lord Bishop made the following suggestions for consideration of the Vestry:

- (1) that a ladies guild should be formed so that various ladies should arrange to ~~the~~ supervise the cleaning of the Cathedral.
 - (2) that if it was found practicable there should be ~~an~~ once a month popular service on Sunday after noon & that the other ^{parish} churches should ~~be~~ in the city ^{might perhaps} ~~be~~ closed on that Sunday after noon.
 - (3) that a meeting of the Chapter of the Cathedral & of those persons interested in this matter should be held with a view to seeing if it was thought that monthly services as he suggested would be appreciated.
- The Lord Bishop then withdrew & the ordinary business was proceeded with.

The Dean mentioned that there were several small bits of work to be completed by Miss Toberty, finishing the concrete flooring near the radiators & round some of the piers & also altering the position of the pulpit. Mr. Oscein was directed to point out these things to Miss Toberty & if possible to get Mr. Toberty to ~~alter~~ ^{alter} the pulpit free of charge.

The Dean read letter from Mr. H. Stewart offering to give his services voluntarily & asking to be ~~now~~ appointed to the office of leader of the choir vacated by Mr. R. Evans & suggesting that the ~~the~~ money formerly paid as salary to Mr. Evans

might be utilized to encourage more regular attendances of musical practices in the Cathedral a letter was handed in from the Presentor proposing that Miss Curran & Stedil be granted £6 a year each for their services in the choir.

The Secretary was directed to inform Mr. Stewart that they were pleased to appoint him as leader of the choir & to express to him their very great thanks for the interest he had shown in & the trouble he had taken in connection with the Cathedral Music.

The Dean mentioned that there was in the Bank a sum of about £13.0.0. to credit of the old Organ Fund. It was proposed by Mr. Angley & agreed that this money be transferred to the credit of the Choir Fund.

J. Rylands & W. Ashlett

Jan. 26. 1923

Cathedral Chapter
26/1/1923

A meeting of Cathedral Chapter was held at 4 o'clock on 26 Jan 1923 in the Chapter room.

There were present: The Dean in the chair also Presentor Atkinson. Rev. R. E. Herbertson. Rev. de Unsworth. Messrs. Day, Chancellor S. Drain. ~~Mr. Dray~~ Rev. Canon Herbertson. Mr. Day. J. Hayden. C. O. Fitt. Wm. Shaw. Dr. O'Brien.

Proposed
alteration of
Pulpit.

Mr. Fitt proposed & the Presentor seconded that the font pulpit be altered so that it should stand out at an angle from the wall as he stated that it did when in its original position. Mr. O'Brien mentioned that this was contrary to the original plans formed by the vestry & contrary to the ~~of~~ advice of both Canon C. O'Brien & Mr. Orpen, the latter having come from Dublin especially to be consulted on this matter among others. The matter was fully discussed & finally the vestry decided that the pulpit should be altered as proposed by Mr. Fitt. Chancellor Drain & Mr. O'Brien voted to contrary. The Secretary stated that he had received two tenders for ^{repairing} the glass looking

Transcription

October 13th 1922

The Lord Bishop addressed the Vestry & pointed out the grave danger that St. Mary's Cathedral might be taken out of the hands of the Protestants, he emphasized the necessity, if the members of the Church of Ireland wished to retain their Cathedral, of better attendances at services & generally of a much greater interest being taken by the Chapter & the parishioners & the diocese in their Cathedral generally. The Lord Bishop made the following suggestions for consideration of the vestry.

(1) That a ladies guild should be formed so that various ladies should arrange to supervise the cleaning (& general tidiness) of the Cathedral.

(2) That a meeting of the Chapter of the Cathedral should be held with a view to seeing if it was thought that monthly services as he suggested should be appreciated.

The Lord Bishop then withdrew & the ordinary business as proceeded with. The Dean mentioned that there were several small bits of work to be completed by the Messrs. Doherty viz furnishing the concrete flooring near the radiators & round some of the piers & also altering the position of the pulpit. Mr. O'Brien was directed to point out these things to Messrs. O'Doherty & if possible to get Mr. Doherty to alter the pulpit free of charge.

The Dean read letter from Mr. H. Stewart offering to give his services voluntarily & asking to be appointed to the office of leader of the choir vacated by Rev. R. Evans & suggesting that the money formerly paid as salary to Mr. Evans, might be utilized to arrange more regular attendances at musical practises in the Cathedral.

A letter was handed in from the Precentor proposing that Messrs. Morrow & Stockil be granted £6 a year each for their services in the choir.

The Secretary was directed to inform Mr. Stewart that they were pleased to appoint him as leader of the choir & to express to him their very great thanks for the interest he had shown in & the trouble he had taken in connection with the Cathedral music.

The Dean mentioned that there is in the Bank a sum of about £13.0.0. to credit of the old Organ Fund. It was proposed by Mr. Augley & agreed that this money be transferred to the credit of the Choir Fund.

[Sgd.] T. Aylmer P. Hackett.

Jan. 26. 1923.

Cathedral Chapter 26/1/1923

A meeting of the Cathedral Chapter was held at 4 o'clock on 26 Jany. 1923 in the Chapter room.

There were present. The Dean in the chair also Precentor Atkinson. Rev. A.E. Hewetson. Rev. de Massy. Chancellor P. Swain. Rev Canon Robertson. Mr. Day, J Hayden.

C.H. Fitt, M.D. Shaw, DR O'Brien.

Mr. Fitt proposed & the Precentor seconded that the pulpit be altered so that it should stand out at an angle from the wall as he stated that it did when in its original position. Mr. O'Brien mentioned that this was contrary to the original plans passed by the vestry & contrary to the advice of both Messrs. C. O'Brien & Mr. Orpen, the latter having come from Dublin especially to be consulted on this matter among others. The matter was fully discussed & finally the vestry decided that the pulpit should be altered as proposed by Mr. Fitt. Chancellor Swain, Mr. DR O'Brien voting to contrary.

The Secretary stated that he has received two tenders for repairing the glass broken [page ends].

Notes

1. *Limerick Chronicle*, 22 June 1911.
2. *Ibid.*, 13 February 1912.
3. These seating galleries, once situated over the aisles of the cathedral, are no longer extant.

Illustrations



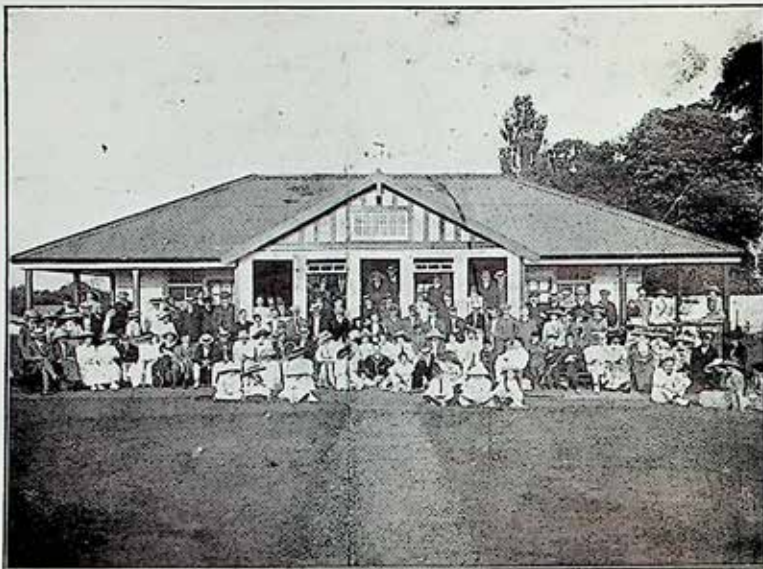
The LPYMA celebrates the coronation of King Edward VII, 9 August 1902
(courtesy: Ludlow Collection, with thanks to Sharon Slater)



The Limerick branch of the Church Lads' Brigade preparing for a march, undated, c. 1906-10 (*courtesy: Ludlow Collection, with thanks to Sharon Slater*)



The reading room of the LPYMA clubhouse, 97 O'Connell Street (*courtesy: Ludlow Collection, with thanks to Sharon Slater*)



THE NEW PAVILION,
L.P.Y.M.A. LAWN TENNIS AND CRICKET CLUB.
Photograph taken on the occasion of a visit from the Church of Ireland Young Men's
Association, Cork, Whit Monday, 1912.

The LPYMA pavilion, Ennis Road, Limerick, 27 May 1912

(courtesy: LPYMA Archive)

No Mrs Martha Sheedy (Deceased) 23 Sept 1914
 Received from Trustees of Craven Charity
 for Mrs R. D. O'Brien & Co. the Sum of
Two Pounds
Shillings and — pence being payment
 of 1 quarter annuity due 25 Sept 1914.
Mrs Sheedy having died 14 July 1914.
£ 2 N. Morrow

Craven Charity receipt for Mrs Martha Sheedy

(courtesy: Mary Immaculate College)

THE PALACE,

HENRY ST.

LIMERICK.

27. Nov 1912

Dear Sir

I have nominated

Mrs Benson
Alphonsus Street
Limerick

to the vacancy in
The "Craven Fund"

would you kindly
note - and send
me the amount

Yours faithfully
D O'Brien

The Bishop of Limerick nominates Mrs Mary Benson as a beneficiary of the Craven Charity (courtesy: Mary Immaculate College)



First World War memorial in the Church of Ireland, Rathkeale
(courtesy: Patrick Comerford)



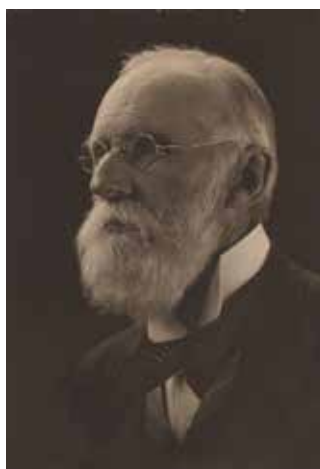
First World War memorial by Conor O'Brien, St Mary's Cathedral
(courtesy: Patrick Comerford)



Memorial to Limerick members of the Howth and Kilcoole gun running team, Mount Trenchard churchyard, Foynes. Mary Spring Rice and Conor O'Brien are buried within
(courtesy: Patrick Comerford)



Windham Thomas Wyndham-Quin, 4th earl of Dunraven, 1841–1926
(open source)



Thomas Spring Rice, 2nd Baron Monteagle of Brandon, 1849–1926
(open source)



Glenduff Castle, Broadford, seized by anti-Treaty IRA forces, 29 June 1922, and burned
(courtesy: Karen Ievers)



Mountshannon House, Lisnagry was burnt down by the IRA on 14 June 1920
(photograph: William Garner)



Rev. Robert John Elliott (1873–1958), Methodist minister in Limerick city, 1919–22
(courtesy: Methodist Historical Society of Ireland)

Limerick

Rev R J Elliott B.A.

July 23rd 1922.

Ross and

Dear Mr Elliott.

Now that the Limerick Musical Society is, much to its regret, about to lose your valuable support and assistance, we desire to place on record our grateful appreciation of all that you have done for the Society since its inception, and especially during your term as first President.

This volume containing the three works performed by the Society since its formation will be to you, we hope, a pleasant reminder of your time in Limerick, and of the respect and esteem in which you are held by all sections of the Protestant community of this city.

With every good wish for your continued success and prosperity

we remain

Dear Mr Elliott

W Phillips

Treas.

Very sincerely yours.

John W. Harris

H M Stewart

Sec.

President

Testimonial to Rev. Robert John Elliott on his departure from Limerick, 23 July 1922
(courtesy: Methodist Historical Society of Ireland)

CHAPTER 5

Muscular Christians: The Limerick Protestant Young Men's Association, 1912–1923

Craig Copley Brown

The Limerick Protestant Young Men's Association (LPYMA) is one of the oldest social and sporting institutions in Limerick. It was founded to provide a means for the Protestant young men of the city and its immediate environs to access appropriate sporting, academic, and social pursuits, and to create good fellowship between members. The Association was formally established on 5 April 1853 at a meeting convened by the Lord Bishop of Limerick, Ardfert, and Aghadoe, William Higgin, at the Leamy Literary Institute on Hartstonge Street, attended by approximately 300 supporters.¹

The establishment of an accessible organisation which could strengthen relations between Protestants of different denominations at a parochial level was key to ensuring the survival of a distinct culture or sense of identity. The impetus for the founding of the Association lay in the successful formation of a Limerick branch of the Young Men's Christian Association, an international Christian body established in London in 1844, which was independent of any particular church. While it proved popular, its lack of denominational demarcation raised suspicion amongst long established clerical interests. Instead, the LPYMA would be underpinned by the support of the clergy of the main Protestant denominations in the city, namely the Church of Ireland, and the Presbyterian and Methodist churches. Its governing authority consisted of clerical members from each of these parishes within the city, alongside an elected president and vice-presidents. These officers tended to be influential businessmen and prominent socialites. Members of well-known

Limerick families such as Shaw, Matterson, Murray, and Barrington, to name but a few, often formed part of this executive. The primary focus of the LPYMA, as stated by Bishop Higgin at its inaugural meeting, was to provide members with the means to improve their mental, moral, physical, and spiritual roundedness. This ethos had led to the coining of the term ‘Muscular Christianity’ during the mid-nineteenth century and the establishment of a movement, popularised among English public schools, which sought to promote its ethos combining Christian values, with the strength, discipline, self-sacrifice, and patriotism associated with sport and athleticism. The LPYMA offered a new and all-encompassing social and sporting forum to working- and lower-middle-class Protestants who had been excluded from earlier social movements, such as the Limerick County Club which favoured the male business and ‘county’ élite.²

While it experienced steady growth in membership during its first decades, the Association’s activities and following increased dramatically during the period from 1890 to 1922, owing to a variety of social, political, and religious factors. In a period that came to be dominated by the movement for Irish independence, the Association found itself caught between the old world of empire and union, and a new and uncertain future separated from Britain both politically and financially. As Irish Protestants continued to explore the importance of identity and belonging during this time of transition, the history of the LPYMA provides insights into the ways in which smaller urban Protestant communities dealt with the challenges and changes of a new political landscape. This essay shall explore some key events which highlight the nature of Protestant sociability within the Association and in Limerick during this period.

Military support and growth

The success of any sporting and social club is undoubtedly reliant on its ability to recruit and retain young and active members. As a major garrison town, Limerick had a considerable soldier population, especially during the years of the Boer War and the First World War, when the Muscular Christianity movement had reached its peak across much of the world. The steady increase in military numbers in Limerick from 1913, and throughout the First World War, provided a promising opportunity for the Association to grow its membership. By 1916, it was a popular meeting place amongst both officers and other ranks who had been posted in the city. Its headquarters at 97 O’Connell Street provided members with access to

an extensive library, along with a reading room, study, gymnasium, lecture hall, and sundry meeting and social rooms, where games of draughts, chess, and table tennis were enjoyed.³ The Association's committee actively encouraged academic study amongst its members, providing seasonal lecture series on topics ranging from geography and science, to history and theology. In the context of soldiers stationed in Limerick, the variety of pursuits provided by the Association around the time of the First World War enabled them to integrate within the local Protestant community at a social level to a greater extent, something which may not have seemed possible within the confines of a barracks.

This growth, however, came at a time of profound change and disorder, both locally and nationally, with religious and political divides widening. Initially only interested in more sedentary pursuits, the Association began to promote sporting activities among its members from the 1880s. Among the strongest supporters of the Association during this transitioning period were the city's soldiery. The growing significance of sports, especially rugby, cricket, hockey, and gymnastics was mainly the doing of these soldiers who brought expertise and experience, and who undoubtedly were interested in recruiting young and capable men from the Association's ranks to join their own. Regimental drill sergeants were employed as sporting instructors, and soldiers often frequented the clubhouse in the evenings, to avail of the gymnasium, billiards room, and smoking lounge.⁴

During the First World War, the Association was very active in its support for the war effort. By 1916, the committee had made the decision to offer honorary membership of the Association to any Protestant soldier stationed in the city, of which many availed.⁵ It was reported in March 1919 at a meeting of the Association's War Memorial Committee that over half a million individual visits to the clubhouse had been made by soldier members since the beginning of the conflict. The Association was also active in fundraising for the war effort through donations to the Prisoner of War Funds and the War Supply Depot.⁶

It was during this time too that it experienced major growth in membership, as soldiers sought a separate social meeting place where recreational activities could be enjoyed. By 1913, the membership of the Association was approximately 474: the net loss of members through enlistment for the army resulted in a decrease to 455 by 1916. Over the course of the war, 164 members enlisted with the colours, almost a third of the Association's entire membership. Among that number were five local Church of Ireland clergymen who fulfilled chaplaincy roles within the army.⁷ By 1920, however, the total number of members stood at 532, the largest

since its foundation. It is evident from examining the annual reports from this period that this was seen as a major achievement for the Association and its committee, as there had been a benchmark set to admit 500 members since its inception. Moreover, considering that the total male Protestant population of Limerick city in 1911 was 1,999, and that this figure included those too young to join, it may be safely assumed that membership of the Association stretched to the vast majority of Protestant families in the city. The reasons for this increase, while not outwardly stated in the annual reports, was most likely due to the continued presence of the military and the growth in popularity of the Association's sporting activities, which had begun to expand into lawn sports such as tennis, croquet, and bowls.⁸

During those years of conflict, the names of members who enlisted in the army were included in the annual report to members; the honorary secretary having ensured that any gallantry or other awards made on the battlefield to members were noted for the benefit of their peers at home. These reports provide tremendous insight into the esteem in which they were held by the Association. For example, it was reported with great solemnity at the 63rd annual general meeting on 17 October 1916 that four members had lost their lives on the battlefield; among them was 'Arthur S. Hetherington, who was killed while bringing in a wounded comrade, he was former Hon. Secretary of your Gymnastics Class, a class which has the proud record that all its working members joined the army'.⁹ These reports of casualties at annual general meetings continued throughout the duration of the war, to the extent that they were given a separate sub-section within the annual report from the president. Overall, even though thirty-one members were killed during the war, less than half of these deaths were reported annually to members. This, it seems, was to highlight the contributions of particular members who had been heavily involved in different clubs within the Association prior to enlisting.

Irish independence and the effects of war

Throughout its existence, the Association, while being an outwardly strong supporter of the union with Great Britain, did not, in general, encourage political debates or party politics at official meetings. Its outward admiration and support for the Union was especially clear during the visits to Ireland of the future Kings Edward VII in 1885 and George V in 1897. On each occasion, the Association's president, Archibald Murray, was chosen to deliver a loyal address on behalf of the members. The exterior of the clubhouse on O'Connell Street was elaborately

decorated for the coronation of Edward VII in August 1902, with a large crown, flags, and a banner which read 'God Save The King' all adorning the front of the building. Debates surrounding the second Home Rule Bill in 1893 were among the very few public political issues entertained by the Association's committee; these conversations being short-lived owing to their divisiveness and unwanted attention from the general public. An example of this can be seen from the annual general meeting held that year in which a prominent Quaker and local business man, Joseph Fisher Bennis, tabled a motion 'to have the Association record its protest to the introduction of the Government of Ireland Bill (the second Home Rule Bill) by Mr Gladstone'. The motion was immediately challenged by Murray, who stated that he was opposed to the introduction of politics into the Association, which was reported as having met with the approval of those members present.¹⁰

As Ireland moved beyond the turbulent period of the First World War, the club's executive was forced to publicly comment on the position of their members within the debate for Irish independence. Murray, as president, made it clear in an address to a large meeting of members in October 1922, in the midst of the secession of the twenty-six counties from the Union to form the Irish Free State, that they now had a duty to assist their new state and its administration in as best a Christian manner as they could.¹¹ This public statement was a profound departure from the earlier views of the Association, which had once encouraged those among its ranks to enlist and fight for King and Country, and had, as a result, seen thirty-one of its members killed in action. The lack of public commentary on the independence movement from the Association can be attributed to the unease felt within its community, especially in the context of its premises coming under attack on several occasions. A malicious fire at the Association's pavilion at Farranshone on 29 March 1922 caused in excess of £1,000 in damage, and two attacks with gunfire on 30 March, and incendiary bombs on 2 April, at its O'Connell Street headquarters suggests that the Association and its members were seen as targets by some opponents, be they politically or religiously motivated.¹² These attacks were publicly condemned by local IRA commandant Liam Forde, who called them 'cowardly and unjust', stressing the point that they were not committed under official IRA sanction.¹³ The annual report of the Association, made in October of the same year, makes no explicit mention of any attacks on the club, rather pointing out that the 'handsome pavilion' at Farranshone, had been completely destroyed by fire on 29 March, and that an insurance claim had been lodged. Within a matter of days, sporting events had recommenced at the grounds and, by the following month, a 'temporary structure' had been erected to facilitate members' needs.¹⁴ In the same

annual report it was noted that members of the LPYMA photographic society were unable to make any field trips during the season, ‘for reasons only too well known to us all’.¹⁵ This rather thinly-veiled comment suggests that even mentioning the tense political climate at the time was unwelcome, and potentially dangerous. The Association, as Limerick’s most popular social gathering place for Protestants, and members of the military, was an obvious target, attacks on which could be used to threaten, and impose fear, as well as furthering a sense of insecurity.

Conclusion

Following the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, the landscape in which the Association found itself was radically different from that which existed only a few years previously. It became clear that the place, acceptance, and strength of Protestant sociability, which had been a small but robust part of Limerick society for almost a century, might be at risk. Protestants had to consider what role they might play in a society and a state where their position was increasingly viewed as a legacy of a British past. Archibald Murray rather eloquently and humbly put it in his October 1922 address to members that:

The Government they now had in the country was constituted by Divine right and that they were placed there to obey and keep its laws ... as far as he knew, the State had not given them up to the present any particular song or battle-cry, and, consequently, they could not avail themselves of it, but he thought they were ready as an Association to say that they wished every success to the Government now constituted in this country, to pray that God’s blessing might rest upon it, and that they would work in every possible way to assist it in all its lawful endeavours (applause).¹⁶

In many ways, this signalled the end of a specific era for associations such as the Limerick Protestant Young Men’s Association. They would now have to learn to adapt and integrate into the newly established Irish Free State where they would no longer have what they had regarded as the protection and familiarity of the Union. In this case, the Association did successfully adapt, and remains active to the present day.

Notes

1. *Limerick and Clare Examiner*, 27 September 1851.
2. University of Limerick, Glucksman Library Special Collections and Archive, Leonard Collection, B/3332, *The County Club, Limerick (founded 1813): A short history of a hundred years of club life* (Dublin, 1913).
3. Limerick Protestant Young Men's Association Archive, Limerick (LPYMA Archive), *Sixty-third annual report of the Limerick Protestant Young Men's Association*, 1916.
4. LPYMA Archive, *Fifty-seventh annual report of the Limerick Protestant Young Men's Association*, 11 October 1910, pp 8-16.
5. LPYMA Archive, *Sixty-third annual report of the Limerick Protestant Young Men's Association*, 1916.
6. Ibid.
7. LPYMA Archive, *Order of service from the unveiling of the LPYMA Great War Memorial*, 9 December 1920.
8. LPYMA Archive, *Sixty-seventh annual report of the Limerick Protestant Young Men's Association*, 12 October 1920.
9. LPYMA Archive, *Sixty-third annual report of the Limerick Protestant Young Men's Association*, 1916.
10. *Cork Constitution*, 30 March 1893.
11. *Freeman's Journal*, 23 October 1922.
12. *Limerick Chronicle*, 30 March 1922.
13. Ibid., 4 May 1922.
14. LPYMA Archive, *Sixty-ninth annual report of the Limerick Protestant Young Men's Association*, 1922, pp 9-11.
15. Ibid., p.13
16. *Freeman's Journal*, 23 October 1922.

CHAPTER 6

Church-goers in Limerick During War and Revolution

Patrick Comerford

Throughout the First World War, the War of Independence, and the Civil War, Protestants of all denominations throughout Limerick city and county kept their churches open, maintained their church and social life, and proclaimed constantly their goodwill towards their neighbours and, after the Treaty, their loyalty to the new Irish Free State. Throughout the Civil War, cathedral services continued in St Mary's, together with ordinations and Holy Week addresses, Sunday services continued in parish churches, and diocesan organisations, including the diocesan synod and council, sought to maintain a semblance of normal church life.¹ But this period was also marked by a number of attacks and killings that were inevitably perceived as sectarian.

Members of the Church of Ireland, Methodists, and Presbyterians in Limerick identified overwhelmingly with the British cause in the First World War, and few showed any open sympathy with Irish nationalism and independence. Those members of the Church of Ireland who identified with nationalism at the time stand out as exceptional, although none could be regarded as a marginal member of the Church of Ireland. Conor O'Brien (1880–1952), skipper of the *Kelpie* during the Kilcoole gun running in August 1914, was a grandson of William Smith O'Brien and a nephew of both Lucius Henry O'Brien, who was the dean of Limerick from 1905 to 1913, and the Revd Robert Malcolm Gwynn (1877–1962), who gave the Irish Citizen Army its name. His cousin Mary Spring Rice (1888–1924), a crew member of the *Asgard*, was a bishop's granddaughter. Sir Thomas Myles (1857–1937), who skippered the *Chotah* in the Kilcoole gun running, was a brother of the dean of Dromore, the Very Revd Edward Albert Myles (1865–1951).²

However, as war memorials in churches throughout Limerick attest, during the revolutionary decade the vast majority of ordinary Protestant church-goers identified not with independence but with family members who enlisted during the First World War.

Experience of the First World War

The experience of war blighted the lives of almost every Protestant family in these years and in the decades that followed. The men who signed up and fought in the main fields of battle, such as Flanders, the Somme, the Gallipoli landings, and Thessaloniki, included about one hundred former members of the Church Lads' Brigade, a church-based youth organisation in the Limerick city parishes. It is difficult to overstate the impact of the war on Protestant family life in Limerick. The Heaphy family, for example, paid a heavy price with the deaths of three brothers: Private William Heaphy (28) died of his wounds on 7 May 1916; Gunner Frederick Heaphy (17) was killed on 3 May 1917; and Lance Corporal John Eyre Heaphy (33) was killed on 7 April 1918. A fourth brother, George Heaphy, survived the war. All three Heaphy brothers who died are named on the war memorial in St Mary's Cathedral, along with two Fogerty brothers, two Hackett brothers, and two brothers from the Wills family. When injured men died at home, their families and churches went to great lengths in organising their funerals. Lieutenant William Brabazon Owens died of his wounds at the age of twenty on 25 June 1916, and received a military funeral in St Mary's Cathedral. The funeral cortege was headed by a firing party and an army band; his coffin, covered with the union flag and his sword, belt, and cap, was borne on a gun carriage.³

After the First World War, war memorials were erected in St Mary's Cathedral and in ordinary churches throughout Limerick. The cathedral war memorial was unveiled in 1922 and dedicated 'In memory of the Men of Thomond fallen in the War: 1914–18.' The forty-three names are listed alphabetically, without class division or separate categories for 'officers' and 'men'. Lord Glentworth (Captain Edmond William Claude Gerard de Vere Pery), the twenty-three-year-old heir of the Earl of Limerick, was killed in action on 18 May 1918; on the monument, he takes his place alphabetically between a Gabbett and a Gore. In contrast, the war memorial in Holy Trinity Church, Rathkeale, has only seven names, but separates the officers from the men. Their deaths are seen as heroic and are imbued with religious significance, emphasised in the heading and the Biblical

citation: ‘1914–1918, To the Glory of God and in loving memory of the following officers and men from this parish who laid down their lives in the Great War ... Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.’

Fear among parishioners: The revolutionary years

After the First World War, and as the War of Independence intensified, the Church of Ireland faced difficulties in maintaining diocesan activities. The 1920 diocesan report, for example, refers to ‘the difficulties of travelling, and the early hour at which people must be in their houses.’⁴ Peter Switzer, an elderly, seventy-five-year-old bachelor, was shot and fatally wounded on 10 January 1922 while he was attending the funeral of his sister in Castletown Church near Pallaskenry.⁵ When a memorial service for Mrs Maria Lindsay (whose murder as an informer by the Cork No. 1 Brigade IRA on 11 March 1921 caused outrage) was held in St Mary’s Cathedral on 28 January 1922, 450 military of all ranks and ninety Royal Irish Constabulary members attended. In many ways, this service also served to express public anguish in the immediate aftermath of the death of Peter Switzer.⁶ A week later, on Sunday 5 February 1922, the war memorial in St Mary’s Cathedral was unveiled at a service attended by 800 people. It was unveiled by Brigadier General Louis Wyatt and was dedicated by the newly-elected Bishop of Limerick, Ardfer, and Aghadoe, Harry Vere White.⁷ Wyatt was the commanding officer of the troops in Limerick, but was probably invited to unveil the monument because he had become a popular public figure as the general who brought the ‘Unknown Warrior’ from France for burial in Westminster Abbey the previous November.

As the conditions for civil war unfolded across the land in spring 1922, the British Army in Limerick was confined to barracks, and the *Church of Ireland Gazette* described ‘a strange and dangerous condition of affairs’ in the city.⁸ Yet, throughout the 1922–23 period, religious services continued in St Mary’s and in parish churches, while the diocesan organisations such as the synod and council worked to maintain the normal routines of church life.⁹ But on 28 March 1922, an attempt was made to burn Kilpeacon Rectory. Canon Charles Atkinson, who was also precentor of Limerick, may have been singled out because he had been an army chaplain during the First World War. Bishop White visited Kilpeacon the following Sunday and urged calm, saying that Church of Ireland members were ‘law-respecting, God-fearing’ people who showed their patriotism in ‘their frank and loyal acceptance of a new form of Government.’¹⁰ In the days that followed,

the pavilion of the Limerick Protestant Young Men's Association (LPYMA) in Farranshone was burnt to the ground, bullets were fired through the windows of its premises on O'Connell Street, and an attempt was made to bomb the building.¹¹ Protestants in Limerick called a public meeting on 4 April 1922 to express their disgust at sectarian outrages in Belfast. The meeting was chaired by Sir Charles Barrington, who – despite the earlier murder of his daughter in May 1921 – praised the toleration shown to Protestants in Limerick and insisted that they 'had thrived' in a Catholic community. William Waller declared that Protestants – 'a small, a very small, minority' – carried on their daily lives without interference. Their sentiments were echoed by Captain James O'Grady Delmege, who declared that Protestants in Limerick had 'received nothing but kindness, courtesy and goodwill at the hands of their fellow-countrymen.'¹²

Brave efforts were made to continue, not only with church-going, but also with the social life of church members. The LPYMA felt confident enough to hold a sports day at its Ennis Road grounds on 27 April 1922 'after the lapse of some years.'¹³ That weekend, however, the diocesan curate, the Revd Ralph Harbord, was shot and seriously wounded on the steps of his father's rectory in west Cork. In a sermon the following Sunday, White referred to this shooting, and the related murders of thirteen Protestants in the Dunmanway area, as a 'grim reminder' of the helplessness of 'scattered, disarmed members of the Church of Ireland in the South of Ireland.'¹⁴

As the new state found its feet, the Diocese of Limerick, Ardfert, and Aghadoe reflected the general mood throughout southern dioceses, eager to express loyalty to the new Irish Free State, yet anxious to see an end to violence. In the diocesan report of 19 June 1922, the diocesan auditor, C.H. Fitt, noted that 'Nation and Church' had been 'passing through' a 'great crisis and change', but his report pledged the loyalty of the church to 'the new state' and its commitment to 'the welfare of all the people in our beloved native land.'¹⁵ When the diocesan synod met in the Diocesan Hall in Pery Square on 5 July 1922, disruptions to transport prevented a full attendance and the synod struggled to find a quorum. In his address, Bishop White declared: 'We meet today in great anxiety about public affairs and in a city which is in the hands of opposing bands of armed men.' White claimed that the Church of Ireland in Limerick had lost up to 60 per cent of its members 'and many churches are now half empty.' As a consequence, parishes were amalgamated and fewer curates were employed. 'Ireland is losing many of her best, most patriotic, and most progressive citizens, who are forced to leave

their native land by economic causes or by political and religious intolerance.’ The financial reports showed that collections and subscriptions were falling off, reflecting that economic and numerical decline.¹⁶

War and memory

In the aftermath of the War of Independence and the Civil War, the diocesan report for 1923 noted that the year ‘began in strife and disorder’, but ‘happily ended in peace’ and with a ‘general improvement of the civic life of the country.’¹⁷ By 1924, the Diocesan Council was giving ‘thanks to Almighty God for His providential guidance’ and the ‘quietness and peace’ that allowed church life to continue.¹⁸

At his diocesan synod in 1923, White lamented the ‘hundreds of industrious Protestant Irish men and women’ who had left ‘because they felt that they were not welcome here, and that satisfactory careers could not be secured for their boys and girls in their own country’. If this hinted at sectarian undertones, White also added that ‘anything like a Protestant exodus would be deplored by our present rulers’.¹⁹ But the Protestant exodus continued. Prominent among those who left was Sir Charles Barrington, who never returned; he sold Glenstal Castle in 1926 and died in Hampshire in 1943, aged ninety-three. Ordinary families suffered the greatest haemorrhage: by 1926, the Church of Ireland population in Limerick city had dropped by 55.4 per cent from the figure in 1911, the Methodist population had declined by 51 per cent, and the Presbyterians had fallen by 82.6 per cent.

The sufferings of laity and clergy alike were seldom spoken of. No-one was ever charged with Peter Switzer’s murder, and his youngest sister Eliza died in 1927 at the age of seventy-five, bringing to an end their branch of the Switzer family. The sectarian undercurrents remained for a decade or more after independence. During a wave of sectarian attacks that swept across Ireland in the summer of 1935, an estimated crowd of 200–300 young men attacked churches and Protestant-owned shops and homes in Limerick on Saturday night, 20 July 1935, including Trinity Episcopal Church on Catherine Street and St Michael’s Church of Ireland on Pery Square, the homes of Canon Thomas Abbot and Archdeacon John Waller, the LPYMA building, the Gospel Hall, the Diocesan Hall, and the Masonic Club, and they attempted to set fire to the Presbyterian Church on Henry Street.²⁰ St Peter and St Paul Church, the Church of Ireland parish church in Kilmallock, was destroyed in an arson attack the following night, while the windows of the local rector’s home were smashed along with those of a Protestant-owned shop. No-one

was ever convicted or jailed for the attacks.²¹

Mary Spring Rice died in a sanatorium in Wales in 1924. When her body was brought back for burial in the Church of Ireland churchyard in Foynes, she was given a guard of honour by the local IRA, the Gaelic League, and trade unionists.²² But the role played by a few other members of the Church of Ireland in the War of Independence was forgotten by their co-religionists and their neighbours alike. Conor O'Brien failed to get elected to the Senate in 1925 and spent his later years in semi-isolation on Foynes Island, where he died in 1952. Sir Thomas Myles had become a colonel in the Royal Army Medical Corps on the outbreak of the First World War and an honorary surgeon to King George V; he died in 1937 in the Richmond Hospital, Dublin, where he spent much of his career.

In the decades that followed, as churches continued to close, every effort was made to ensure that their war memorials were not lost. The memorials in Christ Church Methodist Church, Limerick, for example, include a war memorial with six names salvaged from the Presbyterian Church on Henry Street when it closed. When Rathkeale Methodist Church closed, the war memorial was moved to Ballingrane Methodist Church near Adare.

To this day, the war memorials in many churches in all three denominations remain the focus for Remembrance Sunday services each November. Yet, only one Church of Ireland churchyard in County Limerick has memorials to members of the Church of Ireland who supported the nationalist cause. A plaque on the gate leading into Mount Trenchard churchyard near Foynes was unveiled in 2014: 'In memory of Conor O'Brien, Kitty O'Brien, George Cahill, Mary Spring Rice, Thomas Fitzsimons, Sir Thomas Myles. Go ndéana Dia trócaire orthú. Limerick men and women who imported rifles for the Irish Volunteers, July 1914.' The church at Mount Trenchard had been long closed by 2014, however, and all that remained standing was the church tower. Perhaps the determination to keep open other churches in places such as Castletown and Kilmallock reflects, not only the piety and commitment of their parishioners, but an inherited and inbuilt yet unspoken determination not to concede to the sectarian attacks of previous decades.

Notes

1. See, for example, *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 10 March, 16 June 1922.
2. Valerie Jones, *Rebel Prods: The forgotten story of Protestant radical nationalists and the 1916 Rising* (Dublin, 2016), *passim*.
3. *Limerick Chronicle*, 27 June 1916.
4. Representative Church Body Library, Dublin (RCB Library), D13 Limerick, Ardfert & Killaloe Diocesan Records, 1693–2008: 13/6, Diocesan Report, 1920, p 33.
5. John Lucey, ‘The shooting of Peter Switzer’, *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 53 (2013), pp 237-240.
6. *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 3 February 1922.
7. *Ibid.*, 10 February 1922.
8. *Ibid.*, 10 March 1922.
9. See *Ibid.*, 10 March, 16 June 1922.
10. *Ibid.*, 7 April 1922.
11. Thomas Keane, ‘Class, religion and society in Limerick city, 1922–1939’ (PhD thesis, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, 2015), pp 54-6.
12. *Ibid.*, pp 54-55; Brian Hughes, ‘Unionists and loyalists in Limerick, 1922–23’ in Seán William Gannon (ed.), *The inevitable conflict: Essays on the Civil War in County Limerick* (Limerick, 2022), p. 94; *Limerick Chronicle*, 5 April 1922; *Irish Times*, 5 April 1922.
13. *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 5 May 1922.
14. *Ibid.*, 10 May 1922.
15. RCB Library, D13/13/6, Diocesan Report, 1921, p 4.
16. *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 28 July 1922.
17. RCB Library, D13/13/6, Diocesan Report, 1923, pp 3-4.
18. RCB Library, D13/13/6, Diocesan Report, 1924, p 4.
19. *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 22 June 1923.
20. *Limerick Leader*, 9 January 2010. The primary context for these attacks was an outbreak of sectarian attacks against Catholics in Northern Ireland following that year’s 12 July celebrations.
21. *Irish Times*, 22 July 1935; *Limerick Leader*, 27 July 1935.
22. Jones, *Rebel Prods*, p. 90.

CHAPTER 7

The Craven Widows, 1912–1916

Hélène Bradley-Davies & Paul O'Brien

Mrs Alice Craven, a wealthy Protestant widow, bequeathed in her will of 1729 monies to support the setting up of Limerick's Craven Charity.¹ This charity was committed to the care of the Church of Ireland Bishop of Limerick, Ardfert, and Aghadoe who established a trust in her name – the Alice Craven Trust, which still survives today.² The trust was administered by landed gentry, professionals, and members of the select vestry of St Mary's Cathedral. While the surviving Craven papers span the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this essay focuses on the work of the charity between 1912 and 1916.

Mrs Craven directed that the main beneficiaries of her estate were to be the 'poor inhabitants and housekeepers of the city of Limerick', the 'poor insolvent debtor prisoners', and

the grave, elderly widows that are to be forever from time to time nominated and settled in the Alms House³ ... and each widow to have forty shillings yearly, and every year paid thereof the said legacy ... if the rents, issues and profits of the said land, houses and premises should amount to more than discharging the said several annuities and the repairing of the Alms House, and paying the quit rent thereof, that then the said trustees to bring, nominate and maintain as many more sick, poor widows as will equal and amount those legacy and my Will is that all such widows as shall be so nominated to be in the alms-house, shall inhabit and live therein and not set [let] the apartments to another person, poor being, any children or family to live or settle in said alms-house and that if any of the said widows to be nominated prove to be scolds, brawls or guilty of any

misbehaviour, that the said trustees shall discharge such a person out of the alms-house, first giving her a week's notice, and nominate and appoint some other poor widow in her room.⁴

The Craven Trust's surviving records, which include accounts, correspondences, and annual lists of widows, allow the reconstruction of patronage networks based on social class, family ties, and religious affiliation across time. While there is no direct stipulation that the charity fund Protestant widows only, this is implied when a Protestant bishop set up the charity and the trustees were all Protestant. Irrespective of denomination, however, the loss of a husband and probably the main breadwinner could have a devastating effect. The Craven papers can offer a more nuanced understanding of the socioeconomic circumstances of those in 'poverty' in Limerick's Protestant community. In addition, insightful information about the importance of social standing, familial ties, and religion, and how they interplay with decision-making when distributing the charity's funds, can also be gleaned from the records.

The number of widows receiving annuities fluctuated depending on the fortunes of the charity, but it was usually set at around twenty.⁵ Once on the Craven 'list', the majority continued to receive annuities until their deaths. In the early decades of the twentieth century, widows received annuities on average for sixteen years; however, six widows received annuities for more than twenty-five years. Grounds for removing a 'living' widow from the list included incapacity, emigration, and impropriety.⁶

The Craven Trust's main objective was to assist widows in County Limerick, despite its connections to other charities across the country. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the trustees assigned the monies to widows living predominantly, but not exclusively, in Limerick city and county. Responsibility for nominations lay with the Bishop of Limerick, Ardfert, and Aghadoe, the dean of St Mary's Cathedral, and the canon of St John's Church in Limerick city. These three individuals submitted the name of a candidate deemed to be suitable to the Craven trustees. In September 1912, there were eighteen widows, each receiving £2 per quarter from the Craven Charity. These widows were the Mrs Bouchier, Beere, Carter, Crostan, Ellis, Hewson, Hill, Jellico, Jordan, Kerr, Mills, Moyles, Nicholson, Scott, Sheehy (Martha), Sheehy (Mary), Tristram, and Vokes. Mrs Benson was nominated by the bishop on 24 December 1912, thereby filling the

Table 1 Craven Widows 1912-1916

Surname	Forename	Years of Nomination	Years	Nominated by	Address
Hill	Elizabeth	1905-1940	35	Revd Langbridge	Mulgrave Street/55 Henry Street
Beere	Alice G.	1895-1928	33	Dean O'Brien	Fernlea, Adare
Myles	Sarah (?)	1895-1923	28	Bishop Graves	3 Anne Terrace, New Street
Hewson	Mary E.	1903-1930	27	Dean Gregg	16 Shannon Street/18 Edenvale Road, Ranelagh, Dublin
Sheedy	Mary	1893-1920	27		
Vokes	Eliza	1903-1928	25	Revd Langbridge	5 Shannon Terrace
Mills	Jane	1893-1916	23	Bishop Graves	Frederick Street
Counihan	Mary	1914-1934	20	Revd Langbridge	
Crostan	Mary	1893-1913	20		14 Mulgrave Street/Sunnyside, Corbally
Jordan	Georgina	1903-1922	19	Bishop Bunbury	7 Shannon Terrace, South Circular Road
Tristram	Catherine	1902-1921	19	Dean Gregg	2 New Road, Clare Street/Hall's Alms House
Bouchier	Mary A.	1898-1915	17	Dean Bunbury	Hall's Alms House
Carter	Annie	1912-1926 ⁷	14		South Circular Road
Ellis	Elizabeth	1910-1922	12	Revd Langbridge	4 John's Square/Poor House
Jellicoe	Anne J.	1902-1914	12	Revd Langbridge	Villiers Buildings
Bonhill	Mary	1913-1923	10	Dean Hackett	42 Roxboro Road
Kerr	Elizabeth	1908-1918	10	Revd Langbridge	St John's Terrace
Sheedy	Martha	1904-1914	10	Dean Gregg	33 Farranshone Road, Thomondgate
Scott	Elizabeth	1908-1914	6		Hall's Alms House
Benson	Mary A.	1912-1917	5	Bishop Orpen	Alphonsus Street
Gardner	Frances	1915-1917	2	Bishop Orpen	15 Henry Street
Nicholson	Matilda	1912-1914	2		Hall's Alms House
Mahony	Eileen	1915-1916 ⁸			
McConkey		1915-1916 ⁹		Revd Langbridge	40 Clare Street

remaining place on the ‘list’. In March 1913, following the death of Mrs Crostan, the dean nominated Mrs Bonhill. Following the death of Mrs Martha Sheehy in July 1914, Canon Revd Langbridge of St John’s nominated Mrs Counihan.

Several factors influenced the nomination process with the criteria used being need, respectability, and good character. Such subjective criteria suggest that the charitable relationship was a form of social control.¹⁰ Expectations on behaviour, decorum, and respectability suggests that the ‘grave’ (which, in eighteenth-century parlance could mean ‘serious’ or ‘dignified’) and ‘poor’ widows should be grateful and/or submissive.¹¹ In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was a perceived difference between women judged to be respectable (hardworking and proper) and non-respectable (‘rough’ or ‘good for nothing’). Virtues such as ‘thrift, temperance and self-betterment’ were promoted by Protestant aid organisations.¹² There is some evidence that Craven widows accused of engaging in ‘improper’ behaviour, such as non-attendance at divine service, had their payments suspended or terminated.¹³ On the other hand, Mrs Kerr’s obituary, published in the *Limerick Chronicle* in 1918, testified to her good character:

The death, which is generally regretted in St. John’s parish, took place on Monday morning, after a brief illness,¹⁴ of Mrs Elizabeth Kerr. The deceased was wife of the late Mr Jas. Kerr of Messrs. James Bannatyne & Sons Ltd, and was held in the highest respect by all who knew her.¹⁵

A key feature of nineteenth-century philanthropy ‘was the denominational nature of its development’.¹⁶ Charitable endeavours such as the Craven Trust appear to be rooted in providing support networks for members of the Protestant community, enabling this support to be provided from within their own community. Ian d’Alton and Ida Milne have noted that ‘pockets of poverty – rural and urban’ were assisted by the Association for the Relief of Distressed Protestants from 1916.¹⁷ Oonagh Walsh, in discussing Protestant female philanthropy in Dublin in the early twentieth century, suggested that part of the reason for its prevalence ‘lay in the general social expectation that middle-class women would direct their attentions towards the less fortunate, for the general benefit of both parties (but particularly themselves).’¹⁸ This is evident in the nomination of Mrs Ellis (a Craven widow 1910–22), who Revd Langbridge noted was ‘very poor and in ill health’. Mrs Nicholson (1912–14) of Hall’s Alms House was blind, as was Mrs Bonhill (1913–23). Mrs Martha

Sheedy (1904–14) was described as a ‘most deserving and industrious person in need of help’ in her nomination letter submitted by Dean Gregg in 1904.

The Craven annuities (£8) were paid quarterly, in March, June, September, and December. The majority of widows during the period in question were paid in cash at the office of Robert Donough O’Brien, Land Agent, 16 Upper Mallow Street, Limerick city. For others, the annuity was sent by cheque or note and a receipt was lodged with the charity. A case in point is Mrs Hewson. When nominated by the dean in 1903, Mrs Hewson was residing at Christy’s coach factory, 16 Shannon Street. By 1910, she was living in her sister’s house at 18 Edenvale Road, Ranelagh, in Dublin and her annuity cheque was sent by post.¹⁹

Whilst the original intention of Alice Craven was to provide aid to sick and poor widows in the charity’s alms house, in reality this was not always the case. Some, like Mrs Beere (née Maunsell), lived in relative comfort in Fernlea Cottage, Adare. Fernlea was a substantial farmhouse with eight rooms, a stable, coach house, two cow houses, a calf house, dairy house, fowl house, and turf house. In 1901, Mrs Beere lived with her three daughters, two sons, and a servant. She remained in this property until her death in 1928. The Beere family had close personal connections with the Church of Ireland establishment in Limerick. Mrs Beere’s father-in-law, Revd Gerard Butler Beere, was rector of Ballycahane and prebendary of St. Mary’s Cathedral.²⁰ Mrs Beere’s daughter, Florence, married Revd H.A.H. Orpen of Adare in August 1919, who interestingly was the youngest son of the then Bishop of Limerick, Ardfert, and Aghadoe, Raymond d’Audemar Orpen.²¹ When Mrs Beere died in September 1928, her effects were valued at £175 6s. 3d.²²

A woman of similar social standing was Mrs Jordan (née De Balmount). She was nominated by the bishop to the Craven ‘list’ in 1903, following the death of her husband in June 1902. Mr Jordan was a boot and shoe manufacturer in the city from the 1870s.²³ In 1901, Mrs Jordan lived with her husband and five adult children at 23 Patrick Street, most likely above their commercial premises. By the time of her nomination she, and four of her adult children, had moved to 7 Shannon Terrace on the South Circular Road, leaving the commercial premises to her eldest son Alexander. She remained in this house, receiving the Craven annuities, until her death in November 1922.²⁴

Although these examples illustrate comfortable living, not all Craven widows lived in such conditions. The correspondences and addresses (see Table 1) expose the hidden ‘poverty’ of persons who may have multiple dependents, were

living on meagre army pensions, or residing in the alms houses. Craven annuities would have been a significant source of income for these widows after losing their primary breadwinner. Mrs Hill (1905–40) was one such case. Aged forty-nine, she was nominated by Revd Langbridge in 1905 following the death of her husband George.²⁵ She had five daughters and one son to support, the youngest of whom was only five years old. Another example was Mrs Bonhill. Miss Mary Hannan of the Union Workhouse married Thomas Bonehill (Bonfield Lane) on 5 January 1881. Thomas's occupation was recorded as groom and coachman. However, on subsequent marriage certificates for their children Sarah Anne and William, his occupation was recorded as soldier.²⁶ At the time of her nomination, she was living alone in a house shared with another family on the Roxboro Road. In 1911, she was sixty-three years old and recorded as being unable to read or write due to blindness. As she was under the required age for receipt of an old age pension, it is likely that the Craven annuity was essential for her day to day survival.²⁷ At the time of her death in 1923, she was living with her son William, a shop assistant in Glentworth Street, who received her funeral expenses from the charity.

Four of the widows on the Craven 'list' (Mrs Bouchier, Nicholson, Scott, and Tristram) were living in Hall's Alms House, Nicholas Street. Mrs Nicholson was widowed in 1904, when her husband, Charles, died in the Union Infirmary aged fifty-six. Prior to his death he was residing in Hall's Alms House and was receiving an army pension of 11½*d* per day.²⁸ It is unclear if this pension passed to his wife following his death.²⁹ Mrs Nicholson died in October 1914 and her final Craven payment in December 1914 went towards the cost of her funeral. Mrs Bouchier, a retired lace worker, died in the Union Infirmary on 24 April 1915.

Whether the profile of the average widow receiving the Craven annuities in the period in question fulfilled or met the original criteria of 'elderly widows' needs to be questioned. Many, based on the number of years receiving annuities, must have been relatively young when they were nominated.³⁰ This placed a lengthy financial burden on the charity and ensured that there was a limited turnover in recipients. Despite the decline in Protestant numbers in the city between 1911 and 1926, many of these Craven widows continued to receive annuities into the 1920s and 1930s. The majority continued to live in the city, where they encompassed a range of socioeconomic positions within the Protestant community. For some, like Mrs Beere, Jordan, Hewson, and Kerr, maintaining social status and respectability came with a Craven nomination. The annuity helped to maintain their standard of living and a certain level of 'shabby gentility'. Few of these were poverty-

stricken and many had other means of providing for themselves and their families where necessary. Another group of widows on the list conformed more precisely to Alice Craven's wishes, in light of their straitened circumstances. These widows included Mrs Hill, who had a young family to support, and Mrs Bonhill, whose blindness prevented her from working. There were also the widows living in the alms houses, who were dependent on charity for both housing and daily needs. The Craven annuity was crucial for them and best met Alice Craven's desired intentions of 1729. What is clear is that the significance of the annuity meant very different things and depended on a widow's social standing and economic circumstances.

Commenting on Dublin at the turn of the twentieth century, Todd Andrews emphasised the role played by Protestant charities in alleviating poverty in the city. As a result of their efforts 'there were many poor Protestants in Dublin but never destitute Protestants'.³¹ A preliminary reading of the Craven Charity archive reveals that this may also have been the case in Limerick city. Further exploration of this archive will undoubtedly uncover additional material on the changing geography and life experiences of the Protestant community in Limerick city and county in the pre- and post-revolutionary period.

The Craven Charity material is part of the R.D. O'Brien collection, which was donated to Mary Immaculate College by Mr Brendan Dennehy. Robert Donough O'Brien (1844–1917) was a son of William Smith O'Brien (1803–64).

Notes

1. Alice Craven was married to John Craven, alderman of Limerick. John Craven died c1708, and Alice Craven's will is dated 17 January 1729. *Register of Deeds* 9/334/3762, 10/357/3829 and 51/95/32912; <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:6JXR-BPKB>; <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:6JXR-P39D>. (accessed 12 October 2023). There is no mention of children. This information has been provided courtesy of William Prentice, Dublin.
2. It was the first of several similar private female-funded trusts to emerge in eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century Limerick, including Mrs Hannah Villiers' charity (1821) and Mrs Hall's Almshouses (ca.1848).

3. The exact location of this alms house is unclear. However, Ferrar suggests it may have been ‘a large house or rather a castle, near West Watergate, for the reception of 12 poor widows.’ A Craven charity alms house, housing twenty widows is mentioned in the *Limerick Chronicle* in 1823. No location given. John Ferrar, *A History of the city of Limerick* (Limerick, 1787), p. 216; *Limerick Chronicle*, 20 December 1823; Eamon O’Flaherty, *Limerick; Irish historic towns atlas No. 21*, (Dublin, 2009), p. 53.
4. Mary Immaculate College Archive (MIC), Limerick, R.D. O’Brien collection (RDOB), Craven Charity papers (CCP): Will of Alice Craven, 1729.
5. A Limerick Corporation enquiry in October 1833, recorded forty-seven widows, each receiving £4 per annum: *Limerick Chronicle*, 12 October 1833.
6. On the 29 September 1900, Mrs Harwood, who had only been nominated by the bishop in June, was removed from the list as she ‘has been removed to the asylum, prospect of her recovery not being favourable’. (MIC, RDOB, CCP: 1900–1909, Craven Widows List, File 1 (1900), D. 3 (29 September 1900). In March 1902, Mrs Thess (sic) of 25 Athlunkard Street, who had been nominated by the dean in September 1900, was removed from the list as she left for America in January. (MIC, RDOB, CCP: 1900–1909, Craven Widows List, File 1 (1900), D. 3 (29 September 1900); File 3 (1902), D.1 (2 March 1902).
7. Lists unavailable between 1906 & 1911. Widow not on list in 1905.
8. Lists unavailable between 1917 & 1919. Widow not on list in 1920.
9. Lists unavailable between 1917 & 1919. Widow not on the list in 1920.
10. Laurence M. Geary, *Medicine and charity in Ireland 1718–1851* (Dublin, 2004), p. 83.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
12. Maura Cronin, ‘You’d be disgraced! Middle-class women and respectability in post-Famine Ireland’ in Fintan Lane (ed.), *Politics, society and the middle class in modern Ireland* (Basingstoke 2010), pp 107-29, at pp 118-19.
13. In July 1881, a letter was sent by Courtenay Croker (secretary to the trustees) to a lady addressed only as ‘Madam’, stating that ‘it had been brought under their notice that your conduct of late has not been at all as steady as they desire and you are hereby given notice that should their attention be again called as to your conduct your name will at once be removed from the list of recipients of the Charity’. (MIC, RDOB, CCP: 1880–1889, File 2 (1881), 13 July 1881). No further details are available. In 1887, a Mrs Vokes (not the named widow on the 1912 list) was ‘notified that complaint having being made of her conduct in not attending divine service. She be cautioned as to her future conduct as it may lead to her name being removed from the list of widows’. (MIC, RDOB, CCP: 1880–1889, File 8 (1887), undated).
14. Mrs Kerr’s death certificate records that she died at the age of sixty-five from bronchitis. In November 1918, Limerick was caught in the grips of the Spanish Flu. It is therefore possible that Mrs Kerr succumbed to this flu as her obituary suggests that her death was unexpected.

15. *Limerick Chronicle*, 7 November 1918. Three ‘*in memoriams*’ were published by her daughter and son in 1921, 1923, and 1924. *Limerick Chronicle*, 5 November 1921; 6 November 1923; 4 November 1924.
16. Maria Luddy, ‘Women and philanthropy in nineteenth-century Ireland’, *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organisations* 7/4 (1996), pp 350-64, at p. 351.
17. Ian d’Alton and Ida Milne, ‘Introduction’ in Ian d’Alton and Ida Milne (eds), *Protestant and Irish: The minority’s search for place in independent Ireland* (Cork, 2019), p. 10.
18. Oonagh Walsh, ‘Protestant female philanthropy in Dublin in the early twentieth century’, *History Ireland*, 5/2 (1997), pp 27-31, at p. 27.
19. In the 1911 census she is living with her sister (Sarah Harriet McKinnon) and her two sons (George Albert and Alexander) at 18 Edenvale Road, Ranelagh, Dublin. Her occupation was described as ‘income from dividends’. Both of her sons were employed as commercial clerks.
20. J.B. Leslie, *Clergy of Limerick, clergy of Ardfert and Aghadoe* (Belfast, 2015), p. 194; *Limerick Chronicle*, 22 June 1876.
21. Leslie, *Clergy of Limerick*, p. 430.
22. *Calendar of all Grants of Probate and Letter of Administration* (London, 1929).
23. *Slater’s royal national commercial directory of Ireland* (Manchester, 1870), p. 155.
24. General Register Office of Ireland, Deaths registered in the District of Limerick No. 3 (1922), no. 183, 21 November 1922. Mrs Jordan’s granddaughter, Margaret Elizabeth, married Revd J.E.C. Lawlor, curate of Birr, in May 1930, her husband being nephew of the officiating clergyman, Revd Dean H.J. Lawlor, D.D. Dublin.
25. The exact date of his death is unknown, but he is recorded in the 1901 census as living with his wife and family at 16 Ballinacurra, Limerick.
26. The uncertainty surrounding Thomas’ occupation is a good illustration of the relative obscurity of some beneficiaries of the charity.
27. Old age pensions were introduced in Ireland in 1909 (Old Age Pension Act 1908). In order to qualify a person had to be over the age of seventy, earning less than £21 annually, and of good character.
28. General Register Office of Ireland, Deaths registered in the District of Limerick Rural (1904), no. 301, 15 February 1904.
29. Mrs Nicholson’s (née Winters) marriage certificate states that Charles Nicholson was a drummer in the 41st Regiment and she was a resident in the Molyneux Asylum, Leeson Park.
30. Mrs Beere was forty-three years old when she was nominated in 1895, whilst Mrs Hill was forty years old when nominated in 1905. Both survived into their late seventies.
31. C. S. Andrews, *Dublin made me; an autobiography* (Dublin, 1979), p. 20.

III
Gentry

CHAPTER 8

Revolution and the Limerick Aristocracy

Terence Dooley

This chapter provides a very brief overview of an extremely complicated topic: the revolutionary experience of the Limerick aristocracy over the extended period from the beginning of the Land War in 1879 to the end of the Civil War in 1923. In 1879, this small cohort of families – seventy-six landlords, predominantly Protestant, who each owned over 2,000 acres in and beyond the county – controlled Limerick property, wealth, society, and politics as they had done for many generations.¹ However, within half a century, all had changed dramatically: the rise of Irish nationalism from the 1870s, aided by political reforms introduced by successive British governments, virtually wiped away their political power at local and national level, while an equally powerful and coincident social revolution, centred on land reform, which began in 1879, resulted in the break up and sale of the aristocracy's great estates upon which their social and economic power had traditionally been built and sustained.

This chapter is concerned more with social revolution, which was instigated by the actions of the Irish National Land League, the first nationally co-ordinated anti-landlord movement, led ironically by a Protestant landlord, Charles Stewart Parnell, and established in 1879 in response to the global agricultural depression that impacted tenant farmers' ability to pay their rents. The conflict which ensued greatly soured landlord-tenant relations, typified in the case of the Cloncurry estate around Murroe in County Limerick. In 1876, the Lawless family, barons Cloncurry, owned over 5,000 acres in Limerick, although they resided at Lyons in County Kildare. In 1874, Lord Cloncurry, Valentine Frederick Lawless, had borrowed over £95,000 from St Patrick's College, Maynooth.² This mortgage was due to be redeemed between 1879 and 1892, but this was the period of the Land War of 1879–81 and the Plan of Campaign of 1885–91, one characterised by

rents strikes, evictions, and a general rise in agrarian crime. Lord Cloncurry refused to grant rent reductions to his tenants in 1881, arguing that he could not afford to do so because of his own financial commitments.³ When the tenants reacted by refusing to pay rents and later adopting the Plan of Campaign, it greatly diminished Cloncurry's rental income for the years up to 1889.⁴ Indeed, in the longer term, tensions continued right up to the period of the War of Independence when his tenants refused to pay any rents, anticipating what a revolution and independence might bring. This left Cloncurry with no choice but to sell his lands at Farnane and Ahacane in Murroe to the Irish Land Commission for £10,000 in 1921.⁵

By then, most landlords in Limerick had already sold the bulk of their lands. A few had chosen to sell outlying portions of their estates under the early Land Purchase (Ireland) Acts of 1885 and 1891 to get over the difficult times, including Sir Charles Barrington of Glentsal, Murroe, who sold a modest 485 acres for £7,954.⁶ Absentees such as Edward Bouchier Hartropp of Leicestershire also took the opportunity to rid themselves completely of their Irish property as its collateral value dropped amidst ongoing depression, agrarian conflict, and government interference in the fixing (in point of fact, lowering) of rents under the 1881 Land Act. However, it was not until the passing of the 1903 Wyndham Land Purchase Act that a revolutionary transfer of land ownership took place. The very generous terms on offer, and the added cash bonus of 12 per cent payable to landlords on the sale of estates, was too good to be missed. The Earl of Dunraven, who was the largest resident Limerick landlord with a 14,300-acre estate centred on Adare Manor, came into the market very early selling around 10,500 acres for almost £133,000, while Sir Charles Barrington sold over 4,800 acres for almost £53,000.⁷

Dunraven had been a strong advocate of land transfer and played a pivotal role in the 1902–03 conference that led to the passing of Wyndham's land act. He was acutely aware that while many landlords had a strong emotional attachment to their lands, their position had become untenable. He told his fellow peers in 1903: 'They [landlords] are willing to sell because the present system in Ireland is a system not only ruining them, but ruining and demoralising the whole country, checking and crippling her industry and smothering all her aspirations.'⁸ Dunraven also epitomised those landlords who felt that opportunities would remain for their class to exert an influence on the national life of Ireland after sales, provided, of course, that it remained part of the wider British Empire. He contended that 'as a class there can be no question that the financial circumstances of the landed gentry

will be improved by sale ... They will find, as the country settles down, as large a field for pleasure as and a larger scope for usefulness than they have hitherto enjoyed.' His ideal was that the aristocracy (and lesser gentry) would continue 'farming their own land, retaining the amenities of their position'.⁹ Whether they did so by choice or necessity, a significant number of former landlords continued to reside in Limerick after 1903. A 1906 *Return of Untenanted Land* in Ireland showed that just over sixty mansions remained inhabited in Limerick, including, other than Adare, such great houses as Castle Oliver in the south county and Mountshannon in Lisnagry.

Whether Dunraven's ideal would have become reality is now a matter of historical conjecture. While there was a chance for many families to enjoy briefly the *belle époque* of the pre-First World War era, events after August 1914 brought great upheaval to their lives. That the war was a major watershed for the Irish aristocracy has been well established.¹⁰ In Limerick they played the same roles as elsewhere. They and their sons joined the colours in huge numbers; those men and women who could not go to the Front did all they could at home to recruit young men and fundraise to aid the wounded and imprisoned. But after 1916, they found themselves caught up in the growing tensions as radical nationalism came to the fore. In 1918, at the height of the conscription crisis, Limerick Corporation called to have the traditionally popular Lord Dunraven struck from the list of the city's freemen, Councillor Griffin stating that he 'never thought his lordship would turn on his fellow countrymen and try to enforce a blood tax'.¹¹

Burning the Big House

As the War of Independence gathered momentum, the aristocracy, their Big Houses and their demesnes became vulnerable to attack. After the IRA spring offensive in 1920 aimed at destroying rural police barracks, IRA raids on Big Houses for arms became a matter of course. In June 1921, Lord Dunraven complained in the House of Lords: 'There is in Ireland today absolutely no protection whatever for life or property. Honest, decent citizens have no protection, and can get no protection from the police and are not allowed to protect themselves.'¹²

In 1920–23, raids gave way to the more violent destruction of houses by burning. At least seven houses were burned in Limerick, a much smaller number than in the surrounding counties of Cork, Tipperary, and Clare, something worth investigating in its own right.¹³ Motivations were various. In the early stages of

the War of Independence, some were burned after intelligence was received by the IRA that they were to be taken over by Crown forces, including The Hermitage and Mountshannon;¹⁴ others were destroyed in reprisal for Black and Tan attacks on nationalist property where historical grievances provided further impetus for retribution. For example, Thomas Ryan's remembrance of the burning of the Perry home at Newcastle in Limerick noted that while the attack was ostensibly a counter-reprisal for local Black and Tan atrocities, Perry's 'forefathers before him had been tyrannical landlords in the country.'¹⁵ During the Civil War, houses such as Boskell got caught up in internecine conflict after having been occupied and destroyed by retreating anti-Treaty IRA forces.¹⁶ However, during both phases land-related motivations were never far below the surface and, as Gemma Clark showed in her 2014 study, they were prevalent in the three Munster counties of Limerick, Tipperary, and Waterford.

There were many other houses which were not torched, and their story deserves to be elucidated in the future. For example, Adare might have been torched following the passing of 'Operation Order No. 16: Senators' on 26 January 1923, when all anti-Treaty IRA divisions were issued with orders that houses of Irish Free State senators were to be destroyed as reprisals for executions of anti-Treatyite prisoners, including Lord Dunraven's home. Perhaps it was local good economic sense that prevailed; Dunraven continued to provide large scale employment on his extensive demesne farm of 1,160 acres.¹⁷ Back in 1886, the parish priest of Adare, Fr J.S. Flanagan, in his evidence to the Cowper Commission into the operation of the 1881 and 1885 Irish land acts said: 'I suppose if Lord Dunraven went away, the village of Adare would decay. You would have no employment and the shopkeepers are dependent on the labourers whom he employs. There is no other residence there of any note and we have very little employment of labour amongst the farmers.'¹⁸ The same applied in the early 1920s and this was one of the reasons why working demesnes such as Adare were protected from compulsory acquisition under the 1923 Land Act

Similarly, in December 1922, when the then governor-general of the Irish Free State, T.M. Healy, wrote to Minister of Defence Richard Mulcahy looking for protection for Glin Castle. 'I hear that the Knight of Glin ... is being very badly treated', Healy wrote, 'he is paralysed and unable to protect himself, and he does not know who to blame and to whom to appeal for protection. If it is in your power to afford him a little protection, I should feel obliged.' Mulcahy wrote to the National Army officer in command at Limerick to 'make arrangements to

have the Knight of Glin seen, with a view to assuring him of whatever protection from molestation he may require.¹⁹ During the Truce period, the Knight of Glin had endeared himself to local nationalists by allowing numerous GAA matches to be played on the demesne; a report on one game in October 1921 stated that it was played ‘within touch of the castle’, while the IRA ‘held a gate collection and maintained order’.²⁰ Glin was untouched and remains in the FitzGerald family’s ownership to the present. However, most Limerick landlords could not hold out indefinitely. The terms of the 1923 Land Act introduced the principle of compulsory acquisition of untenanted lands to relieve congestion amongst uneconomic holders and, to a much lesser extent, to provide land for the landless.²¹ By 1926, the Irish Land Commission had acquired most of Lord Cloncurry’s Limerick estate ‘at a very nominal sum,’ a reference by Cloncurry’s solicitors to the fact that payment in 4.5 per cent land bonds was neither welcome nor advantageous.²² By c.1980, over 30,000 acres of demesne lands in Limerick had been acquired by the Land Commission through compulsory purchase for almost £2.5 million and another 12,000 acres for just over £1 million through voluntary sale.²³

For most Big House owners, the loss of their demesnes, allied to the long-term economic post-independence depression that depreciated share portfolios created after 1903, and unfavourable political attitudes towards the former colonial elite, meant the sale or abandonment of their houses became inevitable. Changes in function for those houses that were sold followed. In 1920, the O’Briens sold Cahermoyle and its demesne to the Oblate fathers and the house became a nursing home; Glenstal became an educational institute; while Adare was repurposed as an exclusive hotel and golf resort. Others were much less fortunate: Dromore, Ballynagarde, Mountshannon, and Curraghchase are amongst the most spectacular ruins in Limerick county. All reflected the same story, that in 1879 the revolutionary changes that were to take place over the next 100 years could scarcely have been imagined by the aristocracy.

Notes

1. Jonathan Cherry, ‘Landlords, estates, demesnes and mansion houses in County Limerick c.1870–c.1920’ in Liam Irwin and Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh (eds.), *Limerick: History and society* (Dublin, 2009), pp 533-56, at p. 533. To qualify as an aristocratic landowner one typically had to own at least 2,000 acres.
2. For the full story, see Terence Dooley, ‘The mortgage papers of St. Patrick’s College Maynooth, 1871–1923’, *Archivium Hibernicum*, 59 (2005), pp 106-235.

3. Lord Cloncurry to his Newport tenantry, 15 April 1881, quoted in *Irish Times*, 2 May 1881.
4. National Library of Ireland, Cloncurry papers, MSS 12,893-12,907, Cloncurry estate rentals, 1875–89.
5. Maynooth College Archives (MCA), C7/112/11, Lord Cloncurry to ‘acting bursar’, 10 August 1923; MCA, C7/112/10, White and White (sols.) to O’Hagan and Sons, 20 January 1921.
6. Cherry, ‘Landlords, estates, demesnes and mansion houses’, p. 539.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 535; Terence Dooley, *The decline of the Big House in Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), pp 112-22.
8. Hansard, House of Lords Debates, vol. 126, c1189, 3 August 1903.
9. Earl of Dunraven, *The crisis in Ireland: An account of the present condition, of Ireland and suggestions toward reform* (Dublin, 1905), p. 21.
10. Terence Dooley, *Burning the Big House: The story of the Irish country house in war and revolution* (New Haven and London, 2022), chapters 2 & 3; Patrick Buckland, *Irish Unionism I: The Anglo-Irish and the new Ireland 1885–1922* (Dublin, 1972).
11. Quoted in Peter Martin, “‘*Dulce et Decorum*’”: Irish nobles and the Great War, 1914–19’ in Adrian Gregory and Senia Paseta, *Ireland and the Great War: ‘A war to unite us all?’* (Manchester, 2002), p. 34.
12. Quoted in Earl of Dunraven, *Past times and pastimes, vol. 2* (London, 1922), p. 202.
13. Just two were enumerated in my *The decline of the Big House in Ireland* (2001), but five more have since been identified. The seven were Dromkeen, Mountshannon, Hermitage, Springfield, Kilrush (Knocklong), Boskell, and Glenduff.
14. *Irish Times*, 25, 27 May, 17 June 1920; 9 February 1921.
15. Military Archives (MA), Bureau of Military History witness statements: 783 Thomas Ryan, 20 January 1953, p. 100.
16. Gemma Clark, *Everyday violence in the Irish Civil War* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 27.
17. *Dáil Debates*, vol. 40, cc 1201, 1998, 11 & 25 November 1931.
18. Cherry, ‘Landlords, estates, demesnes and mansion houses’, p. 552.
19. MA, A/7432, Healy to Mulcahy, 23 December 1922; Mulcahy to GOC Limerick Command, n.d.
20. Quoted in Ciarán Reilly, “‘Ill-gotten acres’”: The GAA and the Irish country house’ in Terence Dooley and Christopher Ridgway (eds), *Sport and leisure in the Irish and British country house* (Dublin, 2019), p. 224.
21. See Terence Dooley, *‘The land for the people’: The land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004).
22. MCA, C7/112/12, White and White to O’Hagan and Sons, 25 August 1926.
23. Cherry, ‘Landlords, estates, demesnes and mansion houses’, p. 554.

CHAPTER 9

Devolution and Revolution: The Limerick Gentry and Political Crisis, 1899–1920

Conor Morrissey

During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, three regional gentries challenged the political and cultural orthodoxies of their class. Wicklow, with the Parnells from the 1870s and the Bartons and Childers in the twentieth century, was the most distinguished. North Antrim, where local gentry such as Ada McNeill and Rose Maud Young founded the Gaelic cultural festival Feis na nGleann in 1904, and where Roger Casement and Captain Jack White campaigned against the Union, may have been the most countercultural. In Counties Limerick and Clare, an interconnected cluster of landed families responded to changes in Irish society by embracing paternalism, reformism, and, latterly, radicalism. The leading families were the de Veres of Curragh Chase, the Monsells of Tervoe, the Spring Rices of Mount Trenchard, the Perys of Dromore, the O'Briens of Cahermoyle, the O'Briens of Dromoland, the O'Briens of Cratloe Woods, and the Wyndham-Quins of Adare. David Fitzpatrick first described this set in a 1988 essay.¹ Jennifer Ridden analysed their liberal politics during the first half of the nineteenth century.² Matthew Potter, labelling the circle the 'Shannon Estuary Group', offered a theoretically informed perspective, describing them as 'a classic closed elite sub-group that was unable to make the transition to a democratic open elite'. In other words, a group comprised of members of a hereditary elite, with a sense of cohesion, whose attempts to engage with the new democratic era would ultimately fail.³ The purpose of this essay is not to describe this group anew. Instead, it will assess the often-parallel careers of two leading Limerick landowners who emerged from it, Lord Dunraven and Lord Monteagle, both of whom continued to seek a public role in a changing Ireland between the introduction of democratic local

government in 1899 and failure of Dominion Home Rule in 1920. Latterly, it will discuss the late-Edwardian eruption of radicalism among certain members of the group. As in other counties, the Limerick gentry traditionally provided leadership for the local Protestant population. During the Edwardian era and after, southern Protestants would be forced to slowly come to terms with the decline of the Union and to understand that self-government – at a minimum – was coming. Although they had only limited success in converting their Protestant co-religionists, Lord Dunraven and Lord Monteagle understood the changing nature of Irish politics sooner than most.

The 1899 local elections were the first democratic and representative local contest in Ireland. This saw a major retreat from local representation by the gentry outside of Ulster, and humiliation for many of those brave enough to enter the fray. Limerick proved something of an exception, returning three local magnates, Lord Dunraven and Lord Monteagle as anti-home rulers, and the 2nd Baron Emly, a very recent convert to nationalism.⁴ Lord Dunraven hoped to use his position to work for initiatives which would benefit both Catholics and Protestants; indeed, it has been plausibly suggested that his service on Limerick County Council was formative, where he developed conciliationist views.⁵ Conciliation, sometimes known to contemporaries as ‘Dunravenism’, was the policy of bringing together landlord and tenant, nationalist and unionist, to seek economic and social progress, with the ambition of ultimately resolving the Irish constitutional crisis. Often, landed conciliators saw their original unionist politics eroded and came to support Irish self-government, albeit with a strong British connection. These ideas should be understood in the context of demographic precarity and waning political power. In the south, Protestantism was in slow decline. In the twenty-six counties that would later form the Irish Free State, the number of individuals who professed a religion other than Catholic fell from about 468,000 (10.6 per cent of total) in 1861 to about 327,000 (10.4 per cent of total) in 1911. Although the Catholic population was likewise falling, and this was nothing compared with the reduction that was observed in 1926, such a reduction in numbers was felt keenly in small, isolated populations. There were 6,197 non-Catholics in County Limerick (excluding the county borough/Limerick city area) in 1861, but only 3,049 in 1911.⁶ Furthermore, franchise expansion changed politics in the south. In the 1885 general election, the Irish Parliamentary Party secured its position as the leading party, and the demand for Home Rule became a major issue in Irish and British politics. Protestants, at least in the south, could not look to the gentry to save them, for this class was itself in decline. Land agitation and, from the 1880s, land purchase, diminished their

power. The most significant measure, the 1903 (Wyndham) Land Purchase Act, amounted to a revolution in land ownership, as owners sold their estates to their tenants at attractive rates. In County Limerick, for example, at least twenty-three landed families sold up, changing forever the power dynamics in rural Ireland.⁷ Thus, seeing the changes that were taking place, a small number of landowners looked towards conciliatory politics as a means to retain some influence.

Windham Thomas Wyndham-Quin, 4th earl of Dunraven (1841–1926) held 15,467 acres in Limerick, Kerry, and Clare, as well as large holdings in Wales.⁸ The bulk of the Irish aristocracy were members of the Church of Ireland, and Limerick was no exception. However, there was a cluster of converts to Catholicism among the families discussed in this essay. Dunraven's father, the 3rd earl, converted to Rome, as did William Monsell, 1st Baron Emly, and three members of the de Veres.⁹ Despite paternal pressure, the 4th earl refused to convert, remaining in the Church of Ireland, albeit with a strong strain of religious scepticism. An adventurous spirit, he explored Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana, and purchased an extensive landholding in the latter state. A lover of sailing, he twice competed in the America's Cup in the 1890s. According to Patrick Maume, he was the only person to be present both at Versailles when Wilhelm of Prussia was proclaimed German emperor in 1871 and at the signing of the peace treaty in 1919.¹⁰ Dunraven was originally a conservative and unionist who held junior ministerial office under the Tories (as under-secretary of state for the colonies) from 1885 to 1887.¹¹ However, by the 1900s he had become convinced that Ireland required a large measure of self-government. Alongside a group of like-minded landlords he sought to convince Ireland's noblemen and gentlemen to temper, or even eschew, their unionism, and play a more prominent role in the country's affairs.

From 1902 to 1903, Dunraven chaired the Irish Land Conference, which brought together landlord and tenant representatives to formulate a solution to the land question. In 1903, the conference published a unanimous report which became the basis for the Wyndham Land Act, which greatly extended the policy of peasant proprietorship. For Dunraven, the success of the conference convinced him that a policy of conciliation between nationalists and landlords was possible. Dunraven formed an alliance with William O'Brien, the maverick nationalist and agrarian leader; O'Brien likewise sought conciliation, arguing that the gentry could play a valued part in an independent Irish parliament if they withdrew their objections to Home Rule.¹² (He was no relation to the O'Brien families mentioned in this essay). William O'Brien, too, saw the potential for a round-table summit on the Land

Conference model; he believed such a conference would bring about an agreement between nationalists and unionists to create a devolved system of government, which would ultimately lead to Home Rule.

In August 1904, the Irish Reform Association was founded, with Dunraven as president. Among the eighty-five or so mostly-landed members were two of Dunraven's fellow Limerick landowners, Lord Monteagle and Monteagle's nephew, the artist Dermod O'Brien, of Cahermoyle House. The London *Times* reported that the organisers hoped that the group would form the nucleus of a new moderate party, perhaps in alliance with William O'Brien and his followers.¹³ At its first meeting, the association endorsed the devolution of modest powers, including over certain financial affairs, to an Irish representative body.¹⁴ Although considerably less than the level of self-rule sought by the dominant Irish Parliamentary Party, devolution represented a substantial departure from unionist orthodoxy.

Dunraven denied that the Irish Reform Association sought devolution as a means towards fuller independence. Publicly, he maintained that far from devolution representing a step towards Home Rule, its proposals were indistinguishable in principle from Joseph Chamberlain's Liberal unionist devolution scheme of 1886.¹⁵ There may have been an element of gamesmanship in these protestations. In his memoirs, Dunraven stated that he hoped the proposals would gain the support of moderate nationalists. Then, once the scheme was implemented, parliament, 'seeing it working well and anxious to divest itself as much as possible of Irish business, would transfer more and more legislative and administrative functions to Ireland, until by degrees Ireland would have full control over her own affairs'.¹⁶ That the Irish Reform Association's leaders were surreptitiously in favour of Home Rule is suggested by the fact that four of the five members of the group's provisional organising committee had identified themselves as home rulers by 1912, with the fifth declaring for an independent parliament in 1916.¹⁷

The 1904–05 'devolution crisis' was a blow to the organisation. When it emerged that Dunraven had helped the under-secretary for Ireland draft a devolution scheme, it led to the resignation of the chief secretary, and the creation of the Ulster Unionist Council, a separate body to co-ordinate unionism in the north.¹⁸ Dunraven and his supporters were temporarily buoyed in 1907 when the Liberal government resuscitated the devolution proposals in the guise of the Irish Council Bill. However, the bill was defeated due to the opposition of rank-and-file nationalists. Ultimately, the Irish Reform Association did not gain anything close to enough momentum in order to bring about détente between nationalists and

unionists; Dunraven had gained neither enough support from within his own class, nor from the unionist or nationalist rank-and-file, to bring about a great realignment.

During this period, Lord Monteagle was also working for conciliation, while causing much less controversy. Thomas Spring Rice, 2nd Baron Monteagle of Brandon, held 8,755 acres, mostly in Limerick. Educated at Harrow and Cambridge, he succeeded his grandfather, the first baron, a leading Whig politician who had served as chancellor of the exchequer from 1835 to 1839.¹⁹ Lord Monteagle was among Horace Plunkett's leading supporters in the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society. Monteagle, along with his daughter Mary and sister Alice, sought to put cooperative principles into action: Edward MacLysaght reported on the bewildering variety of initiatives created by the Spring Rice family in and around their estate, including a saw mill, credit society, agricultural cooperatives, workmen's club, and branches of the Gaelic League and United Irishwomen.²⁰ A popular, unassuming figure, a contemporary remembered that 'perhaps [Monteagle] was not a man of outstanding ability, but he was a man of fine education, of stainless integrity and honour, brave but always gentle and conciliatory ... He used to remind me of a benevolent eagle. He was very tall and slight'.²¹

It was unfortunate for the cause of conciliation that Horace Plunkett and Lord Dunraven, the two leading reformers of their era, did not work together. They would have been well-suited to doing so, as they came from the same social background, moved in the same circles, and were both committed to the peaceful development of the country. However, Plunkett despised Dunraven, and refused to collaborate with him. In his diaries, Plunkett wrote of Dunraven that 'there is nothing in him but the political game' and, later, that 'he really has been fond of Ireland all his life, though not as fond as he is of himself'.²² It has been suggested that Plunkett's animosity had its roots in American business dealings in the 1870s, as well as in jealousy of Dunraven's friendship with Daisy, Countess of Fingall, with whom Plunkett was in love.²³

As the Edwardian Irish constitutional crisis intensified, Monteagle and Dunraven became perhaps the most conspicuous examples of landlord flexibility. They were among the select group of noblemen who associated themselves with William O'Brien's All-for-Ireland League, founded in 1909.²⁴ In 1913, Dunraven served as a vice president of the Irish Protest Committee, the leading Protestant Home Rule organisation, and attended their rally in Dublin.²⁵ On the entry of Britain into the European war, Monteagle publicly declared his willingness to join the Irish Volunteers, then under John Redmond's control. Dunraven suggested

that the Irish and Ulster Volunteers should unite, and take responsibility for Irish security.²⁶ Support for the British campaign could strain pre-war alliances: William O'Brien was disappointed when Dunraven supported conscription in 1915, but their friendship survived.²⁷

Dunraven and Monteagle may have been hoping for a constitutional settlement, but members of the younger generation had become imbued with a new militant spirit. Recent research suggests that republicanism among Protestants was often influenced by family tradition, and forged by strong ties of friendship and blood.²⁸ Members of the Spring Rice and related O'Brien families provide one of the most striking examples of such a network. Lord Monteagle's sister Mary (1843–68) had married Edward William O'Brien of Cahermoyle, the son of William Smith O'Brien, the Young Irelander who led the Confederate Rebellion in 1848.²⁹ William Smith O'Brien's daughter, Charlotte O'Brien, the poet and social reformer, held nationalist views and converted to Catholicism.³⁰ The most famous nationalist from this set was Mary Spring Rice, the daughter of Lord Monteagle. As with other nationalists from a Protestant background, learning Irish may have influenced her worldview; she and her two siblings were brought up to speak the language. Mary Spring Rice played a leading role in the planning and execution of the Howth and Kilcoole gun running, which provided arms for the Irish Volunteers. An excellent yachtswoman, she sailed on Erskine Childers' *Asgard*, and left a famous diary of the voyage.³¹ Another leading figure in the expedition was her cousin, Conor O'Brien who, despite being described by Mary as 'useless in the crisis', captained his own yacht *Kelpie*.³² Also involved was Conor's relative, Hugh Murrough Vere O'Brien, of Foynes, Limerick, who subscribed to the Howth fund and helped organise Volunteers in counties Limerick and Clare. Conor O'Brien's half-sister, Nelly O'Brien, was a leading Gaelic Leaguer, and advocate for the Irish language within the Church of Ireland. The Edwardian era saw an increased interest in the language among some members of the Church. In 1908, Nelly O'Brien was involved in organising a petition signed by forty Irish speakers, and another by 428 sympathisers (including Lord Monteagle and the Bishop of Limerick, Ardfert, and Aghadoe), calling for Irish services in St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. A further eighteen people signed a petition calling for Irish language services in Limerick, which seems to have related to St Mary's Cathedral.³³ O'Brien went on to found the Irish College in Carrigaholt, County Clare in 1912. Ultimately, she was the driving force behind the Irish Guild of the Church (Cumann Gaelach na hEaglaise), as it developed from a sedate pressure-group for Irish-language Anglican services into a Protestant nationalist organisation, leading to the mass resignation of unionist

members.³⁴ She also helped organise the Protestant Protest against Conscription. In April 1918, as nationalist Ireland united against the threat of conscription, pledges were signed in Catholic parishes; the Protestant Protest allowed Protestants the opportunity to declare their refusal to be conscripted into the war effort.³⁵

In the immediate aftermath of the Easter Rising, political moderates scrambled to save constitutional politics. The Limerick gentry was again prominent. After much persuasion, the artist Dermot O'Brien (brother of Nelly O'Brien) became chairman of the Irish Conference Committee, a small group which advocated for what became the Irish Convention of 1917–18.³⁶ O'Brien, the president of the Royal Hibernian Academy, was originally a unionist, but after 1912 he aligned himself with constitutional nationalism. He also convinced his uncle, Lord Monteagle, to join the committee. In 1917, the government appointed Lord Dunraven to the Irish Convention. In R.B. McDowell's words, Dunraven, 'being well over seventy ... could at times be testy' and he had little success in persuading the delegates to embrace his preferred solution – a large measure of Irish self-government as the first instalment in the federalisation of the United Kingdom.³⁷

By early 1919, growing violence and support for separatist politics gave rise to one final effort to save moderate or conciliationist politics in Ireland. In June of that year, Horace Plunkett founded the Irish Dominion League, which sought an all-Ireland state, with powers similar to those enjoyed by Canada.³⁸ Founding a new constitutional movement amidst wartime was challenging – the League operated far more as a pressure group with activities in Dublin and London than as a conventional party. For example, in late 1919, in light of the virtual collapse of the nationalist, land reform party, the United Irish League, the feasibility of creating a branch in Limerick was discussed. However, it was agreed that 'it would be very ill-advised to attempt anything in the nature of a public meeting just at present'.³⁹

Lord Monteagle was a leading member of the Irish Dominion League; Dunraven was conspicuous by his absence. Monteagle chaired its active London branch, and it was here that a Dominion of Ireland Bill was drafted. During this period it was stated that 'Poor Lord Monteagle was almost worked off his feet'.⁴⁰ The bill proposed dominion status for Ireland but allowed Ulster to be excluded via plebiscite.⁴¹ It was a slightly quixotic venture, and when Monteagle introduced it to the House of Lords, few believed it had a chance of succeeding. Dunraven – with, he said, reluctance – spoke against his fellow Limerick landowner's bill, rejecting dominion status as incompatible with his preferred scheme of federalism. The bill

was thrown out after about five hours when the lord chancellor made it clear that the government was opposed.⁴² There was a certain symbolism in Dunraven versus Monteagle. The inability of conciliationists – even amidst war – to coalesce around a single political objective underlined their lack of cohesion, and foreshadowed the failure of their project. This lack of a shared programme – besides a willingness to support alternatives to an unreformed Union – was among the major reasons for the demise of the conciliators. Other factors included the small number of Irish landowners who came forward to support the movement, and the fact that an accord between the gentry and tenantry did little to inspire the nationalist grassroots. But ultimately it was the changing demographic and social structure of Ireland which undermined the politics of conciliation. With the ability, at least in the south, to dominate electorally, there was no reason for the nationalist leadership to compromise with the old landed elite.

Post-independence, the decline of the group described in these pages largely paralleled the decline of the gentry everywhere else. But some found a place in the new Ireland. Lord Monteagle, on his death in 1926, was lauded as the model of the progressive landowner.⁴³ Lord Dunraven died a member of the Irish Free State senate. The IRA took part in the guard of honour at Mary Spring Rice’s funeral in 1924; her cousin Nelly O’Brien continued her language activism until her death the following year. In assessing the unusual politics of this group, David Fitzpatrick has rightly highlighted its roots in nineteenth-century romantic nationalism.⁴⁴ It also demonstrates the importance of family and peer networks in explaining departures from unionist orthodoxy. These departures, whether reformist or radical, could be deeply shocking to contemporaries. However, both gentry reformers and the younger radicals were fated to remain small minorities. They could never truly challenge the prevailing political assumptions of their class.

Notes

1. David Fitzpatrick, ‘Thomas Spring Rice and the peopling of Australia’, *Old Limerick Journal*, 23 (1988), pp 39-49.
2. Jennifer Ridden, ‘“Making good citizens”: National identity, religion, and liberalism among the Irish elite, c. 1800–1850’ (PhD thesis, King’s College London, 1988).
3. Matthew Potter, ‘“The most perfect specimen of civilised nature”: The Shannon Estuary Group – elite theory and practice’ in Ciaran O’Neill, *Irish elites in the nineteenth century* (Dublin, 2013), pp 113-24.
4. For a brief discussion of the 2nd baron Emly, see Mark Bence-Jones, *Twilight of the ascendancy* (London, 1987), p. 107.

5. Michael V. Spillane, 'The 4th earl of Dunraven (1841–1926): Local realities and “conciliation” politics' in Liam Irwin, Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, and Matthew Potter (eds), *Limerick: History and society: Interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 2009), pp 499-514, at 506-14.
6. See Saorstát Éireann, *Census of population: 1926, III: Religions and birthplaces* (Dublin, 1929), pp 1, 16ff.
7. See Jonathan Cherry, 'Landlords, estates, demesnes and mansion houses in County Limerick, c. 1870-c. 1920' in Irwin, Ó Tuathaigh, and Potter (eds), *Limerick: History and society*, pp 533-56, at pp 539-41.
8. U.H. Hussey de Burgh, *The landowners of Ireland* (Dublin, 1878), p. 141.
9. See Matthew Potter, *William Monsell of Tervoe, 1812–1894: Catholic unionist, Anglo-Irishman* (Dublin, 2009), pp 43-4ff.
10. Patrick Maume, 'Windham Thomas Wyndham-Quin, 4th earl of Dunraven' in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish biography from the earliest times to the year 2002* (Cambridge, 2009), pp 352-4.
11. *Who Was Who*, II, 1916–1928, 3rd ed. (London, 1962 [1929]), p. 313.
12. William O'Brien, 'Lost opportunities of the Irish gentry', published in idem, *Irish ideas* (London and New York, 1893), pp 13-29.
13. *The Times*, 26 August 1904.
14. *Irish Times*, 31 August 1904.
15. Earl of Dunraven, *Devolution in the British Empire: The case for Ireland* (London, 1906), pp 1-3.
16. Earl of Dunraven, *Past times and pastimes, vol. 1* (London, 1922), p. 28.
17. The organising committee comprised Lord Dunraven, Sir Nugent Talbot Everard, Colonel William Hutcheson Poe, Lindsey Talbot-Crosbie (home rulers since 1912), and Sir Algernon Coote, who declared in 1916.
18. See F.S.L. Lyons, 'The Irish Unionist Party and the devolution crisis of 1904–05' in *Irish Historical Studies*, 6 (1948), pp 1-22; John Kandle, *Ireland and the federal solution: The debate over the United Kingdom constitution, 1870–1921* (Kingston and Montreal, 1989), p. 94.
19. *Who Was Who*, II, p. 742.
20. Edward E. Lysaght, *Sir Horace Plunkett and his place in the Irish nation* (Dublin and London, 1916), pp 96-100.
21. Fitzpatrick, 'Thomas Spring Rice', p. 41.
22. Horace Plunkett diary entries for 1906 and 1923, quoted in Michael V. Spillane, 'The 4th earl of Dunraven, 1841–1926: A study of his contribution to the emerging Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century' (PhD thesis, University of Limerick, 2003), p. 325 (n).
23. Trevor West, *Horace Plunkett: Co-operation and politics, an Irish biography* (Gerrards Cross, 1986), p. 113.
24. William O'Brien, *The Irish revolution and how it came about* (Dublin, 1923), p. 72.

25. Cork City and County Archives, George Berkeley papers, CCCA/PR12, correspondence to George Fitz-Hardinge Berkeley, 3 February 1913 (letterhead); National Library of Ireland (NLI), Sheehy-Skeffington papers, MS 21,650, Report on meeting of Irish Protestants re. Home Rule, 24 January 1913.
26. *Irish Times*, 8 August 1914; *Irish Independent*, 4 August 1914.
27. Maume, 'Windham Thomas Wyndham-Quin', p. 354.
28. See Conor Morrissey, *Protestant nationalists in Ireland, 1900–1923* (Cambridge, 2019).
29. *Burke's peerage and baronetage*, 106th ed., I (London, 1999), p. 1498.
30. Stephen Gwynn, *Charlotte Grace O'Brien: Selections from her writings and correspondence* (Dublin, 1909), pp 99-104ff.
31. F.X. Martin (ed.), *The Howth gun-running and the Kilcoole gun-running, 1914: Recollections and documents* (Dublin, 1964).
32. Fitzpatrick, 'Thomas Spring Rice', p. 43.
33. *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 5, 12 June 1908.
34. Morrissey, *Protestant nationalists in Ireland*, pp 159-68ff.
35. Conor Morrissey, 'Protestant nationalists and the Irish conscription crisis, 1918' in Gearóid Barry, Enrico Dal Lago, and Róisín Healy (eds), *Small nations and colonial peripheries in World War I* (Leiden, 2016), pp 55-72.
36. NLI, Edward MacLysaght papers, MS 4750, Edward MacLysaght, 'Master of none' (Unpublished autobiography, 1952), pp viii-2.
37. R.B. McDowell, *The Irish Convention, 1917–18* (London, 1970), pp 93, 108-9, 168, 183.
38. For Plunkett's thinking, see 'Manifesto of the Irish Dominion League', June 1919, printed in The Irish Dominion League, *Official report setting forth a summary of the results achieved together with the proceedings on dissolution* (Dublin, 1921), pp 12-15; NLI, Monteagle papers, MS13,417/4, Francis Cruise O'Brien to Lord Monteagle, 18 November 1918.
39. NLI, Monteagle papers, MS 13,417/4, Memorandum for consideration of Executive Committee of Irish Dominion League, undated (after 16 August 1919).
40. NLI, George Fitz-Hardinge Berkeley papers, MS 10,924-10,928, George Fitz-Hardinge Berkeley, 'My experience with the Peace with Ireland Council', chapter 1.
41. See drafts and correspondence in NLI, Monteagle papers, MS 13,417/1.
42. Hansard, House of Lords Debates, Vol. 40, cc1113-62, 1 July 1920.
43. See for example, his obituary in *Irish Times*, 27 December 1926.
44. Fitzpatrick, 'Thomas Spring Rice', p. 43.

IV
Aftermath

CHAPTER 10

Limerick Protestants in Early Independent Ireland

Deirdre Nuttall

Hard-won independence was an opportunity to build a nation according to a new paradigm, representing a significant, even traumatic, cultural shift. Many Protestants – already rattled by the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland following the Irish Church Act of 1869, which had significantly diminished the clout of the Anglican community – were very anxious about the future.

In 1911, Limerick city and county were overwhelmingly Catholic, but with a relatively sizeable Protestant minority in the city, where just over 6 per cent belonged to the Church of Ireland, and 2.2 per cent were Presbyterians.¹ Protestants, especially members of the Church of Ireland, were significantly over-represented among the wealthier elements of society. For example, at a time when very few industries had workforces of over 400, the Condensed Milk Company of Ireland – headquartered in Limerick – employed about 300 and was run by the Cleeve family, who were wealthy Protestants, staunchly loyal to the union with Britain. The bacon industry, another very important Limerick employer, was dominated by three wealthy families, the Dennys, Shaws, and O'Maras, of whom only the O'Maras were Catholics.² In 1920, while criticising Limerick unionists for failing to condemn the persecution of Catholics in Northern Ireland, Limerick Corporation councillor Patrick O'Flynn asserted that, of fifty-six businesses on Limerick's O'Connell Street, forty were owned and managed by local Protestants, despite these being a small minority locally.³

Limerick Protestants were not a homogenous group. Their numbers had been augmented by the arrival of Palatine refugees in the 1700s; there was a significant settlement of Palatines on the Southwell estate near Rathkeale in Limerick. While cultural differences had waned with time, Protestants of Palatine

descent were still widely seen as somewhat ‘different’ in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴ Denominational diversity was also a feature of Limerick Protestantism, including Presbyterian, Methodist (which included a majority of Palatines), and Quaker congregations. They were also socioeconomically diverse, including small farmers and farm labourers, the urban working classes, and lower-middle-class families with small shops and businesses. Poverty was far from unknown, and the situation of the poverty-stricken Protestant was no easier than that of their Catholic counterpart. In 1908, the then dean of Limerick, Lucius O’Brien, had written of a Protestant who had been admitted to Limerick’s workhouse, where he was beaten by another inmate. O’Brien’s view was that Protestants were likely to ‘receive rather bad treatment’ at the workhouse and that they should, instead, be received into the Limerick District Hospital’s Protestant Ward.⁵

Political views were also no doubt diverse, but most Protestants were unionists, happy to be both Irish and subjects of the British Empire, which offered the sense of being part of something bigger than themselves. Many Irish people also found work overseas, participating in the British colonial enterprise. On the visit of Queen Victoria to Ireland in 1900 – a much-feted event – the Limerick Protestant Young Men’s Association (LPYMA) expressed their ‘unwavering devotion’.⁶ But by 1920, republicans were running courts across much of Ireland, which were generally accepted in Limerick, including by members of the population whose views were not republican at all, such as many Protestants;⁷ a forerunner of the pragmatism with which so many would approach changes post-independence. For example, one Protestant farmer took a legal case in one such court, maintaining that he was not the father of his maid’s child. (He lost, and was required to pay compensation to the woman in question).⁸

The Irish Civil War, which began on 28 June 1922, saw the bubbling to the surface of many forms of resentment and anger that were at times only tangentially related to the stated reasons for the conflict. The well-to-do Cleeve family, for example, which controlled much of the dairy industry in Limerick and was an obvious focus for resentment relating to Protestant domination of elements of the local economy, was targeted, with several factories and creameries burned.⁹ Yet, despite ongoing tensions and conflict, many Protestants were pragmatic about Irish independence. In October 1922, the president of the LPYMA, Archibald Murray, addressed the group, saying that ‘a great revolution’ had taken place since their last meeting. They were now living in the Irish Free State and, having ‘carefully thought over the circumstances of the case’, were asserting their intention of

keeping the laws of the land under the new government and, in the hope that God's blessing would rest upon Ireland, would 'work in every possible way to assist it with all its lawful endeavours'. Describing the Free State as 'a portion of the British Empire', they finished the evening by singing 'God Save the King', as was their wont.¹⁰ Less than a year later, on 23 June 1923 (a month after the end of the Civil War), the Bishop of Limerick, Ardfert, and Aghadoe, Harry Vere White, bemoaned the fact that large numbers of Protestants, taking with them much of the wealth of the community, had left the Free State because they felt that they were not welcome and that it would be difficult for their children to get good jobs in independent Ireland when they grew up. He added, however, that many Protestants had accepted the new situation and were prepared to make the best of it, appending his view that Protestants could make a 'priceless' contribution to 'the spiritual and intellectual life of Ireland'.¹¹

Large numbers of Protestants had, indeed, left. The Protestant population of Limerick dropped by 27 per cent between 1911 and 1926 (not including the drop relating to the withdrawal of the British forces, which had swelled local Protestant congregations).¹² While emigration from Ireland was high in general at this time, this was a remarkably high level of outward migration. Nonetheless, it is also true that the state was notably generous, in particular to wealthy Protestants whom it did not wish to see leave, taking their capital with them. For many such families, life went on much as it had before, and concerns about violence and sectarianism waned, occasionally bubbling to the surface in response to external stimuli.

The Eucharistic Congress was held in Dublin from the 22–26 June 1932, as the Free State was immersed in nation-building. It was celebrated all over the country, officially to mark the 1,500th anniversary of the missionary activities of St Patrick, Ireland's patron saint. For the Catholic majority, this was a hugely exciting event, a thrilling recognition of Ireland's place in the world as a Catholic society; an astounding counterpoint to the last visit of Queen Victoria just thirty-two years before, and a way to underline how the Irish people, recently independent after centuries of oppression, were part of a huge, important, international faith community, that easily rivalled the British Empire in power and influence.¹³ The congress was celebrated with gusto in Limerick, where the Limerick Development Association requested that the local business community observe 27 June as a holiday, and urged local businesses and citizens to adorn the streets with suitable decorations. Limerick city and smaller communities all over the county were decorated lavishly with flags, religious imagery, altars, and grottoes. About

8,000 people from Limerick travelled to Dublin for the festivities.¹⁴ Speaking at a reception in Dublin for the papal legate, the president of the Irish Free State's executive council, Éamon de Valera, stressed that Ireland was, by definition, Catholic: 'Repeatedly over more than three hundred years', he said, 'our people, ever firm in their allegiance to our ancestral Faith, and unswerving even to death in their devotion to the See of Peter, endured in full measure unmerited trials by war, by devastation, and by confiscation.'¹⁵ Implicitly, and despite numerous conciliatory government policies intended to reassure the Protestant population, de Valera was suggesting that those in Ireland who were not Catholics could also be seen as not fully Irish.

Meanwhile, in Belfast, the Ulster Protestant League (UPL) had been founded in 1931 to support what it saw as Protestant interests (for example, encouraging employers to hire Protestants by preference, and urging the Royal Ulster Constabulary not to hire Catholics). By 1935, the UPL was organising provocative meetings and parades, often in areas very close to traditionally Catholic neighbourhoods. The Orange Order's parades that July led to rioting, culminating in the deaths of thirteen people (drawn from both communities) and ousting thousands from their homes. Most of those who had to leave their homes were Catholics.¹⁶ While Limerick was far away from Belfast, the violence in Northern Ireland, coupled with ongoing resentment relating to the over-representation of Protestants as employers and gentry, inevitably contributed to tension even far south of the border. In certain areas, among them parts of Limerick, this tension sometimes manifested in the form of vandalism and violent protest. On 22 July 1935, a mob of up to 300 young men marched through Limerick, smashing the windows of Trinity Episcopal Church and of the homes of several local clerics and premises associated with the Protestant community.¹⁷ On 27 July, the *Irish Times* reported that the Kilmallock Church of Ireland church was destroyed by fire, while windows were broken at the local rectory.¹⁸ A woman recalling her mother's accounts of life in Limerick in the 1920s and 1930s said that 'she felt part of a minority in Limerick. I think they felt quite beleaguered as Protestants in Limerick,' while her uncle later recalled being 'a little boy hiding under the stairs with local children banging on the doors saying, "Proddy, proddy, come out, come out!"'¹⁹

Whereas it is easy to understand resentment relating to the vast socioeconomic differences that were still partly aligned with ethno-religious difference in the early decades of the twentieth century, on the whole wealthy Protestant families were still able to remain – if they so wished – almost entirely

within Protestant circles for the purposes of education, business, and social life. Protestant families with modest incomes were often the most likely to have to deal with resentment in their daily lives despite having much more in common with Catholic families on low incomes than with wealthy Protestant merchant families. The Limerick Protestant Aid Society and the Limerick Protestant Orphan Society, which marked its centenary in 1935,²⁰ engaged in philanthropy on the part of needy Protestants, demonstrating the ongoing socioeconomic diversity of Protestants in the area. One family member who lived in straitened circumstances in one of Limerick's widows' alms houses, which provided homes to poor Protestant families that had lost their breadwinner, recalled that, in his childhood in the 1950s, he still experienced taunts that might have seemed more in tune with the tensions that lingered throughout the 1920s and 1930s: 'Somehow or other the children down there knew that we were Protestants and they used to stand outside the gate and shout in at us: "Proddy woddy ring the bell, all the soupers go to hell"'.²¹ Non-Protestants in Limerick were often, perhaps understandably, given the rather simplified history then taught in school and promulgated in the media, quite unaware that Protestants could be poor or modestly-off, and perhaps suspicious of those who appeared to be so. This, of course, contributed to a significant sense of being invisible and unseen, which can still be expressed today by many older people from modest Protestant backgrounds.²²

But as independent Ireland matured, feelings of difference waned, despite an education system that remained persistently denominational at the behest of both majority and minority ethno-religious groups. Nationalist, or at least culturally nationalist, feelings grew among the Protestant population, which steadily sloughed off the unionist views that had been held by many at the point of independence. By the mid-1960s, post Vatican II, Catholics could attend the marriages and funerals of Protestant friends and colleagues and, in the 1970s and 1980s, the growing trend of ecumenism reduced difference yet further. Furthermore, dramatic improvements in educational standards generally, and growing industrialisation, had started to transform Ireland in ways that could only have been imagined in the 1920s, increasingly rendering old resentments obsolete. By the 1990s and 2000s, amid a dramatic general decline in formal religious observance, cultural differences continued to erode, with 'difference' in Ireland increasingly seen in terms of the ingress of people from a wide array of backgrounds from all over the world. In the context of a multi-cultural Ireland – incorporating an ever-more multi-cultural Limerick – the extent to which Irish Protestants were once seen as 'different' already seems quaint and peculiar. Yet these differences, with their

multiple historic, socioeconomic, ethnic, denominational, and cultural strands, are an essential element of Irish history, both national and local, and part of what makes us who we are as a nation.

Notes

1. John O’Callaghan, *Revolutionary Limerick: The republican campaign for independence in Limerick, 1913–1921* (Dublin, 2010), p. 10.
2. Frank Barry, ‘Old Dublin Merchant “Free of Ten and Four”’: The life and death of Protestant business in independent Ireland’ in Ian d’Alton and Ida Milne (eds), *Protestant and Irish: The minority’s search for place in independent Ireland* (Cork, 2019), pp 155-70, at p. 160.
3. O’Callaghan, *Revolutionary Limerick*, p. 106.
4. Vivien Hick, ‘Images of Palatines from folk tradition, novels and travellers’ accounts’, *Béaloides: The Journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society*, 64/65 (1996–7), pp 1-61, at pp 4, 12, 21.
5. *Irish Times*, 27 February 1908.
6. *Ibid.*, 31 March 1900.
7. There were, of course, notable exceptions to the tendency for Irish Protestants to be unionist in their views; for example, Mary Spring Rice of Mount Trenchard, Foynes, County Limerick was a staunch nationalist who was involved in gun running for the Irish nationalist cause. Diarmaid Ferriter, *Between two hells: The Irish Civil War* (London, 2021), p. 35.
8. O’Callaghan, *Revolutionary Limerick*, p. 87.
9. Ferriter, *Between two hells*, p. 72.
10. *Irish Times*, 24 October 1922.
11. *Ibid.*, 14 June 1923.
12. O’Callaghan, *Revolutionary Limerick*, p. 128.
13. Terence Brown, *Ireland: A social and cultural history, 1922–2002* (London, 2004), p. 25.
14. Charlotte Murphy, ‘Limerick and the Eucharistic Congress, 1932’, *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 52 (2012), pp 75-80.
15. E.B. Titley, *Church, state and the control of schooling in Ireland, 1900–1944* (Dublin, 1983), p. 127.
16. Graham Walker, ‘“Protestantism before Party!”: The Ulster Protestant League in the 1930s’, *Historical Journal*, 28 (1985), pp 961-7, at p. 964.
17. *Irish Times*, 22 July 1935.
18. *Ibid.*, 27 July 1935.
19. Oral History interview provided to the Irish Protestant Folk Memory Project, carried out 2013–2019 in collaboration between the author and the National Folklore Collection at University College Dublin, now part of the archives there.
20. *Irish Times*, 4 June 1935.

21. Deirdre Nuttall, *Different and the same: A folk history of the Protestants of independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2020), p. 225.
22. See Deirdre Nuttall, 'Count us in too: Wanting to be heard in Independent Ireland' in d'Alton and Milne, *Protestant and Irish*, pp 82-95.

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