



NUI MAYNOOTH

Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

Local experience of the 1798 rebellion: a comparative context

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Abbreviations

<i>BN</i>	<i>Belfast Newsletter</i>
<i>CG</i>	<i>Cork Gazette</i>
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Connaught Journal</i>
<i>DEP</i>	<i>Dublin Evening Post</i>
<i>FJ</i>	<i>Freeman's Journal</i>
<i>LG</i>	<i>London Gazette</i>
NAI	National Archives of Ireland
NCEP	<i>New Cork Evening Post</i>
NLI	National Library of Ireland
<i>NS</i>	<i>Northern Star</i>
PRONI	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
RCB	Representative Church Body Library
<i>TLG</i>	<i>The London Gazette</i>
TNA	The National Archives, London
UCC	University College Cork

Introduction

In order to reconstruct four local worlds in late eighteenth-century Ireland, this thesis will investigate the differing effects the Rebellion of 1798 had upon them. In order to assess how religious, political, social and key demographic factors may have influenced a locality's experience of the Rebellion of 1798, the study engages with a cross section of contemporary population centres and examines events in their locality under a number of themes that will allow for comparison across regions. The objective of this research is not to investigate the Rebellion of 1798 in a local context in exhaustive detail *per se*, rather it is intended to examine the structure of the selected areas in the late eighteenth century and to evaluate, at a time of conflict, the nature and workings of these societies. By investigating these societies as they came under strain, it is anticipated that the ensuing tensions will reveal aspects of these societies which may have not been otherwise discernible. By extension, this thesis will develop a research framework through which local societies may be considered in a regional context; a theme that has been somewhat lacking in studies of late eighteenth-century Ireland.

The theoretical framework is influenced by the chapter structure of Margaret Spufford's work *Contrasting communities: English villages in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*.¹ This work is a detailed history of the economic, educational and religious life of three contrasting communities, Chippenham, Orwell and Willingham in Cambridgeshire from 1525 to 1700. The three villages had very different economic settings, in which the pattern of landholding changed over this period and the general and particular reasons for these changes that took place are investigated. The study also covers the educational opportunities open to the villagers, examines religious affairs, the effect on peasant communities of the Reformation and the disturbance in the devotional life of the ordinary villager, which often

¹ Margaret Spufford, *Contrasting communities* (Cambridge, 1974).

culminated in dissent and disruption under the Commonwealth. The comparative aspect of Spufford's work is a notable feature of this study. By developing a comparative framework through which her subjects are considered, Spufford ensures that more definitive conclusions can be reached.

Although this thesis is considerably more focused in terms of timeframe, it will adopt many of the methods deployed in *Contrasting communities*. By developing a research strategy for late eighteenth-century Ireland, similar in approach and objective to that which Spufford applied to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Cambridgeshire, it is hoped to provide a new perspective by which the motivations, intentions and manipulations which occurred in contemporary society can be considered.

Wim Klooster's *Revolutions in the Atlantic world* offers an example of a comparative history that is more relevant in terms of content and time frame to this thesis than Spufford's work. However, analysing in a comparative context the late eighteenth- early nineteenth-century revolutions of America, France, Haiti and Spanish America, Klooster does not develop a comparative model but rather treats each revolution as a separate entity and includes a comparative chapter on the causes, patterns and legacies of all four.² To adopt a similar model for this thesis would add little to the existing body of research on the topic.

In order to investigate the mechanics of a local society in context it is necessary to provide a comparative template through which each case study will be measured. In this instance, each case study is contemporaneous, centred on events leading up to 1798, so the research is focused on identical themes. There are some shifts in emphasis in each case study in terms of available evidence and dominant themes. For example, it proved necessary to devote more attention to economic change in Killala, County Mayo than was the case for

² Wim Klooster, *Revolutions in the Atlantic world* (New York, 2009).

Ballymoney, County Antrim where an ideological conflict was articulated within the locality and led to a fall out that could not be imagined in the former context.



Source: John Rocque's map of Ireland, 1790

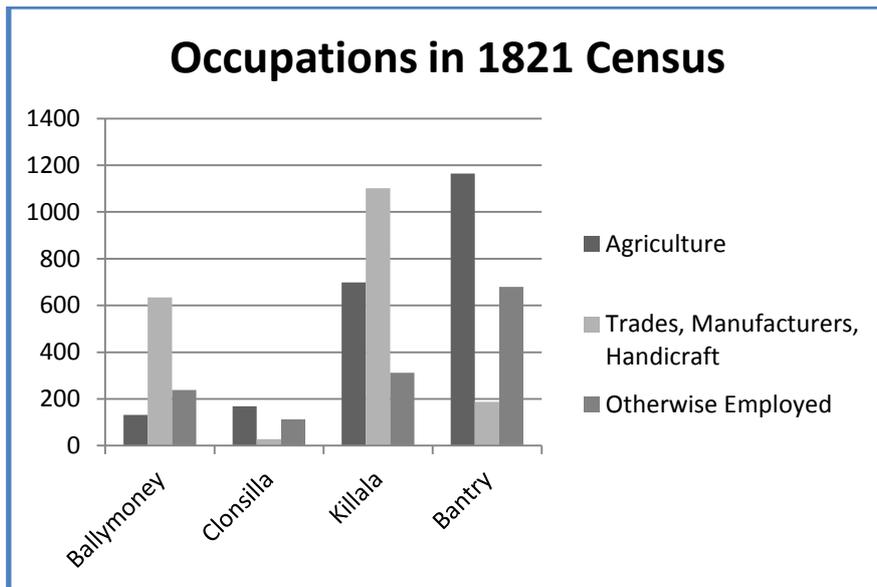
It was decided to select one locality from each province and investigate the effect of the 1798 rebellion in each locality. This should allow for the emergence of 'human units' or serve as evidence of community interaction on a significant scale. The localities, chosen on the basis of their suitability in terms of research categories and overall aims and objectives are Ballymoney, County Antrim, Clonsilla, County Dublin, Killala, County Mayo and Bantry, County Cork. These localities were selected after considering their suitability in terms of available sources, relevant events and whether they provided contrasting demographic categories to compare.

All of the localities played at least some role in a theatre of conflict and, to varying degrees, were instrumental in the outcomes of that conflict. This ensures, at a basic level, that a narrative could be constructed on each locality and an analysis of that narrative could be carried out. In the case of Ballymoney, prominent members of the community were involved in a tit-for-tat political debate which was linked to the violence of 1798 in a very direct manner. As a result, this study allows for an analysis of political clubs in late eighteenth-century Ireland, as well as an investigation of the Volunteer presence in the town and the political dynamic of this body. In Clonsilla, the sources provided by the various societies and associations of the Church of Ireland gentry allow for that aspect of a locality's experience of the rebellion to be investigated in further detail. The gentry of Clonsilla adopted an inventive, two-pronged approach to dealing with the disturbances in their locality. The same body of men who addressed security concerns and prosecuted offenders in one guise helped to alleviate hardship and tackle the root cause of dissent in another. In some respects, this section details the success of the establishment at a local level in containing the rebellion and maintaining the existing social order.

While the comparative aspect of this thesis can be addressed by the studies of Ballymoney and Clonsilla, it should come to the fore when considering the situations of

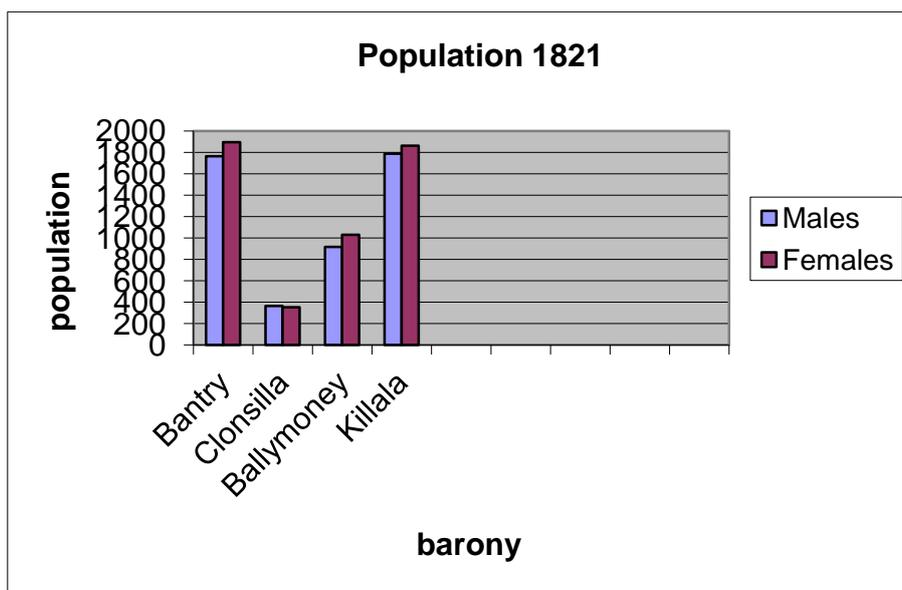
Killala and Bantry. Both localities rose to national and international prominence due to the activities of French invasion fleets at their coastlines, albeit only in Killala did they land successfully. While this thesis seeks to make comparisons across the four localities selected for study, there are obvious comparisons to be made between Killala and Bantry in terms of the inhabitants reaction to the intended invasions. This is not the case for Ballymoney or Clonsilla.

As this work is already placed in an extensive historiography, it was decided to select these localities as each offered an opportunity to achieve different aspects of the overall objectives. In concentrating on north Leinster and not south Leinster, it is aimed to open up a different dynamic to that which has already been established by historians of 1798. The local studies of Louis Cullen and Kevin Whelan on Wexford, in particular, were considered in the writing of this thesis and it was felt that by choosing an under-studied locality like Clonsilla, this work could better add to existing knowledge on the subject. Overall, this thesis seeks to establish a rational and set of criteria by which different localities of the late eighteenth-century in Ireland can be considered in a comparative manner. In order to do so, it is necessary to identify categories across the four localities that warrant comparison. An analysis of occupations in the 1821 census provides one such example of these categories for analysis.



Source: *an act to provide for taking an account of the population of Ireland ... 1824*

As can be observed, by 1821 the localities offer sharp contrasts in terms of the two main employment categories of agriculture on the one hand and trades, manufacturers and handicrafts on the other. While definitive conclusions cannot be drawn from a statistical analysis carried out at least 23 years after the events in question, it provides a guideline and account for a general pattern of employment, population levels and attendance at schools in each locality.



Source: *An act to provide for taking an account of the population of Ireland ... 1824*

Each of the four studies offers a ‘snapshot’ history of local power structures, religious belief and key demographic factors dominant during the 1790s. An important aim of this analysis will be to investigate by which form the state or civil polity came to be identified within the locality. Popular sentiment towards this authority will be assessed through a measured analysis of seditious activity and incidents of violence. By a similar approach, the differing means by which seditious activity manifested within a community will also be considered in terms of their defining characteristics and ideological outlook. These characteristics are clear from the lives of those who inhabited local worlds.

Before explaining the rationale of this thesis in greater detail, it is necessary first to provide an overview of the general political situation in Ireland at a national level during this time. In the decade after the French Revolution in 1789, the ideology which underpinned that event swept across Europe and popular support for ‘French’ principles spread fear amongst every European government and ruling class. ‘Liberté, Egalité, and Fraternité’ became the rallying cry for a generation of ambitious young revolutionaries. Support for these principles in the Irish context manifested as opposition to the ‘Protestant Ascendancy’, a term given to the Irish political ruling class who were drawn exclusively from the Protestant section of society.

In the age of the Penal Laws, which reinforced Protestant dominance over Catholics in the realms of political rights, access to professions, inheritance laws and religious freedom, the Protestant Ascendancy had jealously guarded their right to govern the country throughout the eighteenth-century, a claim given legitimacy following the victory of the Williamite forces at the battle of the Boyne in 1690. In the opinion of James Kelly, ‘the *raison d’être* of conservative Protestant political thought in late 18th century Ireland was to provide the “Protestant interest” with an ideological rationale to enable it to justify its dominant position

in the Irish constitution'.³ Needless to say, this was not a political body that responded favourably to any criticism of its right to govern, however frivolous it might appear to be.

The original club of the society of United Irishmen was formed in Belfast in October 1791, the beginnings of which are believed to lie in the 1791 celebrations of Bastille Day in the town.⁴ It was a society which aimed to apply the ideals of French republicanism to the Irish political situation, initially by peaceful means. Nancy Curtin has noted that the dominant ideological influence on the United Irish leaders was the British Whig tradition and the radical Whig Protestants who formed the ideological core of the movement were willing to court middle-class Catholic and, later, Defender participation. The implementation of Thomas Paine's *The rights of man* required it, as did the strategy of mass mobilisation.⁵

Branches of the organisation were soon to appear in various forms in other parts of the country. Early in the 1790s, the United Irishmen consisted mainly of respectable bodies of educated, middle-class, professional men and men of small property who sought radical reform and increased political influence. The power and influence of the Belfast club was increasingly lost to the Dublin branch, and this coincided with a growing militancy within the movement. Enigmatic young leaders such as Theobald Wolfe Tone and Lord Edward Fitzgerald, who were of quite affluent backgrounds, attracted popular support and became national figureheads for the United Irish movement. As the leadership of the organisation tended towards more radical elements by the time the society was outlawed in 1795, links with the Defenders gathered apace. The Defenders were a secret, oath-based agrarian agitation group who espoused vague political notions of reversing the contemporary trend of Protestant dominance, but more often sought to address local concerns through violent acts and tactics of intimidation. Marianne Elliot has commented on Defender membership, with

³ James Kelly, 'Conservative Protestant political thought in late eighteenth-century Ireland' in S. J. Connolly (ed.), *Political ideas in eighteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), p. 185.

⁴ R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600 – 1971* (London, 1989), p. 265.

⁵ Nancy J. Curtin, *The United Irishmen; popular politics in Ulster and Dublin 1791 - 1798* (New York, 1998), p. 37.

particular reference to Ulster, by noting that they ‘were not always the lowly peasantry and labourers of government propaganda’.⁶ Rather, there would appear to have been elements of common membership from the earliest stages of the United Irish organisation and perhaps the co-operation after 1795 may have been more a merger and less the uneasy alliance of previous perception.⁷

In a strictly legal sense, Ireland at this time was an independent country. To be more precise, it was a kingdom dependant on the kingdom of Great Britain. A distinctive form of Protestant nationalism, sometimes referred to as ‘colonial nationalism’ had emerged in the latter decades of the eighteenth century. Consequently, Irish Protestants had agitated for political reforms and greater legislative freedom from the British parliament. In Henry Grattan, who entered the Irish parliament at College Green in 1775, that movement found an inspired and capable leader. Specifically, the limitations on the powers of the Irish parliament imposed by Poynings’ law, and the act of 1720 declaring the right of the British parliament to legislate for Ireland, were targeted. While he believed that Ireland should be granted status as an independent legislature, Grattan insisted that Ireland should remain linked to Great Britain by a common crown and by sharing a common political tradition.⁸ The lord lieutenant, who resided in the Viceregal Lodge in the Phoenix Park, represented the king and was appointed by the British government. Through his right to select and control the Irish executive, he indirectly had power over such concerns as the granting of peerages and pensions, which ensured satisfactory British control over Irish affairs.

In terms of Irish agitation for legislative independence, international affairs played a key role in this dynamic. Ian Mc Bride has remarked that the American War of independence led to the loss of the jewel in Britain’s first imperial crown ... [and] eventually the American

⁶ Marianne Elliot, ‘The Defenders in Ulster’ in David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (eds), *The United Irishmen; republicanism, radicalism and rebellion* (Dublin, 1993), p. 233.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.233.

⁸ R.B. McDowell, ‘The Protestant nation’ in T.W. Moody and F.X. Martin (eds.), *The course of Irish history* (Cork, 1967), p. 233.

rebellion would create the backdrop against which the Irish elite were able to negotiate a new commercial and constitutional settlement with London.⁹ The obligations of the military in America directly led to the formation of the Volunteers, a part-time force raised locally in defence of the country. Given contemporary legislation, it had to be a formally Protestant movement, but from early on Catholics were admitted to Volunteer ranks in several places including Kerry, Cork and, less predictably, Armagh. Principally, Volunteering was a great psychological affirmation: of citizenship, of ‘patriotism’ of exclusive identity. The Volunteers could be identified with being anti-government. They mounted a campaign to repeal Poyning’s Law and the 1720 Declaratory Act. After this had been achieved in 1782, some Volunteer conventions moved to the language of political reform and accountability to constituents: but by then the movement was splitting fast. Its political influence was inseparable from the crisis conditions of 1779-82. However, the Volunteers were very far from radicalism: they showed great alacrity in breaking up demonstrations by journeymen claiming the right to form combinations.¹⁰

A unique combination of military defeat abroad and Catholic quiescence at home had forced the British government to concede, first, ‘free trade’ in 1779, and then legislative independence three years later. Just as important, however, was the revolution in Ireland’s internal affairs effected during the same period. The Volunteers had mobilized public opinion on an unprecedented scale, bringing ‘the people’ into politics for the first time; it was natural that the nation-in-arms should now push for domestic reforms that would render the House of Commons accountable to the new balance of political forces in the country.¹¹ Ian McBride summed up the socio-political importance of the Volunteers by stating

The significance of volunteering lay not just in what it achieved but in what it represented. The Irish Volunteer was the embodiment of the civic virtue so prized by republican writers.

⁹ Ian McBride, *Scripture politics, Ulster Presbyterians and Irish radicalism in the late eighteenth-century*, (Oxford 1998), p. 114.

¹⁰ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, pp 246-7.

¹¹ McBride, *Scripture politics*, p. 134.

The debates of these years represent the beginnings of popular politics in the north and the emergence of a new, self-conscious public eager to assert its authority. The experience of electing officers and delegates, participating in debates, writing addresses, chairing meetings and serving on committees provided a vital political education for thousands of northern Dissenters. Although the reformers ultimately failed to obtain their demands, the Ulster Volunteers had created a provincial political culture outside the structures of the constitution. It was a culture which was republican in the classical sense, founded on the active participation of the arms-bearing citizens. If radicalism had lost its momentum after 1785, the machinery for popular mobilisation was still there.¹²

During the era of ‘Grattan’s parliament’, many of the penal laws relating to religious, social and economic activity began to be cautiously removed. Still, the issue of extending the franchise to Catholics remained perhaps the most contentious political issue of the period. In terms of what had been achieved in 1782, Ian McBride has stated that radicals were well aware that legislative independence was the work not of parliament, but of the Volunteers.¹³ McBride quoted William Drennan, who summarised a popular contemporary view, when he declared that without reform Ireland’s free trade and legislative independence merely ‘enriched a corrupt aristocracy; oppression from abroad had been exchanged for despotism at home’. During the 1783 general election, parliamentary reform was naturally an important issue. Buoyed up by the successes of the Volunteers, the ‘independent interest’ scored a series of spectacular victories. For example, two prominent Volunteers were returned unopposed in County Antrim. However, with the election behind them, Irish MPs were also less susceptible to popular pressure; secure in their seats for another seven or eight years, and their misgivings about the whole Volunteer enterprise came to the fore. The House of Commons thus felt bold enough to reject two reform bills introduced by Henry Flood in November 1783 and March 1784.¹⁴

Adding further to the international dynamic, once France and Britain went to war in February 1793, the polarised opinion between those who supported and opposed the French

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 160.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

Revolution eventually squeezed out the middle ground.¹⁵ Britain feared French interference in Ireland, as a campaign rich in the rhetoric of liberation would also conveniently attack British interests. This was especially so after the failed French attempt at Bantry Bay in December 1796 and the subsequent government crackdown on the United Irish presence in Ulster and Leinster was the natural result. It is in this context that the outlawing of the United Irishmen must be placed and the anti-French sentiment of British public opinion can be understood. This scenario placed Ireland in a precarious international position. Equally, the vulnerability of localities to the fluctuations of national and international politics is also evident.

In terms of analysing how the national political situation played out locally, it is necessary to investigate how the government at College Green was identified in each locality. The emphasis of biographical work on late eighteenth-century Ireland has tended to focus upon the United Irishmen and its national leadership. This thesis aims to provide a variety of personal accounts of the rebellion by analysing the experience of key figures in each area. Louis Cullen has demonstrated the importance of such material in reconstructing the background and conduct of the rebellion in Wexford, a practice which could be applied to each of the localities featured in this research. Source material on the rebellion's lesser participants can be scant or non-existent. While it will be difficult to ensure that biographical information can be uniformly unearthed and accounted for in each community, such details will form an important feature in the reconstruction of these local worlds.

The destabilising effect of political dissent in Ballymoney exposed personal tensions evident in that society. Mainly a Presbyterian community formed, in part, as a result of seventeenth-century immigration, this case study underlines the vindictive, personal nature of conduct during the rebellion on both sides. In many respects, this case study also represents

¹⁵ Kevin Whelan, 'Reinterpreting the 1798 Rebellion in Wexford' in Dáire Keogh and Nicholas Furlong (eds.), *The mighty wave; the 1798 Rebellion in Wexford* (Dublin, 1996), p. 11.

the polarisation of political opinion and the tragedy of missed opportunity as evidently capable men of different opinions could no longer cooperate for their collective benefit. The ‘common good’ appears to have been a salient *motif* of previous generations in this locality; perhaps this case study investigates an era when the unifying force of settler’s desire to establish their locality had begun to dissipate. Of the four localities selected for study, Ballymoney is the only one in which Presbyterianism dominated. As the northernmost community selected for study, it was the most influenced by the Ulster plantation and elements of the settler mentality can be detected in the subjects of this research. This locality is also unique since two discernible economic and political blocks appeared to have been in a genuine contest for supremacy over the town’s political direction. This was not the case in any of the other three localities.

A desire to act for the ‘common good’ was certainly a concern for the gentry of Clonsilla, who formed various societies and associations to oversee economic activity and address security concerns in the area where they extended their influence. To a certain degree, their actions may have alleviated the detrimental influence of the nationally loathed Lord Carhampton, who was the most significant political figure and landowner in the region. Carhampton was an infamous member of the Irish house of lords and for a brief time was commander-in-chief of the army. That is not to suggest that the gentry of Clonsilla were above parish politics, political squabbling or allowing ego to cloud their judgement. However, as the evidence presented will suggest, it was possible to maintain relatively positive relationships even at times of conflict and violence, insofar as external issues becoming a mask for personal vengeance within the community may not have been a significant feature. In Clonsilla, the power base of the locality was centred upon one parish and one faith, that being St Mary’s Church of Ireland. This allowed for a certain unity of action and intention that was not present in Ballymoney. Clonsilla had the smallest

population of the four localities selected for study yet was the closest to the capital. It was open to a range of external influences and there is much evidence of interaction between it and surrounding locations. In this respect it shares some similarities with Ballymoney, while Killala and Bantry appear to have been somewhat isolated and self-contained.

The case study of Killala, County Mayo provides a particular example of external issues being articulated in the local context and the confused redefinition of radical ideology that can occur as a result. As the twin forces of the market and the state gradually extended their influence over the wider population and traditional society, the arrival of a French invasion fleet with strategic military intentions was understood in mythological terms; a peculiar *mélange* of contemporary and historical grievances and an alliance of mutually baffling values. The French fleet appears to have been aware of aspects of the society its members sought to influence toward outward rebellion. A Franco-Irish priest, Henry O' Kane, became the public face of the invasion. He appears to have been a key figure in the French 'hearts and minds' mission and featured prominently when presenting the ideological rationale to enlist. As all sources appear to suggest that a great deal of social distance existed between those who were within the 'establishment' and those who became the 'rank and file' of the French invasion fleet, an extended consideration of the sub-communities which existed within the wider population warrants further investigation. That is with reference to their religious practices, economic activity, hierarchical structures and ideological underpinnings. In many respects, Killala was the locality which was undergoing the most change among the four selected for study. At times, contemporary sources conflict with the results of the 1821 census for the area and this should be taken into consideration when analysing the data. For example, it appears from contemporary sources that an upsurge in employment in trades and manufactures was taking place during the 1790s, a trend which had increased further by 1821.

In relation to Killala, it is necessary to shed some light on why the nature of the uprising assumed a decidedly local character. Those who flocked to the French standard in the bay of Killala played a small, yet rapidly increasing, role in the conventional consumer economy. The communal nature of the society in which they existed produced limited financial output and contained limited conventional consumer activity. Again, generational and/or gender issues are addressed in this section, in terms of the emergence of that economy or the increased participation of ‘natives’ in consumerism. The emergence of debt as a means to fund war on a national level and fuel consumerism on a local level could also form a backdrop to this. Levels of literacy and/ or the existence of paper culture could also determine participation in the state economy; how were larger internal transactions carried out and how was debt owed by one party to another? The conservatism of the traditional society may have resulted from being constantly under attack or threat of ‘improvement’ at this time. Social values and practices became entrenched and failed to evolve over time; were attempts to impose outside influence on the traditional structures resisted as acts of political defiance?

In the absence of substantial data on literacy in Ireland prior to the 1841 census, this thesis will attempt to assess education provision in each locality as a means of addressing this shortfall. Ian McBride has noted that in the absence of this data, historians are forced to resort to ‘educated guesswork’ on the matter.¹⁶ In 1841, almost half of the population over the age of five was able to read, although there were vast regional differences, ranging from 90 per cent in parts of Ulster to just 15 per cent in areas of Connacht. Citing the work of Niall Ó Ciosáin and by projecting backwards from the 1841 data, using age cohort figures, McBride estimates that literacy in the later eighteenth century had already reached 55 per cent among men and 34 per cent for women. Once more, the regional distribution was uneven.

¹⁶ Ian Mc Bride, *Eighteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 2009), p. 57.

Table 1.1 Literacy levels in late eighteenth-century Ireland

	Men(%)	Women (%)
Ulster	70	52
Leinster	65	45
Munster	48	24
Connacht	37	15

Source: Niall Ó Ciosáin, *Print and popular culture in Ireland, 1750-1850* (Basingstoke, 1997), p. 38.

Advanced levels of literacy implies that crucial access to radical newspapers and publications that prior politicisation depends upon was possible. In this context, widespread distribution of the *Northern Star* or Paine's *The rights of man* could become a real headache for government and loyalists alike. It is no coincidence that schoolmasters were often suspected United Irishmen, a phenomenon that can be observed across Ireland at this time.

McBride has observed that

The expansion of print was closely linked to urbanisation and to the growing communications network that accompanied it. It was not just the presence of bookshops and coffee-houses that mattered, but the critical mass of lawyers, doctors, teachers, traders and printers living in towns all of whom needed to be able to read and write to advance their careers.¹⁷

In terms of this thesis, the fact that Ballymoney was a town is significant. This implied that a range of professions and external influences existed there. The ideological argument for improving government advanced in that locality is without parallel in the other localities selected for study. Essentially, the dispute is an internal one and is played out by prominent local figures to a definite conclusion. Equally, that the region surrounding Killala was undergoing a process of urbanisation and commercialisation is also key. While no other locality experienced such external influence as a successful French landing, an ideological

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

impulse to rebel founded on socio-economic grievances and mythological concerns did exist, albeit one that would have little in common with the politicised rebellion in Ulster.

The intention of the French fleet that hovered around Bantry Bay in December 1796 was discernible through diaries and contemporary materials. Their failure to land successfully averted a military conflict which may have tempted the loyalty of the local population away from local leaders. This case study highlights the response of a functioning, hierarchical society to an outside threat that potentially undermined the existing social order. The comparisons made between the economic and ideological conditions of Bantry and Killala attempt to account for the contrasting reactions of their wider populations to external threat. In addition, the evidence collected for this thesis would support Marianne Elliot's theory, as suggested in *Partners in revolution: the United Irishmen and France*, that poor communication between the French and United Irishmen prevented any significant radicalisation of the local population, in terms of peasants' action during the crisis.¹⁸ Certainly, Elliot's theory that the United Irishmen little understood the aspirations underlying the popular support they attracted is given some weight in each section, with the possible exception of Ballymoney.

This approach to the events of the 1790s is located within an extensive historiography. The seminal Bartlett, Dickson, Keogh and Whelan edited *1798: A bicentenary perspective* is an admirable chronicle of academic research in this field.¹⁹ David Dickson's article on Munster and the 1798 rebellion does much to explain the complex and contradictory experience of Munster during the 1798 Rebellion, where little action occurred although it appeared social conditions could, or in fact should, have encouraged rebellion.²⁰ This phenomenon will be examined with particular reference to the Bantry area during the French

¹⁸ Marianne Elliot, *Partners in revolution: the United Irishmen and France* (New Haven, 1990), p. 63.

¹⁹ Thomas Bartlett, David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (eds), *1798-a bicentenary perspective* (Dublin, 2003).

²⁰ David Dickson, 'Smoke without fire? Munster and the 1798 rebellion' in Bartlett, Dickson, Keogh and Whelan (eds), *1798- a bicentenary perspective*, p. 147.

crisis of 1796. David W. Miller's article in the same volume on radicalism and ritual in East Ulster identified four different types of non-governmental organisations which practised politically salient rituals and enjoyed remarkable growth, that is rural combinations, volunteer units, masonic lodges and covenant based Presbyterian sects.²¹ All four of these phenomenon will be considered in relation to the political fallout which occurred around Ballymoney during this period.

Overall, this thesis aims to provide a theoretical framework within which such detailed information and source material might be used to consider popular experience of the rebellion in a comparative social context. A comparative, regional approach was adopted recently by James Patterson in his work *In the wake of the great rebellion*.²² In the context of north Mayo, Patterson is keen to stress that a prior politicisation by the Defenders and the United Irishmen did take place, which was in turn shaped by pre-existing regionally specific socio-economic and cultural factors. This was exacerbated by the existence of an underground Catholic gentry with long-term connections to the Continent, a pervasive smuggling culture and a traditional agrarian dissent which focused the anti-state *mentalité*. He concludes that this can only then be understood when placed in the wider context of the Atlantic revolutions. Overall, Patterson's work presents some interesting conclusions but perhaps attempts to draw too many definite regional conclusions from what were essentially local incidents with disparate motivations. In several instances, he is keen to impose a similar ideological interpretation of what was taking place upon his subjects.

In the section covering this period in *The emergence of modern Ireland*, Louis Cullen highlights the value of local history in the study of 1798 in avoiding broad national generalisations.²³ At times, Cullen appears to suggest that modernisation is the implicit

²¹ David W. Miller, 'Radicalism and ritual in east Ulster' in Bartlett, Dickson, Keogh and Whelan (eds), *1798- a bicentenary perspective*, p. 196.

²² James Patterson, *In the wake of the great rebellion* (Manchester, 2009).

²³ L.M. Cullen, *The emergence of modern Ireland, 1600-1900* (London, 1981).

outcome of commercialisation, a theme that is studied and contrasted in sections three and four of this thesis. In the sections covering the late eighteenth century in Cullen's work, a deep tension between conflicting social, economic and cultural worlds is evident.

Specifically, the religious and cultural 'frontier' areas of south Wicklow and north Wexford are studied here in extended detail. Cullen successfully challenged the established view of the Wexford rebellion as a spontaneous reaction to government repression and revealed far more reaching economic, political and social factors for the outbreak of violence. In one particular aside that is relevant to this thesis, Cullen noted that while the decline of Gaelic patronage drove literate men into popular school teaching, often as apostles of the French Revolution, their cultural background made them heirs of the resentments of leaders of old Gaelic landed classes - a puzzling fusion of contemporary politics and ancient grievances.

Cullen has further addressed the contentious issue of United Irish organisation in Wexford on a local level in his essay in *Wexford: history and society*. This is an account which highlights the social complexity of United Irish organisation in the county on a local level and draws on a range of biographical sources to achieve its objectives. It criticises the ambiguity of the terms often employed by historians to dismiss potential organisation in the county, such as the absence of correspondence in the rebellion papers, and puts forward an alternative view on the impetus for rebellion, noting

The rebellion and state of the country papers in Dublin Castle do not throw much light on Wexford on the eve of the rebellion or in the preceding year and accordingly they have been used to support the contention that there was little or no organisation in Wexford on the eve of the rebellion. However, the papers have never been systematically appraised as a documentary source. Either they have been mined for isolated evidence contained in letters or negative conclusions have been drawn from the fact that evidence fails to surface in them.

Their inherent character as an archive has never been appraised. They represent the role of complex networks of individuals ... absence of comment does not suggest the absence of events which give rise to concern; instead, it may reflect local circumstances or even relative immunity to the insidious network of Castle loyalists who were intent on stirring up loyalist panic to engender pressure for sterner law and order methods.²⁴

²⁴ L.M. Cullen, 'The 1798 rebellion in Wexford: United Irishman organisation, membership, leadership' in Kevin Whelan and William Nolan (eds), *Wexford: history and society* (Dublin, 1987), p. 262.

In this instance, Cullen exposes the limitations of government sources to account for seditious activity and reappraises key sources to piece together a compelling argument for significant United Irish organisation in the county prior to the rising. While Cullen made this case for the rebellion in Wexford, it is applicable for evaluating seditious activity in each of the localities covered by this thesis. Equally, the argument put forward to explain the nature of discontent and the process of popular organisation is applicable to this thesis.

If the case is made that there was no organisation or preceding conspiracy, then the responsibility for the rising and for the sectarian animosities must be thrown onto popular feeling, popular organisation and in the last analysis the Defenders. The only feature of the period is the loose use of both the terms 'Defenders' and 'United Irishmen' by some contemporaries.²⁵

The blurring of these lines of distinction between the terms of 'Defender' and 'United Irishman' is a common feature of this time, as the United Irishmen were driven underground later in the 1790s. Cullen is less strenuous in linking the 1798 Rebellion as a continuation of the Whiteboy disturbances earlier in the century, however, and is critical of Richard Musgrave's assertions in this regard. In the opinion of R.F. Foster, Cullen is successful in establishing a prehistory of social and agrarian conflict in the county, breaking along lines of land settlement and helping explain the savagery of intercommunal violence there.²⁶ When commenting on the work of early propagandists who performed a key role in the process of politicisation, Cullen remarks on

... the danger of relating non-middle-class activities to the ranks of agrarian rebels. The sharp definition given to defenders as an organisation separate and distinct from the United Irishmen is due largely to an implicit and unchallenged assumption limiting radical well-defined aims to the middle classes and relegating all other discontents to an underworld of ill-defined and unrelated discontents.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., p. 253.

²⁶ R.F. Foster, 'Remembering 1798' in Ian McBride (ed.), *History and memory in modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 74.

²⁷ Cullen, 'The 1798 rebellion in Wexford' p. 275.

Rather, an argument for mass organisation and a unity of purpose is advanced by Cullen, who concludes;

The well-defined pattern in which the units and their leaders emerged within the three days from the late evening of 26 May gives the lie to the argument that the rebels were merely frightened crowds of peasants and that they had acquired their leaders simply through a process of intimidation of suitable middle-class figures.²⁸

Guy Beiner's *Remembering the year of the French* demonstrates the value of using non-conventional sources as a means to understand the past.²⁹ The book has three broad functions; to explain the role of the French invasion and its collapse; to reflect on the subsequent character of historical memory and the factors influencing this and to bring to the attention of traditional historians the resources available in the annals of folklore. Beiner's treatment of how folk memory persisted and was reshaped by successive generations in differing localities is insightful regarding the nature of oral evidence. This line of thinking is consistent with R.F. Foster's assertion that 'folk memory of 1798, like that of the famine, the next traumatic caesura in Irish history, tends to be repressed: it often takes the form of re-remembering in the following generation'.³⁰ Thirdly, Beiner focuses on the dynamics of folklore to advise the aspiring historian. In this instance, the principles that Beiner developed in terms of using folklore material as a means to understand a community's relationship with its heritage will be employed in analysing localities outside of the west of Ireland.

Of the primary sources utilised, Richard Musgrave's 1801 work *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland* is an important compilation of depositions from various localities recording the sufferings of the loyalist population. Unquestionably biased and written with an expressed political agenda, the work is nonetheless vital in accounting for a popular and polemic contemporary view of events. It was important for Musgrave to implicate the French in the sectarian disorder that was manifest in Ireland, as much as it was

²⁸ Ibid., p. 295.

²⁹ Guy Beiner, *Remembering the year of the French* (Wisconsin, 2007).

³⁰ Foster, 'Remembering 1798', p. 67.

to connect the Defenders, and before that the Whiteboys, with France.³¹ It also contains vital factual information and can be generally relied upon for dates and locations. It is not the case that Musgrave cannot be relied upon to provide factual information, more that his fanaticism blinds any prospect of objective analysis surrounding the causes of political violence. James Kelly has commented on the overriding themes of this work by noting

Its significance for Ireland is clear; it provided the advocates of protestant ascendancy with a compelling case in support of the contention that Catholics could not be admitted to the political process, because the concessions made to date had served merely to encourage Catholics to intensify their historic campaign to eradicate Protestantism in Ireland and the sunder the British connection.³²

The likelihood, therefore, of obtaining objective analysis of the crisis from this source is doubtful. However, Kelly's appraisal of the work does expose key areas of research which were overlooked or dismissed by Musgrave and provides themes which should have been considered in more detail. Musgrave's work was of its time and its main objective was political; a warning against granting Catholic emancipation by chronicling attacks on Protestants as an implicit outcome of increasing Catholic relief. At the heart of *Memoirs* ... analysis lies an obsession with the belief that Catholics in Ireland were determined to achieve the extirpation of Protestants of every denomination, that they were indoctrinated almost at birth by the clergy in this enterprise and that their political ambitions and actions can be explained by this fact. In essence, the very nature of 'popery' prevented even minimal improvement of the Catholic's position. For example, as Kelly has noted

Though aware that the United Irishmen had sought actively to unite Catholic and Dissenter, Musgrave believed it was merely an alliance of convenience, and maintained that Catholics and Presbyterians, avowed and inveterate enemies, were embarked on a duplicitous strategy to achieve their own ends at the expense of the other. He accepted that some 'northern gentlemen of sagacity' believed the Presbyterians were 'sincere in fraternizing with the Roman Catholics for the purpose of forming a republick', but his own negative conclusion was that the Catholics

³¹ James Kelly, *Sir Richard Musgrave, 1746 – 1818, Ultra Protestant Ideologue*, (Dublin 2009), p. 111.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 90.

aspired to ‘lull’ Presbyterians into a false sense of co-operation, and once their ‘object was accomplished,... to...extirpate ... Protestants of every description’.³³

Indeed, Musgrave refused to acknowledge the legal rights or justifiable political reasons for the Catholic Committee, United Irishmen or any other group to seek reform of the political system. The fact that they may not have found the constitution as favourable as he did is not considered. This is most notable in the two hundred pages that Musgrave devotes to the origins and background of the 1798 rebellion. Musgrave argued that ‘the envenomed hatred with which the popish multitude are inspired from their earliest age by their clergy to a Protestant state, their protestant fellow-subjects and to a connection with England’ was crucial in encouraging Catholics to participate in the major popular movements of the era – the ‘Whiteboys, Rightboys, United Irishmen and Defenders’. Crucially, Musgrave assembles these movements, and an underlying French influence, into a continuum of dissent that all paved the way for the 1798 Rebellion.³⁴ Cold water has been poured on these assertions by modern historians; nonetheless it remains a key theme of Musgrave’s opinion-forming work.

The regional focus of *Memoirs...* is also disjointed. The ideological backdrop to the rebellion in Ulster did little to satisfy Musgrave’s objectives of accounting for a combination of sectarian atrocity and military event, in comparison to Leinster, particularly Wexford, and Connacht. His treatment of the inaction of the Munster peasants at the time of the French attempt at Bantry Bay is skewed by his political manifesto, believing they did not rise as they had been instructed to expect and invasion in the spring of 1797. This ‘perverse interpretation’, Kelly has noted, ‘was in keeping with Musgrave’s advanced capacity to perceive every action, event and development through inflexibly loyalist lens’.³⁵

³³ Ibid., p. 113.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 109.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 112.

There are a wider range of primary sources utilised to achieve the objectives of this thesis. The sources used vary in content and form from each locality although each one is geared towards the same fundamental research framework. In Ballymoney, a large volume of personal correspondence complements the usual cache of government papers. The bulk of this correspondence is in the form of private letters written between John Caldwell and John Parks in the aftermath of the rebellion and provides valuable personal insight into the conflict.³⁶ Newspapers such as the *Belfast Newsletter* and the *Northern Star* are important sources for this section, as declarations and advertisements provided much detail for local political clubs and volunteer units.

In Clonsilla, unique volumes of minute books from various local associations and societies such as the Association for the Protection of Private Property and a Farmer's Society account for gentry sponsorship of the local economy and safeguarding law and order. The minute book of the Association for the Protection of Private Property acts as a log book of violent incidents and the response to this violence by the gentry.³⁷ The Association was essentially a neighbourhood-watch scheme and prominent members would form the armed Clonsilla yeomanry corps later in the decade. The Farmer's society regulated the local economy and acted as a humanitarian outlet at times of particular hardship. It also owned and controlled a village shop that provided access to consumer goods within the community. These sources provide an insight into the mindset of the gentry that has not been accessible in other communities.

Folklore sources and material from the French invasion fleet provide crucial sources for Killala. The diary of Reverend James Little of Lacken is equally important in portraying a polarised view of the events as they occurred. Little was a local Church of Ireland minister. His diary was finished in the aftermath of the French occupation during which his home was

³⁶ PRONI, T 3541/1 John Parks to John Caldwell Snr.

³⁷ RCB, P.0352.28/2.

damaged and many of his possessions were destroyed.³⁸ The diary of the bishop of Killala provides telling insight into the experience of the gentry during the occupation.³⁹ The personal accounts of the French officers provide an insight into the ‘clash of cultures’ which occurred upon their landing and note their surprise at the squalid conditions that they encountered among the cottier class.

The Bantry estate papers offer crucial insights into the ‘command centre’ at Bantry House during the French crisis.⁴⁰ Equally, Edward Morgan in his diary attempted to record events ‘on the ground’ during the crisis from a loyalist perspective. Morgan was a local loyalist who acted with the landlord during the French crisis. Nonetheless, Morgan recorded a plausible account of events and the concerns of the local population throughout the invasion scare. While contemporary statistical surveys were located for each locality, these vary greatly in quality from McParlan’s concise survey of Mayo to Townsend’s rather vague work on Cork.

The Rebellion Papers in the National Archives of Ireland were consulted for each section of this thesis and information taken from this archive is employed throughout. The papers consist mainly of correspondence and reports sent to the Chief Secretary during the period of the 1798 rebellion. As well as reports on the state of law and order throughout the country, the papers contain records of courts martial, correspondence of informers, papers concerning state prisoners, and papers seized by the authorities from suspects. At times, the information contained in the correspondence from concerned supporters of government is little more than gossip transmitted to government in a state of panic or with some clear objective in mind, usually to condemn a prisoner or agitate for more troops. Nonetheless, they contain vital information on local concerns and details of court martial, in particular,

³⁸ James Little and Nuala Costello, ‘Little’s diary of the French landing’ in *Analecta Hibernica*, xi (1941), pp 69 – 75.

³⁹ Joseph Stock, *A narrative of what passed at Killala* (Dublin, 1800).

⁴⁰ UCC, BL/EP/B/2247 Bantry Estate Papers.

shed some light on the machinations of Dublin Castle and the judicial process. The limitations of the Rebellion Papers have already been commented on; nonetheless, they remain a vital source in understanding loyalist and government perspectives of the crises of the late eighteenth century.

Due to the nature of this research project, whether a source was generated from within a locality or outside it became a crucial point of evaluation. Indeed, whether the source portrayed the conflict from ‘above’ or ‘below’ is of equal importance. These fundamental questions set the tone of assessment as primary sources written at a time of conflict can understandably tend to more bias than is usual, given the polarised nature of events. If 1798 is understood as the descent of a barely functioning, unequal society to the brink of chaos and this thesis aims to recreate facets of this world to investigate that process, then the perspective of the source becomes all the more important. For example, the minute books of the Association for the protection of private property in Clonsilla barely detect seditious activity or agrarian violence from ‘below’ until it is acted out and comes to their attention. This can be said of pre-planned murders and the houghing of cattle in the area. Equally, the diary of Church of Ireland Bishop Joseph Stock does little to explain the motivations of those who made up the ‘rank-and-file’ of the rebel army around Killala, while James Little attempts to do so his observations are made at some remove from his subjects, considering he lived amongst them. As an example of a source from ‘below’, Irish language Jacobite poetry provides more insight into what many rebels believed was taking place when the French landed and these motivations are not alluded to by either Stock or Little.

A central aspect of this thesis is its comparative dimension. Making comparisons required a framework that allows for meaningful comparisons despite the fact that the localities selected for investigation had no formal ties with one another, other than a similar interaction with the government at College Green. Section one of the framework will

consider local experience of the 1798 Rebellion. This section will consist of a narrative of the key events which took place in the locality in the era of the rebellion. It was decided to place this narrative at the beginning of each chapter. The motivation for doing so is to allow the next three chapters to analyse the factors which influenced outcomes to be considered in more systematic detail.

Section two is titled 'the locality in context'. In this section, population figures and geographical details will be provided. It aims to provide a demographic context to events in each locality. An analysis of the religious outlook of the locality is included. As will be discussed, each of these terms of reference held different implications in different communities. As an agent of politicisation, the nature of the local economy is also considered.

Section three analyses 'the locality and the state'. Crucial to this investigation is an analysis of local power structures. Often, this involves an account of local figures and families of power, their backgrounds and indications of their conduct during the crises. It is necessary to consider in more detail the nature of state presence within the locality and its functional role, civic functions and community structures. Important questions are posed regarding the obligation that the individual held towards the state and what they received in return. Also, the extent to which networks of communication facilitated the spread of information will be established.

Section four will investigate 'conflict and the locality'. An account of agrarian disturbance within the region will provide some perspective on the incidents which took place in the late eighteenth century. This section will also contain an account of conflicts of ideology and interpretation in the community. In addition, it will seek to investigate how secret societies or agrarian groups identified with revolutionaries.

In terms of timeframe, this thesis will focus largely on events in the 1790s for each section. Ian McBride's *Eighteenth century Ireland: the isle of slaves* signs off on the 1798 Rebellion as the culmination of the religious and social tensions which underpinned political activity in eighteenth century Ireland.⁴¹ This thesis agrees with McBride's assertion and does not attempt to study local reaction to the Act of Union debates as a barometer of public opinion or to reconstruct these worlds. This thesis also attempts to address what McBride identifies as a 'central bone of contention' of 1798 studies; the relative weight that should be accorded to political, religious and economic factors in explaining the mobilisation of tens of thousands of Irish people against the existing social order.⁴² The political context of the 1798 rebellion is an important feature of this era. This aspect is examined to a limited extent by this thesis, as establishing local perspectives on the rebellion is the imperative; nonetheless, R.F. Foster's summary of the underlying triggers behind the rebellion is considered:

Behind the savage episodes of 1798 lay a complex recent history of parliamentary reform, short-circuited from the early 1790s, agitation for the lifting of all disabilities against catholics, mounting tension in the countryside, and most significantly of all the foundation and transformation of the Society of United Irishmen: French-inspired radicals, embracing modern, egalitarian, secular ideals.⁴³

Essentially, this research aims to provide a framework which explains how each local society operated and in turn, how it experienced the rebellion. In order to do this it is necessary to account for important variations over space, that is to say which identifying factors influenced these outcomes. A crucial outcome of this process will be to explain how rebellion worked in each locality. French influence, whether it be ideological or military feature prominently in this thesis. In some respects, while the French military input is accounted for, the overriding objective is to assess how receptive localities, which came under strain, were to the ideological French argument for better government which

⁴¹ Ian Mc Bride, *Eighteenth century Ireland* (Dublin, 2009).

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 407.

⁴³ R.F. Foster, 'Remembering 1798' in Ian McBride (ed), *History and memory in modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 69.

underpinned their intervention and United Irish activity. In other words, when law and order came under threat and local society ceased to function appropriately, how was disorder expressed by those who instigated it? The following four chapters will aim to account for this in more precise detail than has been attempted previously.

Chapter 1

Ballymoney, County Antrim

Witness that astonishing revolution in the great mighty kingdom of France, where humanity itself trampled underfoot, where despotism and priest craft reigned without control, where even the innocent victim of ministerial vengeance or holy strand experienced all the horrors of an infernal prison and 'till lately of a more infernal inquisition, dreadful far beyond the imaginary hell of ancient poets.¹

(Ballymoney Whig Club, 17 March 1790)

The inhabitants of the late eighteenth-century town of Ballymoney were deeply ideologically divided by contemporary political issues to the extent that normal social relations broke down and extreme violence was employed to settle political disputes. Disputes centred largely on Catholics' access to the franchise and their right to bear arms. This assertion is supported by analysing events which took place in the locality in the era prior to the rebellion. This chapter proposes to study the underlying triggers for that violence and to explain the local context for why this occurred.

In many respects, the political conflict appears to have taken place between two different economic groups; namely the landed interest and the linen merchants. By analysing this dispute, leaders of either side can be distinguished in the tit-for-tat political debates and arguments which preceded the violent conclusion to the century. There can be little doubt that a great deal of 'score-settling' took place during the time of the rebellion for which the political motivation or value can be questioned.

Edmund McNaghten represented the generational landlord interest with great forthright and determination. His skilled manoeuvrings and manipulations of events ensured that he emerged from the dispute with his position greatly enhanced; by no means a foregone conclusion at the dawn of the 1790s. In contrast, John Caldwell Snr. emerged as the natural

¹ *Belfast Newsletter*, 19 Mar. 1790.

leader of the linen merchants, a man of great principle and eloquence, his ability to organise clubs, articulate democratic principles and his desire to keep up-to-date with contemporary political developments ensured his position in this regard. Caldwell was a wealthy linen merchant and landowner who counted a corn mill and bleach green with forty-two acres of land at his home at Harmony Hill (now Balnamore) amongst his possessions. Caldwell's ancestors had come from Scotland to Antrim and Tyrone during the second half of the seventeenth century and two of his uncles were venerated in the family for their role in resisting the siege of Derry in 1688-9. The Caldwell family was part of a tight-knit kin group in which cousins married cousins - inter marriage being a common feature amongst Ulster Presbyterians at this time.² Born in 1742, John Caldwell married Elizabeth Agnew in 1767 while his two brothers, Richard and James, emigrated to Dominica and Philadelphia in 1776 and 1769 respectively.³

Catherine Ball, an aunt of the Caldwell family, detailed the actions of their ancestor William Caldwell of Ballymoney in her private letters. His activities made an indelible impression on local opinion and familial politics in the town. He had received a commission in 1718 to search the houses of Roman Catholics for firearms 'and severely did exercise the power entrusted in him'.⁴ In 1689 an ancestor of William Caldwell had been the first commander to lead his troops to the gates of Derry to demand its surrender for his master, James II. This could account for continuing Jacobite sympathies amongst the Caldwell family. Local families such as the Leslie and Mc Naghtens had profited from land obtained by the earl of Antrim. Caldwell appears to have been in much conflict with the earls and his family were excluded from these grants as a result. It should be noted, however, that there

² David A. Wilson, 'John Caldwell's memoir: a case study in Ulster-American radicalism' in David A. Wilson and Mark G. Spencer (eds), *Ulster Presbyterians in the Atlantic World* (Dublin, 2006), p. 106.

³ NLI, GO MS 811 (5) Draft pedigree of Caldwell of Ballymoney.

⁴ PRONI, D/1518/1/1 letter 2/5/1934 J.B. Hamilton Papers.

appears to have been some social fluidity in this context as Catherine Ball also commented on the close friendship between the Leslie and Caldwell families.⁵

This chapter will set the events as they occurred into a narrative structure, before interrogating that narrative through a measured analysis of various demographic and ideological factors. It is vital to highlight the importance of the ideological background of what took place around Ballymoney as sources record that a consistent argument in favour of reform of the political system was advanced in the locality and that this had a direct influence on local events. The personal nature of the dispute cannot be underestimated despite the political overtones. In some respects, the crux of this dispute took place between two families, and by extension, two men, who were constantly at odds with one another. While they were entangled in a two-and-fro intrigue, each attempting to undermine the other's position through the vehicle of contemporary political debate, the dispute was eventually settled by acts and intentioned acts of extreme violence.

⁵ PRONI, D/1518/1/1 letter 2/5/1934 J.B. Hamilton Papers.

Section One - The locality in context

The eighteenth-century town of Ballymoney developed in tandem with the plantation of Ulster and subsequent movement of people to Ireland from Scotland, in particular. Although as Ian McBride has highlighted, settlement in much of Antrim and Down were not included in the original scheme and ‘can only partly be attributed to the policy of British colonisation, it must also be seen in the context of a centuries old tradition of migration between Scotland and Ulster.’⁶ This would account for the overwhelming dominance of the Presbyterian religion in the town.

In 1792 a statistical survey carried out by Daniel Beaufort described County Antrim as a ‘maritime county ... extending from north to south forty four miles and from east to west twenty four, containing 387,200 acres, which make about 605 square miles’. The county comprised the eight baronies of Massareene, Antrim, Toome, Kilconway, Dunluce, Cary, Glenarm and Belfast, ‘exclusive of the county of the town of Carrickfergus.’ Beaufort stated that the county contained 29,122 houses, ‘in which we cannot suppose more than 160,000 souls’. These figures would allow for a mean average of 260 inhabitants per square mile, although as Beaufort accounted ‘the mountainous and boggy county on the east coast, which with a large tract of very rough and high hills west of Belfast, occupies near one third of the county’. The richer and more fertile parts of the county were reported as being ‘well cultivated and well inhabited’. In addition to this, the linen trade is said to have given ‘spirit, employment and wealth to the whole county’. The principal towns of the county are listed as Belfast, Carrickfergus, Antrim, Lisburn, Ballymena and Ballymoney.⁷

Ballymoney, County Antrim was described in Lewis’ *Topographical dictionary of Ireland* (1837) as a market and post-town, and a parish, partly in the north-east liberties of

⁶ Ian McBride, *Eighteenth century Ireland* (Dublin, 2009), p. 27.

⁷ Beaufort, Daniel Augustus. *Memoir of a map of Ireland; illustrating the topography of that kingdom, and containing a short account of its present state, civil and ecclesiastical; with a complete index to the map. By Daniel Augustus Beaufort, L.L.D. Rector of Navan in the county of Meath, and vicar of Collon, in the county of Louth* (Dublin, 1792).

Coleraine, county of Londonderry, and partly in the barony of Kilconway, but chiefly in that of Upper Dunluce, county of Antrim, and province of Ulster, 35 miles (North West) from Belfast, and 119 miles (North by West) from Dublin.⁸ In 1812, John Dubourdieu carried out a statistical survey for the county of Antrim and recorded that Ballymoney town was scattered over an extent of about three quarters of a mile and that a population of about 1,800 persons lived in 309 houses.⁹

According to the census of 1821, the total population of Ballymoney town was 1,949, with a slightly higher proportion of females. The total population for the county of Antrim was recorded as 262,860. By 1821, there were eight baronial divisions within the county, of which Dunluce upper was the sixth smallest with a population of 16,533. Within the barony of Dunluce upper there were five subdivisions of town, parish and village, of which Ballymoney town, with a population of 1,949, represented approximately eleven per cent of the overall population of the barony.¹⁰

Occupations were recorded in the 1821 census under three broad categories, 'agriculture', 'trades, manufactures or handicrafts' and 'not comprised in the preceding classes'. What we are not told is whether these statistics included women.¹¹ In the county of Antrim, those listed as employed chiefly in agriculture represented 26 per cent of the total persons occupied. The returns for trades, manufactures or handicrafts were 57 per cent whereas those not comprised in the preceding classes were at 17 per cent.

Returns for Dunluce upper barony indicated a total of 54 per cent for those working in trade, manufactures or handicrafts. Within the town of Ballymoney, 63 per cent of those employed were in this category. This is the highest proportion of the four communities selected for study, with Killala in second place at 49 per cent. Accordingly, a mere 13 per

⁸ Samuel Lewis, *A topographical dictionary of Ireland* (3 vols, London, 1837), i, p. 375.

⁹ John Dubourdieu, *A statistical survey of County Antrim* (Dublin, 1812), p. 475.

¹⁰ *An act to provide for taking an account of the population of Ireland, and for ascertaining the increase or diminution thereof ... 1824*, p.240, H.C. 1823 (577) xxii, 411.

¹¹ Margaret E. Crawford, *Counting the people* (Dublin, 2003), p. 51.

cent of those resident in the town were employed in agriculture. The spike in figures for employment in trade, manufactures or handicrafts in the town is significant as is the low numbers for those employed in agriculture. This could account for the diminished starting position of landowners in the town's political landscape. At 63 per cent of the working population in the town, those employed trades, manufactures or handicrafts in the town of Ballymoney represented a potentially powerful political unit.¹²

According to the census, 100 people, or 5 per cent of the population of the town of Ballymoney, were attending school, sixty of whom were female and forty of whom were male. When these figures are adjusted to account for the ages of persons they show a higher proportion of people attending schools. These figures must also be altered to account for the barony as a whole, as this is the only source data that exists for ages of persons. Therefore, it can be stated that 11 per cent of the population of the barony of Dunluce upper who were under the age of ten attended school according to the 1821 census. This is the lowest percentage of the four communities selected for study on a baronial level.¹³

According to an 1824 report of the commission of Irish education inquiry, there were a total of sixteen schools located in the town of Ballymoney, all of which were pay schools. In terms of the schools religious denomination, nine of them had a Presbyterian master, two were of the established church, three were Roman Catholic, with one, Randal Howard of Landhead, listed as a Seceder and Robert Hardford of Piper Row listed as a Covenater. The total annual income of the masters varied significantly, from £6 earned by James Fitzpatrick, a Protestant, at Claghney, to £60 each by James Mc Williams and James Fleming, both of whom were Presbyterian and held lessons at main street in Ballymoney. Equally, the description in quality of the school buildings varies. Robert Steen's school was described as a 'hired house of lowest description', while schools where the master earned

¹² *An act to provide for taking an account of the population of Ireland, and for ascertaining the increase or diminution thereof ... 1824*, p.240, H.C. 1823 (577) xxii, 411.

¹³ *Ibid.*

the highest salaries tended to conduct lessons in hired rooms, although the mode of buildings were described as ‘small thatched cabins’ and were usually rented.¹⁴ The significance of school provision lies in the ability to access radical doctrine that advanced levels of literacy implied.

A letter from Ballymoney received by the *Freeman's Journal* and printed in the 24 July 1788 edition recorded George Black of Glenstal as having erected a school house and employed a master at £30 a year to instruct the poor children of the neighbourhood at his own expense. A report on 2 August 1788 indicated that this practice was now ‘common across the north of Ireland’ and followed the example set by Issac Corry of Newry, county Down. The report noted that similar schools had been established at Ballymena, Randalstown, Elmvale and Coleraine. It is notable that children of all denominations were received in the schools and the school at Coleraine was under the patronage of the mayor and corporation of the town. The account of Black’s school at Ballymoney recorded that the patron ‘attends on every Sunday and hears the children taught and examined and then accompanies them and the teacher to Ballymoney meeting and regularly returns in the same company to his own house, where there is a suitable dinner prepared for the master and his little flock. Who, after dining, assemble in the school house, where the master reads prayers and dismisses his scholars with due admonitions and proper instructions for their behaviour until next meeting’.¹⁵

In terms of the religious outlook of the area, in 1766, the Irish Parliament at College Green, Dublin undertook a census to determine the religious affiliations of the population. It was carried out by the clergy and those not eligible for payment of tithes were excluded. The results for Ballymoney show that of 647 families registered in the town, eighty-three

¹⁴ *Second report of the commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry*, p.246, H.C. 1826 (12) xii, 1.

¹⁵ *Belfast Newsletter*, 24 July 1788.

belonged to the Church of Ireland, sixty were recorded as belonging to the Roman Catholic faith and 502 families were registered as 'Dissenters'. Of the 647 heads of family registered, a minimum of forty-eight were recorded as female. When female heads of households are considered within their religious affiliations, 6 per cent of Presbyterian, 12 per cent of Church of Ireland and 6 per cent of Roman Catholic families were recorded as having a female head.¹⁶ Despite this, the local political debates appear to have been carried out entirely by males.

It appears that two congregations of the Presbyterian Church were active during the 1790s in Ballymoney. Ballymoney 'first' congregation was established at some time in the 1640s and Mr James Kerr was ordained in Ballymoney in 1646. He was in continual trouble with the government and with the Presbytery who suspended him for a time. In 1777 a new church was built a short distance from the original site and this church is still used by the congregation, although there have been many improvements. Mr. Alexander Marshall was Moderator of the Synod in 1795 and died on 10 April 1799 aged 50. The second congregation of Ballymoney 'trinity' was established in 1748 when a society of Seceders was formed and met regularly in Charlotte Street, in Ballymoney town. They applied to the Antiburghers in Scotland for supplies which were granted, but it was not until 1814 that they were erected into a congregation by the Burgher Synod. By this time they had converted a disused malt-kiln into a primitive church. Owing to the lack of accommodation in first Ballymoney Church for the growing number of Presbyterians in the district, a new congregation was formed in Ballymoney in 1834. It was known as second Ballymoney, but in 1840 at the union the Seceding congregation was given the name second Ballymoney, and this new congregation was called third Ballymoney.¹⁷ A separate Presbyterian congregation was also in existence at

¹⁶ NLI, GO. MS.4173.

¹⁷ Presbyterian historical society of Ireland, *A history of congregations in the Presbyterian church in Ireland 1610* (Belfast, 1982), p. 86.

Kilraghts at the end of the eighteenth century; the addition of townlands formerly belonging to Ballymoney taking place at some point around 1716 improving the financial position of the congregation. On 27 September 1716 John Cochrane was ordained and he was later Moderator of the General Synod in 1738. During the time in question in this research, Matthew Elder was ordained in 1789 and died in office on 23 July 1827.¹⁸

A list compiled by George Millar in 1872 documented the inhabitants of Ballymoney by trade, religion and address during his childhood. Born in 1797, Millar wrote: ‘should this writing be preserved for forty or fifty years, I flatter myself it will be considered of some little value’. While these recollections must be considered with some doubt, it is noteworthy that several inhabitants are marked as having no religious profession and that Millar ‘never knew them to attend any place of worship’. The majority of these non-confessionals lived at Gate End (now Castle Street) on the south side of the town, although several of their number were scattered about the town. Their professions include ‘painter and philosopher’, ‘labourer, when not too lazy’, ‘bailiff’, ‘blackhole keeper’ and ‘cock-fighter’.¹⁹

Town markets and the linen trade were important components of Ballymoney’s economy. A market for provisions was established in the town at some point around 1790.²⁰ Linen drapers, in particular, operated within a strict network based on mutual dependency, economic necessity and maintaining high standards of product and conduct within their trade. There was a precedent within this group of collective organisation and a certain independence of action. In April 1764 ‘the brethren linen drapers of the County of Antrim’ revived the market at Ahoghill ‘to be held the last Wednesday of every month’. Pragmatically, the linen drapers cited this arrangement ‘as being the most convenient for the linen drapers that attend Ballymoney market from this part of the country, on their way to said market which is fixed

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 567.

¹⁹ George Millar, ‘Old Ballymoney’ in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 2nd series, xvi, (1910), p. 101.

²⁰ Samuel Lewis, *A topographical dictionary of Ireland* (3 vols, London, 1837), i, p. 375.

the day after, they also have the benefit of Ballymena market on their way home as usual'.²¹ Similarly enabled to act in the collective interest of their trade, a printed notice on 13 March 1770 by 'the linen drapers that attend the markets at Coleraine, Ballymoney and Garvagh' targeted suspected frauds within their trade. They agreed to enter into oaths and execute the law 'without favour or affection' against those found to have been responsible for such abuses and fraud. Specifically, these included insufficiently woven ends, deficiency of length and breadth or, more cynically, linen 'exposed for sale and not fairly folded'. In addition, drapers were obliged to sell their produce with the weaver's name and place of abode clearly marked upon it.²² Within this dynamic, the obligation of personal conduct was clearly aligned to the benefit of the collective group.

A Farmer's Society, charged with improvement of agriculture, also existed in North Antrim around this time. On 5 July 1763 'The Farmer's Society for the four lower baronies in the County of Antrim' met at the house of James Gardiner, a Ballymoney innkeeper, to pay premiums for making ditches.²³ Detailed instruction for the digging of ditches had previously been published by the society. Those awarded premiums were obliged to ensure that ditches were 'six feet wide and five feet deep, not less than 318 inches wide at bottom', in addition to which, detailed direction was provided for the backing of the ditch and the condition of the area immediately surrounding it.²⁴ Local gentry and large land holders featured prominently within this society.

²¹ *BN*, 20 Apr. 1764.

²² *BN*, 13 Mar. 1770.

²³ *BN*, 23 Sept. 1763.

²⁴ *BN*, 3 July 1761.

Section Two – The locality and the state

The town of Ballymoney was situated on the vast estate of the earl of Antrim, the ancestral title of the Mac Donnell family. Randall William Mac Donnell, then head of the family and holder of the estate, had no male heir when he died on 29 July 1791. On 19 June 1785, he had been created Viscount Dunluce and earl of Antrim to facilitate the succession of his daughters. In these circumstances, Anne Katherine Mac Donnell became countess of Antrim and viscountess of Dunluce in 1791. She was only thirteen-years-old at this time. Born on 11 February 1778, she married Sir Henry Vane-Tempest of Wynard, Co. Durham on 25 April 1799 in her mother's home at Hanover Square in Mayfair, London. Her first husband dying on 1 August 1813, Anne Katherine married Edmund Phelps on 24 May 1817 in St. James Church, Westminster. She was buried in this church on 7 July 1834 while her second husband, who had taken the name Mac Donnell, died in Rome on 30 May 1852. Having produced no male heir by the time of her death, Anne Katherine's sister Charlotte became countess of Antrim and Viscountess of Antrim in 1834. Born on 12 August 1779, she married Lord Mark Robert Kerr on 18 July 1799 also at her mother's home in Hanover Square. She died at Holmwood near Henley on 26 October 1835 and her husband survived her by five years. It was their son, Hugh Seymour Mac Donnell, who secured the male line and the earldom. It is important to note that the events outlined in this study took place in a power vacuum as the uncertainty surrounding the future earl of Antrim continued. This may have been compounded by the fact that rival siblings appear to have competed to secure their father's title through traditions of male succession.²⁵

In theory, the earl of Antrim was a constant presence in the public life of Ballymoney during this time. Although no living person held the title during much of the time in question,

²⁵ *The complete peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland Great Britain and the United Kingdom* (4 vols, London, 1910) ii, 12-14.

due gratitude was expressed to the earl at official events and public meetings.²⁶ Ian McBride has surmised that ‘ultimately the economic power of the landlord rested on the option of not renewing a lease.’²⁷ In the absence of the earl of Antrim, it is not evident who managed the vast estate. It may have allowed large leaseholders more influence in the conduct of estate business and resulted in greater power being consolidated in their hands. Equally, the uncertainty regarding the earl’s succession could have lead to a certain nervousness on their part as their favourable positions were no longer guaranteed.

In the period following rebellion, George Hutchinson was the earl of Antrim’s representative in Ballymoney, presiding at the meetings of the court leet of the manor of Dunluce.²⁸ It is not entirely clear whether Hutchinson held this position prior to the rebellion as he certainly seems to have advanced his position due to his conduct during the disturbances.

In terms of United Irish structures, it is possible to detect a high level of activity in the region during this time. This will be discussed in further detail later in this section. A magistrate attended Ballymena on 26 April 1796 for the purpose of registering arms for the town and neighbouring districts.²⁹ An official letter was sent from Dublin Castle to the Officer Commision in the north on 2 December 1796. It provided the following reports on the various states of town and villages in north Antrim:

²⁶ *BN*, 8 July 1791.

²⁷ Ian Mc Bride, *Eighteenth century Ireland* (Dublin, 2009), p. 136.

²⁸ James B. Hamilton, *Records of the court leet, manor of Dunluce, County Antrim 1798 to 1847* (Ballymoney, 1934), p. 2.

²⁹ *NS*, 18 Apr. 1796.

Larne: very disaffected

Ballymena: worse

Ballymoney: no better

Randalstown: as bad as any

Broughshane: ill-affected but not half the size of the others

Portglenone: a bigger, better town than the former, ill-affected not less than the others

The baronies of Dunluce, Toome, Antrim and Belfast are most inclined to disturbances.³⁰

On 25 June 1797 a report was sent to General Lake from the officer commanding the Crown Forces in Ballymoney accounting for oaths of allegiance taken before local magistrates. 948 people had taken the oath swearing that they were not United Irishmen and thirty-four had surrendered as United Men, also taking the oath and giving up their arms. It was reported that a great number of the disaffected had opted to go before John Gage Lecky, a magistrate for County Londonderry whose sister Mary was married to John Caldwell Jnr.³¹ Those who went to Lecky had been permitted to take an amended oath of allegiance. The officer commanding at Ballymoney had subsequently compelled them to swear the oath in full. The amended oath had omitted allegiance to ‘the succession to the throne in His Majesty’s illustrious house’ from swearing loyalty to King George and the laws and constitution of the kingdom. James B. Hamilton has suggested that this may have been in deference to the strong Jacobite views known to have existed amongst Ulster Scots.³²

Having investigated local power structures, it is now necessary to discuss in some context the nature of state presence within the community, civic functions and relevant community structures. This process will reveal how local power structures evolved during this period. When France and Spain entered on the side of the colonists during the American War of Independence (1775-83), the British military were obliged to redeploy troops to such an extent that an invasion of Ireland became a distinct possibility. In response to this, public-

³⁰ James B. Hamilton, *Ballymoney and district, in the County of Antrim prior to the twentieth century*, (Ballycastle, 1957), p. 84.

³¹ PRONI, D1946/7/1 *Pedigree of Lecky*.

³² James B. Hamilton, *Ballymoney and district, in the County of Antrim prior to the twentieth century*, (Ballycastle, 1957), p. 84.

spirited landlords and loyal citizens formed volunteer corps in defence of the country and local property. Ultimately, volunteering became a fashionable pastime and reviews and parades of impressively clad part-time soldiers were a regular occurrence in towns across Ireland. As the movement progressed, the volunteer corps came to constitute a public forum for political discussion. It soon became clear that a drastic shift in power had taken place and armed force – the ultimate arbitrator – was no longer controlled by the government but by the politically minded public.³³

Ian McBride has noted how the practise of Volunteering rested on a number of ideological suppositions, the most important of which was the eighteenth-century ideal of the citizen-soldier. Volunteering offered an opportunity for the middling ranks to affirm their civic identity, particularly important for Dissenters who were barred from public office until the repeal of the Test Act in 1780. McBride cites the example of the Belfast First Volunteer Company, who set a precedent which was soon followed by other districts in the north by declaring that they would accept no financial assistance from the government nor swear any oath which bound them to use their military capabilities at the government's request. In addition, the articles of association of the First Armagh Company, used as a model by other local corps, included the pledge that except on the battlefield it would be governed by democratically expressed wish of the majority.³⁴ As resolutions were debated at meetings, reviews and conventions, the Volunteer army seemed to offer nothing less than an alternative political structure in which the middling ranks were fully represented and delegates could be held accountable to their constituents.³⁵

A strong volunteer company, said to number about one hundred men, was formed in Ballymoney and district some time before 1784, officered by local gentlemen. The earl of

³³ R.B. McDowell, 'The Protestant Nation' in T.W. Moody and F.X. Martin (eds), *The course of Irish history* (Cork, 1967), p. 232.

³⁴ McBride, *Scripture politics*, p. 126.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.130.

Antrim was credited with forming one of the first volunteer companies, although this does not appear to have been in Ballymoney.³⁶ A company had certainly been founded by 1778 when Company Secretary of the Ballymoney Volunteers, Adam Calderwood, advertised a position for a ‘young man who can beat on a drum and play the fife’ in the 22 September 1778 edition of the *Belfast Newsletter*. Company reviews were a common feature of the Volunteers. On 20 May 1784, *The Freeman’s Journal* reported on ‘the spirited little town of Ballymoney, where billets for no less than 2,000 men are provided for their ensuing review’. The account noted that ‘it was found a very great exertion in Belfast in 1781 to supply 5,381 volunteers, how much so for a place so inferior in point of size to provide 2,000?’ It is recorded that James Leslie, Esq. of Lesliehill was the Reviewing General at the review held on 12 July 1784.³⁷ At a meeting in the Town Hall at Ballymoney on 24 July 1783, Leslie had been proposed and unanimously backed to represent ‘the county [Antrim] in parliament, by virtue of his knowledge of the constitution and integrity of heart’.³⁸ He had also previously been president of the Antrim Hunt.³⁹

At some point in the 1780s, Daniel Maxwell was proposed for enrolment by John Caldwell Snr. who was a commanding officer of the corps. Maxwell was a Roman Catholic and a ‘worthy and respectable neighbour’ of the Caldwells. The arming of Catholics in the Volunteer movement was a highly contentious issue and many were said to have refused to agree to the move. Caldwell used his privilege to call another ballot and informed his peers that ‘his conscience and his honour forbade his commanding of a body of men under the influence of such unworthy prejudices.’ Caldwell won the day and Maxwell was said to have

³⁶ J.H. Lepper and P. Crossle, *History of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Ireland* (Dublin, 1925), p. 208.

³⁷ James B. Hamilton, *Ballymoney and district, in the County of Antrim prior to the twentieth century* (Ballycastle, 1957), p. 80.

³⁸ *BN*, 15 Aug. 1783.

³⁹ *FJ*, 25 Feb. 1771.

become the first Catholic to bear arms in the Volunteer army in Ulster.⁴⁰ This action set a precedent in a society where the right to bear arms was a more salient mark of political participation than access to the franchise.⁴¹

The precise nature of the fallout concerning the enrolment of Maxwell in the volunteer corps is difficult to ascertain. A clarification reasserting the original principles of the Ballymoney Volunteers, printed in the 15 March 1785 issue of the *Belfast Newsletter*, indicated that considerable local debate surrounded the actions and motives of the volunteer corps in the town. John Orr had assumed the role of company Secretary in place of Adam Calderwood and he criticised the accusation that they were not ‘the original volunteers, but the armed beggary of the soil’. It is notable that Henry Grattan had criticised the crudity with which the Volunteers had tried to exert direct political pressure by referring to them as ‘the armed beggary of the nation’ in 1784.⁴² In this climate, Orr asserted that

... such billingsgate epithets may suit the complexion of a few hate encipled individuals to the southward. Men wearing the form, though destitute of the power of freedom’s spirit ... Such plants rarely thrive in our northern corps ... , a few casualties allowed for and death or removal, we are almost to a man the original volunteers.

...Volunteering in the north has proved a regulation of the manners of men ... We are too much influenced by common sense, in admit of a general conclusion from a particular premises or to believe that the ... influence of office, can ever fancify what sound reason condemns.

... We despise the impotent shafts of malice, the “beggarly” venom of appropriate terms and are determined as volunteers to adhere in our original affections and by every constitutional effort in our power, as freemen and freeholders, to assist our fellow citizens in renovating the administration of our happy constitution and reassuring an equal piece to King, Lord and Commons.⁴³

The notice indicated that the Ballymoney Volunteers were formed on 12 August 1784 ‘to learn the military disciplines for defence of ourselves, this town, parish and county... and resolve with that spirit inherent in freeborn Irishmen, we will endeavor to resist by force of

⁴⁰ PRONI, D/1518/1/1 J.B. Hamilton Papers.

⁴¹ David W. Miller, ‘Radicalism and ritual in east Ulster’ in Thomas Bartlett, David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (eds), *1798- a bicentenary perspective* (Dublin, 2003), p. 198.

⁴² R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland* (London, 1988), p. 256.

⁴³ *BN*, 15 March 1785.

arms every attack against our properties, lives of liberties whether from foreign or domestic enemies'. However, there was a volunteer corps in the town before this date, as the advertisement in 1778 for a drummer and fife player would indicate. It is conceivable that the precedent set by enrolling a Catholic in the volunteer corps was the origin of an apparent split in the Ballymoney Volunteers, but this cannot be stated conclusively. This dispute will be examined in detail in the next section.

According to historian Patrick Rogers, the innovation of rank and file volunteers electing their own officers in the vicinity of Belfast and surrounding towns compromised the original patron-client culture of the Volunteers.⁴⁴ Had this situation been repeated in Ballymoney, it would account for the change in direction and leadership of the local battalion. A letter from John Caldwell printed in March 1785 called for a delegate from each company to meet at Rasharkin on 1 April 1785 to decide a time and place of holding a review for the ensuing year. The accusation that the volunteers represented 'the armed beggary of the soil' was echoed by Caldwell and used as a rallying cry for the men to display their respectability and the falsehood of this claim.⁴⁵ They may have been successful in this enterprise as the earl of Charlemont, the Commander in chief of the Irish Volunteers, was the reviewing general on the occasion of 19 July 1785.⁴⁶

While he was outwardly respectful towards the Volunteers, Richard Musgrave accused them of the fatal error of 'teaching the mass of the people to speculate upon politicks' and thereby preparing 'their minds for the reception of those deleterious doctrines which produced the rebellion'. In a particularly relevant aside, Musgrave criticised some radicals and presbyterians in the Volunteers who supplied catholics with arms in order to 'subvert the constitution'; thus, in Musgrave's opinion, resulting in a religious war in Armagh

⁴⁴ Patrick Rogers, *The Irish Volunteers and Catholic Emancipation 1778 – 1793*, (London, 1934), p. 46.

⁴⁵ *BN*, 15 Aug. 1785.

⁴⁶ Hamilton, *Ballymoney and district*, (1957), p. 80.

and with French encouragement to a plan to effect ‘the extirpation of protestants of every domination’.⁴⁷

While the Volunteer company signified a group of men forming a body to adopt the duties of state within the locality, officers of the state also formed their own bodies to safeguard their security and livelihood. Such bodies formed networks of communication that allowed people to transmit information to one another, usually bound by some mutual interest. On 11 February 1788 the baronies of Dunluce and Carey were formally included in the Ballymoney Farmer’s Society remit and George Moore was appointed secretary and treasurer for the ensuing year. Moore was later active in the legal ‘mopping up’ of the rebellion and was present for the examinations of James Huey with George Hutchinson.⁴⁸ A resolution was also passed by the society to include other districts in the county. These efforts could be seen to represent formal attempts to organise landowners in Antrim on a wider scale in terms of their mutual interest. James Leslie was president of the society and Edmund Mc Naghten was the second signatory to these resolutions. Mc Naghten was born on 2 August 1762, the eldest son of Edmund Mc Naghten and his second wife Hannah, daughter of John Johnstone of Belfast. He had been educated at Glasgow University from 1778 and entered Lincolns Inn, London on 9 November 1781. He was appointed sheriff of county Antrim by a patent dated 15 February 1793 and was returned as MP for county Antrim at the 1797 election.⁴⁹

Edmund Mc Naghten and James Leslie had stood as candidates ‘in the landlord interest’ in the 1790 parliamentary election for County Antrim. The election was polled for twenty-one days at Carrickfergus, a total of 3,538 freeholders casting their ballot. Mc Naghten and Leslie lost to the candidates ‘in the independent interest’, Hercules Rowley and

⁴⁷ James Kelly, *Sir Richard Musgrave, 1746 – 1818, Ultra Protestant Ideologue* (Dublin 2009), p. 110.

⁴⁸ PRONI, D272/26 Examination of James Huey.

⁴⁹ E.M. Johnston-Liik, *The history of the Irish parliament 1692-1800* (6 vols, Belfast, 2002), v, p.171.

John O' Neill, afterwards first Viscount O' Neill who was killed at the Battle of Antrim. It is noticeable that of the twenty new appointees to the jury in the manor of Dunluce between 1798 and 1801, all but four had voted for Leslie and Mc Naghten in the 1790 election. This fact provides evidence of the political manouverings of Mc Naghten and his tendency to bestow political favour upon those who were amongst his support base. On 19 August 1803, Daniel Maxwell was appointed as a juror in the manor of Dunluce. The enrolment of Maxwell, a Roman Catholic, in the Volunteer Corps some twenty years previously had been the source of much local debate and ideological dispute.⁵⁰

The probate for the will of Edmund Mc Naghten Snr. was granted on 25 February 1780, under the terms of which his eldest son inherited the management of his properties in Dunluce barony. The will also set strict terms of succession for the estate to be inherited by Edmund and his brother Francis 'and the heirs male of their respective bodies generally and successively according to seniority'. The rigidity of familial relationships in terms of obligation to law, family and gender roles is apparent in the conditions laid down by Mc Naghten Snr. Failing the issue of any male heirs from Edmund and Francis, the line of succession included their daughters 'and the heirs of their bodies', subject to the same conditions as those of their father. Mc Naghten's nephew, Bartholemew, was also included in the line of succession under the same terms as Edmund and Francis as the third beneficiary in order of seniority. Francis and Edmund were also to receive yearly sums of £120 and £20 respectively. Mc Naghten granted a yearly sum of £120 to his wife 'in consideration of [his] love and esteem' for the remainder of her life in addition to his 'horses, chaise and liquors of all kinds'.

Mc Naghten Snr. was notably generous to female members of his extended family. Among the long list of monetary amounts granted to them upon his death is a dowry of £400

⁵⁰ James B. Hamilton, *Records of the court leet, manor of Dunluce, County Antrim 1798 to 1847* (Ballymoney, 1934), p. 21.

to his grand niece, Mary, 'not to be paid or raised unless in case of marriage'. The same Mary was also to receive an annual sum of £20 until death or marriage 'whichever shall first happen'. The role of community was also recognised in the will in terms of Edmund and Francis' formal education, Mc Naghten Snr. directed that

being sensible of the many obligations I lie under to the family of Antrim and being extremely desirous that my sons may early imbibe and ever retain the same grateful sentiments and attachments I do request and entreat that my esteemed friend the Earl of Antrim will take upon him the guardianship and direction of the persons and education of my sons and I do entreat my worthy and much esteemed friend James Leslie of Leslie Hill in the said county of Antrim as joint guardian and assistant... I am happy in the hope of it being undertaken by men whose integrity and worth I have such perfect confidence.

Mc Naghten's wife was also appointed joint guardian of Edmund and Francis' person and education. It is impossible to confirm, in practice, the precise responsibility of each guardian in the execution of their role but the conditions do confirm the formal presence of local community in the family unit and the important inter-dependent relationship in that regard. The terms of the will are a clear indication of the obligation and duties inherited by Edmund Alexander Mc Naghten before he reached the age of thirty.⁵¹

Many other networks of communication existed which could facilitate the spread of information. A warrant for the first Masonic lodge in Ulster was issued for Enniskillen in 1733. By the 1740s twenty lodges had been warranted for the province, one of which was in Ballymoney. A list of subscribers to a book of Masonic constitutions published in 1751 lists Stephen Cuppage as the sole subscriber from the town.⁵² Of the forty-one other subscribers listed from Ulster, twenty-three were from Derry, six each from Muff and Newry, two each Strabane and Coleraine and one from Enniskillen. Gillian O'Brien has noted that many prominent members of the United Irishmen were also Freemasons; Henry Joy McCracken was a member of Belfast Lodge number 763, Bartholomew Teeling was a member of Lisburn Lodge number 193. Samuel Kennedy a printer in the *Northern Star* office and the man who

⁵¹ PRONI, D2977/1/6/1 The Will of Edmund Mc Naughten 1780.

⁵² Edward Spratt, *The new book of constitutions* (Dublin, 1751), p. 27.

introduced the informer Bird, alias Smith, to Samuel Neilson was a founder member of Belfast Lodge number 762. Indeed, Dublin Castle was informed in 1796 that every United Irishman in the Belfast region was also a member of a Masonic Lodge.⁵³

In *Freemasonry in Ulster, 1733-1813*, Petri Mirala has stressed the social and practical benefits which membership of the Masonic brotherhood held at this time. Financial security could be improved through fraternal benevolence and membership also allowed for informal social occasions through drinking, songs and companionship at lodge meetings. Access to secret rituals and involvement in the public ceremony which attended the parades on St John's day would also have proved enticing to men of the eighteenth century. Freemasonry processions were rich in pomp and ritual, featuring brothers wearing their ceremonial aprons, sashes, medals and carrying banners. Children of deceased members could be helped to embark on a career and member's burial expenses were usually paid. Owing to the international network of lodges across America, Britain and continental Europe, Mirala has argued that a Masonic cert 'was the nearest available equivalent to a modern travel insurance policy'.⁵⁴

Many lodges sought to cultivate a standard of respectability in manner and appearance through a combination of rules and peer pressure. It was a common practice of lodges to apply internal disciplinary measures for drunkenness, swearing and other disturbances in order to uphold public perception of the brotherhood in the locality. The expectation of public decorum on the part of the members was not restricted towards fellow masons or within the confines of the lodge and suspension was a common reprimand for failure to do so. There was a certain level of secrecy expected within the Freemasons and membership was restricted to males in Ireland. Chivalry aside, the justification usually given for the exclusion of

⁵³Gillian O'Brien, 'Spirit, impartiality and independence': 'The Northern Star', 1792-1797' in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, xiii (1998), p. 14.

⁵⁴ Petri Mirala, *Freemasonry in Ulster 1733-1813* (Dublin, 2007), p. 79.

females was that women were supposedly not able to keep a secret. Masonic principles preached the ideals of self help, benevolence and charity and sought to achieve greater social harmony through equality and tolerance. In the context of eighteenth-century Ireland, where one's political rights depended on religious profession, a social movement actively preaching religious tolerance would have been a revolutionary development. The admission of Irish Catholics to the franchise and consequent extension of British constitutional rights was consistent with Masonic principles.⁵⁵ This question was the most divisive contemporary issue debated in parliament.

In Ballymoney, an air of respectability must have accompanied Freemasonry activity by the time Randall William Mac Donnell, earl of Antrim was elected grand master in 1772. He would have been twenty three at this time. He succeeded William Robert Fitzgerald, marquess of Kildare, who was elected to the position at twenty one years of age. MacDonnell left his office as grand master in 1776 and was later credited with the formation of one of the first volunteer corps in 1777. Mac Donnell also served as grand master of England from 1783 until his death in 1791.⁵⁶ By the French Revolutionary period lodges 135, 240, 655 and 703 were active in the Ballymoney area.⁵⁷

An ideological split amongst the Freemasonry community in Ballymoney in the late 1790s seems clear. Following the attempted French landing at Bantry, County Cork in December 1796 lodges 135, 240 and 655 hurried to declare their loyalty and jointly declared that they 'would individually and collectively as often as called upon, assist the civil powers in execution of the laws' in defence of the kingdom. The signature of George Hutchinson was the first on the declaration, as master of lodge 135, the senior and original lodge in

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 133.

⁵⁶ J.H. Lepper and P. Crossle, *History of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Ireland*, (Dublin, 1925), p. 208.

⁵⁷ *BN*, 27 Dec. 1796.

Ballymoney.⁵⁸ It is also highly likely that Edmund Mc Naghten was a member of the Freemasons. The formal role in the education and professional upbringing of his sons which Mc Naghten Snr. stipulated for the earl of Antrim and James Leslie in his will was common Freemasonry practise.⁵⁹

Lodge 703 is noticeably absent from this declaration. As it would have been the last lodge to have been constituted in Ballymoney, 703 may well have been that which most imbibed revolutionary politics. The addresses which were published by the Ballymoney Whig Club indicated a clear belief that the French Revolution had been carried out consistent with Freemasonry ideals. The Ballymoney Whig club was constituted on 11 November 1789 and will be discussed in more detail in the next section, including their public addresses. While there is every reason to believe that lodge 703 did not allow political discussion to take place at their meetings, consistent with standard Freemasonry practice, there was nothing to stop the same body of men establishing separate clubs in order to do so. That a culture of political debate extended from the spread of Freemasonry is established, although the extent to which it fuelled revolutionary politics in Ireland is a source of some dispute. Mirala has noted that Freemasons, and the lower order Hedgemasons, ‘and indeed all Irishmen of the 1790s were divided into reformers and conservatives, radicals and loyalists, Protestant and Catholic’.⁶⁰ David W. Miller has emphasised the growth of four different types of nongovernmental organisation in east Ulster during the period covered in this research, rural combinations and agrarian agitation groups, Volunteer units, Masonic lodges and covenant based Presbyterian sects practised politically salient rituals and enjoyed increasing popular support.⁶¹ Importantly, while they increased the level of community interaction which surrounded the issues of the state, they occurred outside the remit of state control.

⁵⁸ *BN*, 27 Dec. 1796.

⁵⁹ PRONI, D2977/1/6/1 The Will of Edmund Mc Naughten 1780.

⁶⁰ Petri Mirala, *Freemasonry in Ulster 1733-1813* (Dublin, 2007), p. 130.

⁶¹ David W. Miller, ‘Radicalism and ritual in east Ulster’ in Thomas Bartlett, David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (eds), *1798- a bicentenary perspective* (Dublin, 2003), p. 196.

On occasions, newspapers could be used to transmit messages that could be clear to the recipient. For example, on 7 November a notice was printed in the *Northern Star* for ‘the inhabitants of Ballymoney and the barony of Dunluce’ and signed by ‘an old Whig’. It stated ‘be sober, be vigilant, for the devil, your adversary, is being about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour- don’t be alarmed when you recollect the old proverb - every dog has its day’.⁶²

By the early 1790s, a tangible ideological divide appears to have taken root in Ballymoney amongst the most senior members of the community. In many respects, the primary motivation for all sides of the political crisis was to ensure the survival and prosperity of their community, albeit by markedly different means. It should also be noted that both sides of the divide were either signatories or the descendents of signatories of a resolution which publicly declared opposition to agrarian disturbances during the ‘Steelboy’ revolt in 1772. The ideological divide appears also to have been reflected in the economic interests of senior community members. Local landowners and members of the expanding Farmer’s Society in Ballymoney do not appear to have been active in the volunteer movement following the enrolment of Daniel Maxwell. Among the prominent members of the Farmer’s Society were James Leslie and Edmund Alexander Mc Naghten, two men whose mutual dependence was clear by the will of Edmund Mc Naghten Snr. Their economic concern was largely centred on the improvement of land and agriculture and they may have operated in a more restricted network of local commercial interest. Their attempts to extend the Farmer’s Society at Ballymoney to include other districts throughout the county indicated a desire to operate outside the constraints of a decisively local network. It is probable that this group looked to Dublin as the centre of Irish government and administration to attain political and civic responsibility. Leslie was a member of parliament for county Antrim at College

⁶² *NS*, 7 Nov. 1797.

Green in Dublin and Mc Naghten was also a member of the Dublin Agricultural Society.⁶³ In contrast, the essentially mobile world of linen merchants and traders such as John Caldwell had resulted in an organic network of wealthy and successful members of the community who were not automatically members of the landed and political elite. They appear to have expected high standards of personal conduct to protect and maintain their collective interest and are likely to have demanded likewise from all sections of authority and society.

⁶³ E.M. Johnston-Liik, *The History of the Irish Parliament 1692-1800* (6 vols, Belfast, 2002), v, p.171.

Section Three: Conflict and the locality

In early 1772 notices from numerous parishes across the north of Ireland were published in the *Belfast Newsletter* condemning the activities of the ‘Hearts of Steel’, an agrarian insurrection group who terrorised large parts of east Ulster during this period. The ‘Steelboys’ burned houses and haystacks, maimed cattle and ruined crops as well as levying contributions on local people to fund their activities. When considering the background of the Steelboy revolt, Ian Mc Bride has highlighted three successive crop failures (1769-71) and a simultaneous reduction in foreign trade for linen as being responsible for the disturbances. The specific trigger for revolt lay in the wholesale renewal of leases on the Upton and Donegall estates in south Antrim. The system of securing tenancy restricted each bidder to one written bid, meaning that the sitting tenant was under extreme pressure to propose an inflated price. In this context, Mc Bride has argued that the revolt partly represented a ‘revolution of rising expectations on the part of the under-tenant class who sought to acquire direct leases for themselves and believed that long occupation combined with the improvements made by them and their ancestors gave them a moral entitlement to do so’.⁶⁴ In analysing the nature of the disturbances in relation to the nature of landholding on Lord Donegall’s estate in south Antrim, W.A Maguire has emphasised the role of ‘middle men’ in creating the conditions which lead to revolt. Subdivision and subletting were not forbidden by covenants in the leases and the sheer size of the estate meant that many ‘middle men’ secured large leaseholds comparable to whole estates. According to Captain Erskine, a contemporary observer, ‘over most parts of the county [Antrim] the lands are subset six deep, so that those who actually labour it are squeezed to the very utmost’.⁶⁵ It is almost certain that the same circumstances could be attributed to the vast estate of the earl of Antrim in the north of the county.

⁶⁴ Ian Mc Bride, *Eighteenth century Ireland* (Dublin, 2009), p. 318.

⁶⁵ W.A. Maguire, ‘Lord Donegall and the Hearts of Steel’ in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxii, no 84 (1997). p. 351.

On 7 April 1772 over 300 ‘inhabitants of the town and parish of Ballymoney’ added their signatures to an address published in the *Belfast Newsletter* condemning the actions of the Hearts of Steel. The letter expressed the subscriber’s sentiments at having ‘for some time past with anxiety and indignation considered the unhappy tendency of that spirit of riot and opposition to law that has of late too much prevailed in our neighbourhood’.⁶⁶ The letter illustrated a remarkable display of unity within respectable society in Ballymoney at this time. This address was echoed by the ‘members of the Presbyterian congregation of Kilraghts, consisting of the parish of Kilraghts, the greatest part of the parish of Loughguile and lands of the parish of Ballymoney’ on 24 April. Repeating the sentiments expressed in the 7 April letter, the congregation stated ‘we have all of us reason to be thankful that none of our congregation (except one, who is now at liberty) were [implicated] ... either by oaths, threats with that lawless set’.⁶⁷

Local responses to the Steelboy disturbances illustrate several key aspects of social conduct in Ballymoney at this time. Notably, the body of 300 signatures for the 7 April declaration is entirely male. The religious survey conducted in the town six years previously indicated that at least forty-eight women were recorded as heads of households in the town, although the marital status of these women is not known. This is significant as women were usually defined by their relationship to men at this time. The address of the Kilraghts congregation also highlighted the case of their member who was implicated in the disturbances, the ‘liberty’ to which he was set being more accurately described as banishment. This indicates a religious precedent for the judicial banishment suffered by the Caldwell family following the 1798 rebellion. In this instance, it is not known whether this action was taken against a single individual or a male head of family and including all dependents. The address also highlighted the relative unity of the collective population of

⁶⁶ *BN*, 7 Apr. 1772.

⁶⁷ *BN*, 24 Apr. 1772.

Ballymoney to articulate a short condemnation of the disturbances and consent to its publication. Within their lifetime, the signatories of the address would be deeply ideologically divided when external issues were articulated within the community and normal social relations broke down.

There appears to have been an ideological split within Ballymoney following the American Declaration of Independence on 4 July 1776. John Caldwell junior remembered ‘the little club’ that his father attended every Wednesday, from which members of the established church, lead by Mr Lecky, withdrew following the declaration. Caldwell noted that they ‘thought it incumbent upon them to join in the hue and cry against the rebels, who had proclaimed civil and religious liberty throughout their land’.⁶⁸

The advent of the French Revolution represented a watershed moment in eighteenth-century Ireland in terms of providing a context in which political debates, issues of state security and social disharmony converged in an ideological battleground, through which various competitive interests interpreted contemporary events to justify their own objectives. In Ballymoney, the ideological and social divide that had become apparent in the town also began to be expressed in these terms. In this scenario, the Ballymoney Volunteers appear to have provided a genesis from which political and ideological debate was fostered in the town. Contemporary issues regarding the social position of Catholics were addressed through the enrolment of Daniel Maxwell in the corps. The volunteers also provided an opportunity for local power structures to attain civic responsibility and to operate outside the remit of immediate state control.

The Ballymoney Whig club, constituted on 11 November 1789, set an important precedent in providing a public forum for overtly liberal political debate and discussion in the town. A resolution and declaration ‘unanimously agreed to’ by those present on 17 March

⁶⁸ David A. Wilson, ‘John Caldwell’s memoir: a case study in Ulster-American radicalism’ in David A. Wilson and Mark G. Spencer (eds.), *Ulster Presbyterians in the Atlantic World* (Dublin, 2006), p. 109.

1790 articulated local reaction to the revolutionary movement sweeping aside the institutions of the French kingdom. It read;

That in every free and well poised government the people at large, are and of right should be, considered as the fountain of power from which Kings, Magistrates and all inferior officers receive that authority wherewith they are clothed and to which every supreme and subordinate officer in the state stands responsible.

That if each member of the community acted towards all as he ought to do, government, laws and kings would be totally unnecessary - hence they have arisen from the vices and not the virtues of mankind and are wisely calculated to protect the weak from the violence of the strong - to render life and property more secure - to restrain and punish the wicked - to reward and cherish the rueful, ingenious and honest members of the community.

That having as citizens and volunteers contributed our mite to the emancipation of our country from a slavish yoke, long imposed on Irishmen by the avarice, pride and illiberal policy of Britons, we cannot view the present conduct of the servants of the crown and the hackneyed hirelings of a corrupt administration but with the utmost chagrin and the most ineffable contempt. Are we not the same who but yesterday were persuaded to convert our spears into pruning hooks? - We doubtless are and how appears the proposed before us! If we credit the celebrated Montesquieu "when the legislative part of any government becomes more corrupt than the executive there is an end to all just government" whether we are arrived at, or verging to such state let facts declare!

The numberless grievances which are so fully stated by the noble band of patriots in our house of commons by the declaration of the Whig club in Dublin - the northern Whig club inserted in the paper 9th instance - and the resolutions of the town of Belfast, the 12th instant - are those we lament and remonstrate against.

It's an old and though vulgar perhaps a truer saying that oppression will make a wise man mad - but a madness arising from a strong sense of liberty, injured by the wanton hand of power may sometimes be governed by method and not seldom may terminate in wisdom. Witness that astonishing revolution in the great mighty kingdom of France, where humanity itself trampled underfoot where despotism and priest craft reigned without control, where even the innocent victim of ministerial vengeance or holy strand, experienced all the horrors of an infernal prison and, till lately, of a more infernal inquisition, dreadful far beyond the imaginary hell of ancient poets.

The necessities of the state - the low ebb to which mal administration had reduced their finances, obliged the monarch to convene his people out of evil, out of necessity sprang the most supreme good

His Parliament, his representations of French man were not venal - they were not mercenary, the western breezes had already wafted determined ideas of liberty by which the majority were inspired and that majority distained to be the servile hirelings or the petitioned minion of the corrupt legislature. A redress of grievances - a renovation of the ancient constitution was sought for and the divine flame set the kingdom into a blaze

The common people were mad indeed, but the madness was by enlightened leaders, converted to the noblest purposes - even the bigotry and avarice of churchmen are overcome by the torrent - and priests themselves are constrained to sacrifice their wealth, the dearest idol of their souls, at the altar of the divine Goddess, rising on the foundations of reason and common sense.

But pleasing as the subject is, we shall relinquish the animating theme with a wish that the servants of every powerful and intelligent state may consider to what degree of oppression they may venture. This consideration is important, and always should precede every new act of coercion, duplicity and injustice.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ BN, 19 Mar. 1790.

This address of the Ballymoney Whig Club represents a vital source in assessing contemporary reaction to the events unfolding in France. It offers telling insights into the cause for common concern that the liberals of Ballymoney felt they shared with revolutionaries in France. The constitution of the Whig club and subsequent public declaration indicated a confidence and defiance on the part of its members to express their views in the months after the fall of the Bastille.

A dinner was organised in the house of Patrick Mc Aulay for ‘those subscribers in the town and neighbourhood of Ballymoney who agreed to commemorate the French Revolution’ on 14 July 1791. On that occasion, the gentlemen present composed an address to be presented to the National Assembly of France from their group. Signed by Chairman James Gamble and Secretary Joseph Walker by order, it developed the theme of common cause and ideological empathy previously expressed by the Ballymoney radicals, it reads

Gentlemen,

Convinced that you will favourably receive our address, because we are animated by the same sacred fire of liberty which you have displayed with magnificent splendour to enlighten and animate the whole human race; we make bold to lay our felicitations at your feet - we felicitate you for not only having asserted, but demanded, and at last gloriously achieved the rights of man - we felicitate you for having made any king that is a tyrant tremble; and inspired all who are the friends of liberty and of their country; with the brilliant hope, that tyranny and oppression will soon end - we felicitate you for the humanity that all your resolution display and are happy to declare what is allowed by all who are not the bare hirelings of tyrants, that no revolution ever took place in a great nation where less blood has been shed.

Though struck with the wisdom and benevolence of all your decrees, we are forcibly so with one - which marks your abound philanthropy - it is this, that you will never declare war but for self defence, and that when your variegated banners shall appear upon the ocean, they shall not appear as the signal of war, but of liberty and peace - with horror we view the conduct of those who disapprove of your glorious revolution, a revolution inspired by heaven itself; for liberty is a principle implanted by our great creator in every breast; a principal by your efforts under the divine auspices we trust will carry its independent banners from shore to shore, from Indus to the Pole.⁷⁰

The enthusiasm with which the Ballymoney Whig Club celebrated the original principles, ideology and optimism of the French Revolution is rivalled by the belief they held in the integrity of the newly empowered to uphold these values. Without the benefit of

⁷⁰ BN, 22 July 1791.

hindsight, their assertion that self-defence alone would instigate a declaration of war from republican France was dangerously naive. In reality, the first French republic was defined by aggressive military action, the guillotine and culminated in Napoleon Bonaparte's coronation in 1804. The fervency of the Ballymoney Whigs in celebrating that 'no revolution ever took place in a great nation where less blood has been shed' must have been the cause of some concern to those in the community who did not share their revolutionary zeal. The address also reveals a clear conviction that the revolution has been carried out consistent to the principles of the Freemasons.

The celebratory dinner in Ballymoney was held on the same day as a commemorative parade in Belfast by the Northern Whig club, 'to testify their joy at an event so interesting to man and their ardent wish that their [the French revolutionaries] great work may speedily be perfected, so as to produce all desired happiness to the people of France and a melioration of all the bad governments in Europe'. A public dinner held in the Donegall Arms, Belfast to celebrate the revolution in 1792 advertised that 'the company may depend on wines, port, sherry and claret at the best quality' and suitable accommodation was available for three hundred gentlemen.⁷¹ Details of the 1791 parade exhibited the ceremony of Belfast's emerging culture of political expression, remnants of which would become entrenched in the social development of the city. The parade was to assemble and depart from Bridge Street at one o' clock, proceeding through Castle Street, passing by the exchange and up the east and west sides of Donegall Street. The parade halted at Linen Hall Street where 'three rounds [were] to be fired by battalion companies, answered between each by the artillery, after which the whole will advance as before, in regular order, into the square in the centre of Linen Hall for the purpose of a public declaration on the subject of the glorious revolution in France.' It was resolved that participants in the parade should wear 'Irish national green cockades' and

⁷¹ *BN*, 5 June 1792.

‘discourage bonfires and illuminations’ on the day to ensure that ceremonies were conducted with ‘seriousness, dignity and decorum’.⁷²

On 16 February 1792 the political divide amongst the men in Ballymoney was publicly acted out at a meeting in the town hall attended by the gentlemen, clergy and freeholders of the four lower baronies of County Antrim. The purpose of the meeting was to propose a petition to parliament on ‘the great question before the legislature respecting the Roman Catholics of this kingdom’. James Leslie was called to the chair for the meeting, during which Edmund McNaghten proposed a petition to be presented to the House of Commons. This was seconded by John Crombie, who was also a member of the Farmers Society with Leslie and McNaghten.⁷³ John Boyd presented a petition ‘of an opposite nature’, which was not permitted to be read once its contents were explained. Boyd was later linked to the United Irishmen by the testimony of Robert Getty who stated that he was ‘in part made a United Irishman ... in the parlour of John Boyd of Ballymoney’.⁷⁴ John Caldwell moved that a committee should be appointed to prepare a petition, a measure which was rejected and the original petition proposed by McNaghten was adopted. At this point, James Leslie left the chair, to which John Crombie was called and the thanks of the meeting were voted to Leslie for his proper conduct. The adopted petition read

...your petitioners, impressed with that affection for our Roman Catholic brethren, which all good Christians mutually owe to each other, do sincerely and heartily rejoice at the indulgences heretofore granted to them by the legislature and will feel themselves happy that they should receive every liberal immunity consistent with the spirit of our glorious constitution ...

We earnestly express our utter disapprobation of all inflammatory publications that tend to excite discontent and disorder or to infringe upon our excellent constitution ... we rely on the wisdom of parliament that such indulgences only will be granted to the Roman Catholics as will not affect the elective franchise or endanger the Protestant religion in this kingdom.

⁷² *BN*, 8 July 1791.

⁷³ *BN*, 11 Feb. 1788.

⁷⁴ PRONI, D272/25 Examination of Alexander Hamilton, Robert Getty and David Shearer.

On 2 March 1792 the *Belfast Newsletter* reported that a large body of freeholders had reassembled in the town hall following the rejection of the opposing petition. At that meeting, John Caldwell was called to the chair to read a patriotic speech made by Henry Grattan in parliament on 19 January. This would appear to have been in support of extending the electoral franchise to Catholics. An address was moved and unanimously adopted by ‘the great majority of freeholders’ and others who had been present at the first meeting. It was ordered to be signed by the chairman on their behalf, transmitted to Mr Grattan and to be published in the *Dublin Evening Post* and the *Belfast Newsletter*. The petition read

To a generous mind, the approbation of the discerning and virtuous among mankind must be the highest gratification. To meet the applause of such must render any man an ornament to human nature and a real blessing to the country in which he lives, in you, sir, many of your fellow citizens have often recognized such a character: they have felt an honest pride for the rising dignity of Ireland, as often your irresistible oratory has embellished the senate.

It is natural few honest men speak their sentiments. In this rank we ever wish to be found, and therefore we have taken the liberty to address to you this small, but sincere evidence, both of the high opinion we entertain of your exalted abilities and with them integrity, as also for the heartfelt gratitude for the many eminent services you have rendered your country.

When the demon of corruption has spread the most baneful restrictions over Irishmen, in you we have found the health virtue of a restoring angel, who, by powers almost supernatural, revived our drooping hopes with the heaven born privilege of enacting our own laws.

Our best wishes have ever accompanied you in your senatorial career and our hearts have uniformly vibrated responsive to the high toned strains of your patriotism. But your address to the commons on the 19th January last obliges us to exceed the bounds of silent admiration...

Such irresistible arguments must be listened to by any administration that is not bent upon the servitude and consequently the ruin of this devoted country; such grievances must arouse any people, but the people of Ireland, to vindicate their right, - but as you very justly observe and appositely quote from inimitable Junius, “the Irish are accustomed to be trodden upon” “plundered and robbed” and therefore cannot soon be easily be forced upon violent expedients ...

Whilst then we view with indignant sorrow, the increasing clouds of corruption which tend to darken every part of our political hemisphere, - we feel consolation in the idea that you and the glorious band usually cooperate with you, do form a constellation of light, the rays where of will - we trust, at last dissipate those gloomy vapours and foster to perfection the original principle of our civil government, viz King, Lords and Commons, equally poised - a plant productive of the sacred fruit of liberty to mankind.

Grattan’s rather guarded reply acknowledged that he received the address ‘with great sensibility of the spirit which has suggested it’. His curt response expressed his view that

some further measures were ‘necessary for the better security of the happy constitution which the exertions of Ireland and no part more than the north, obtained for their country’. Grattan may have been alarmed by the language used by Caldwell, lest he should appear to publicly support inflammatory principles in an era of European revolution. As if to underline the importance of remaining within the parliamentary process, Grattan assured his petitioners that he has ‘endeavored in parliament to procure some wholesome consolations and great encouragement - you are entitled to everything that you can make your liberty perpetual. In such cause the mite of my perseverance shall not be wanting.’⁷⁵

When eighteen members of the Ballymoney Volunteers met at the town hall on 30 December 1792, their captain, John Caldwell, chaired a meeting which published the following address

The following strictures on the present political state of this kingdom were unanimously adopted and ordered for publication, as expressive of their sentiments: To be silent in this present momentous crisis of our country would be treason against the constitution - to decline casting our influence into the scale of national importance, would be a total want of those principles upon which we were originally formed into a volunteer association. Somewhat more than fourteen times has the sublunary? Ball performed its annual course around old sol, since the defenceless state of this kingdom, drained of he military force, to support a ruinous unnatural and inglorious war, arouse us in conjunction with many others, to take up arms for the defence of ourselves and our country, resolving “that with a spirit becoming freeborn Irishmen, we would endeavor to repel by force of arms, every attack against our properties, lives or liberties, whether from foreign or domestic enemies.” Although our first principles and chief aims are the securing to ourselves and extending to others those privileges which are unquestionably the birthright of freemen; yet fully aware that the most laudable and virtuous aims are subject to abortion and disappointment, unless directed by some well digested system, we propose that the following shall be the plan of our operations - conducted by moderation and animated by firmness, we will unite with our countrymen in every virtuous effort that may tend to render our constitution in practice,, what it is in theory.

We will cherish every sentiment and praise every action that tends to promote rational freedom and curse “the insolence of unlimited power”. We are offended with the unmasked profligacy of government - but we are not seditious. - Whilst we rejoice at the progress of liberty, we sincerely lament the miseries which visionary schemes, or rather, indeed, anarchy has produced in a neighboring country. But the horrors flowing from commotion or anarchy, shall never render us the panders of corruption nor induce us barely to crouch beneath, or support that government which - “openly boasts of corrupting the people’s representatives with the money of the people” - The civil constitution which is composed of Kings, lords and commons equally poised, we heartily prefer to all others, but we are too much under the influence of common sense, not to know that, in the present state of things, the original beauty

⁷⁵ BN, 2 Mar. 1792.

of our admired constitution is defaced, its substance exhausted, and it is become an empty name.

We have not met with any man so completely callous to every virtuous sentiment, as to deny that a reform in parliament is necessary. With a reform, radical, effectual, and impartial we will be satisfied, but with nothing short of that. We therefore pledge ourselves that no effort of ours shall be wanting, that may be requisite to promote and accomplish that wisdom of design, that unity of exertion, and unremitting perseverance, to indispensably necessary for recovering the just balance of our once glorious constitution, and transmitting to posterity that dearest inheritance. We rejoice to think that there is but one sentiment on this subject pervading the great body of the people in Ireland. It must give the most refined pleasure to every virtuous and benevolent mind, to behold how rapidly the sun of liberality, at this day, dissipates all the clouds of bigotry and prejudice cherishing, at the same time, the pure flame of brotherly love.

May the sacred fire of charity burn still brighter and brighter, until the auspicious dawn of that happy day, when not long hence, religious distinctions, from those rights and privileges which the author of our being intended for rational creatures. Pity it is that so pleasing a prospect should be over clouded by the cry of danger, or the sound of alarms. From what motive sprung, we intend not to investigate, but danger is proclaimed, the people are called seditious, the armed society's levelers. When we look for the foundation of such ideas, we find the people peaceably disposed, , the armed societies friends of liberty indeed, but by no means admirers of the French politics in the gross, or of Jacobin (republican) principles in particular. The only dangers we are alarmed for, is that which has been wasted to us on the wings of a Proclamation, excited by the military parade in the metropolis, and the preparations of a naval armament in Britain. - These things indicate danger somewhere and summon us to arms - for we remember we were once left defenceless. But we complain of no grievances, only such as more equal representation of the people in Parliament can remedy, and that we must have.

Such being our sentiments, we will be happy to cooperate in every virtuous society and individual in Ireland upon these principles. In particular, we cannot suppress the exalted pleasures we have derived from reading the address, resolutions and declaration of the friends of the constitution, liberty and peace at their meeting in Dublin 21st December 1792 and as the most perfect mark of our cordial approbation of every sentiment contained therein, we resolve unanimously that a copy of these strictures shall be forwarded to Richd Griffith Esq. Secretary to that meeting.

Ian McBride has commented on the publication of 'loyal' toasts and addresses in the mid eighteenth century by declaring that they were 'generally not spontaneous' and were 'carefully orchestrated affairs designed to publicise the loyal sentiments of civic elites and popular societies alike'. The addresses of Caldwell and his cohorts must be considered in the context, as McBride has stated 'any suggestion that they were simply harmless festivities should be dispelled by the serious trouble courted by those who proposed disloyal toasts',

citing the example of James Heggarty who was sentenced to be pilloried at Derry for drinking to the health of the pretender.⁷⁶

Given this background of ideological dissent, it is little surprise that secret societies or agrarian groups identified with revolutionaries and found common cause during the 1790s. A cell of the United Irishmen appears to have been active in Ballymoney from some date in 1795. According to sworn testimonies and examinations taken after the Rebellion in 1798, Samuel Caldwell of Coleraine, John Boyd and Andrew Smylie formed the town's society in the house of Willoughby Chestnut.⁷⁷ It is important to place the detail of these testimonies in the period that they were written, namely the draconian and punitive atmosphere of post-rebellion society. In many instances, the primary motivation of the examinants was to diminish their own activities under immense pressure from local magistrates. Despite this, the testimonies do offer some insight into the organisational nature of the United Irishmen and their membership base. The oath of the United Men appears to have been taken in two sections, an oath of secrecy first and then the oath of allegiance to the society.⁷⁸

James Huey, a woollen draper, informed George Hutchinson of Ballymoney that county meetings of the United Irishmen had been formed from baronial meetings and that members who attended county meetings took an oath not to mention the names of other members. According to Huey, baronial meeting continued to be held in the house of Willoughby Chestnut during this period. He claimed to have attended one such meeting at which he took the oath of allegiance but later ceased his dealings with the society.⁷⁹ In 1791 Huey was named as a collector of subscriptions for Ballymoney in a prospectus of the *Northern Star*.⁸⁰ While this organisational structure cannot be presumed to have been applied

⁷⁶ Ian Mc Bride, *Eighteenth century Ireland* (Dublin, 2009), p. 302.

⁷⁷ PRONI, D272/26 Examination of James Huey.

⁷⁸ James B. Hamilton, *Ballymoney and district, in the County of Antrim prior to the twentieth century*, (Ballycastle, 1957), p. 82.

⁷⁹ PRONI, D272.26 Examination of James Huey.

⁸⁰ TNA, HO 100/43, fo.50

uniformly, it does assume that United Irish principles would have been read and disseminated at a local level. Hierarchical structures could then be formed on the basis of local activity. Information and influence was organised along the lines of government electoral divisions of county and barony, albeit with the direction of political impetus reversed. Local historian James B. Hamilton noted that the United Irish headquarters for the barony of Dunluce was located at Ballymoney, the town being one of the first to join the movement. He also stated that two delegates were typically appointed from baronies to form county committees, from which a provincial committee was chosen.⁸¹

The testimony of James Hopkins, as sworn before George Hutchinson on 27 June 1798, implicated Huey in swearing him to the United Irish constitution in 1796.⁸² Such facts had been omitted by Huey in his own testimonies against United Irish activity in Ballymoney. On 4 July 1798 Hutchinson examined David Shearer, a schoolmaster, who claimed to have been made a United Irishman by James Hamilton in 1796 and sworn to the constitution and an Oath of Secrecy around the same time.⁸³ On 22 June 1798 Edmund McNaghten examined Robert Getty of Ballymoney, a woollen draper, who claimed to have been made a United Irishman in the parlour of John Boyd at some point in 1796. Getty also implicated James Hamilton, James Hopkins, James Huey, John Calderwood, James Parks and Richard Caldwell in the society.⁸⁴ James Parks lived with his uncle James Hamilton at Bush Bank and his elder brother John married Flora Caldwell, daughter of John, in 1796. Richard Caldwell was the nineteen year old son of John Caldwell Snr.⁸⁵ Notably, none of these men appear on the 1772 declaration condemning the hearts of steel revolt.⁸⁶ This is not significant in the case

⁸¹ James B. Hamilton, *Ballymoney and district, in the County of Antrim prior to the twentieth century*, (Ballycastle, 1957), p. 82.

⁸² PRONI, D272/25 Examination of James Hopkins.

⁸³ PRONI, D272/27 Examination of David Shearer.

⁸⁴ PRONI, D272/27 Examination of Robert Getty.

⁸⁵ PRONI, D/1518/1/1 J.B. Hamilton Papers.

⁸⁶ *BN*, 7 April 1772.

of Richard Caldwell, however, as he had not yet been born. The ages of the other men are not known.

George Moore wrote to Dublin Castle on 4 February 1798 to inform authorities about rebel activity and pike making in Ballymoney. Moore appears to have been a local magistrate given the nature of this correspondence and the fact that he was present at examinations of suspected United Irishmen later in the year.⁸⁷ Describing the seizure of two ‘hellish weapons’, he also reported an incident during which a group of up to twenty people came to a farmers garden and cut down an ash tree for making pikes. The farmer was told he would be shot if he interfered with the group. Moore regretfully agreed that Ballymoney needed to be proclaimed under martial law and claimed to have written to Edmund McNaghten to this effect. According to this correspondence, there was ‘as good a horse barrack in Ballymoney as any in Ireland, for forty four horses and men’ which would provide enough military to maintain a proclamation. He also believed that Belfast needed to be proclaimed first as ‘the villainy is all hatched there’ but conceded that this was unlikely.⁸⁸ The response urged Moore to ‘procure full information and examinations against the persons accused’. In his efforts to secure military assistance he was advised to apply to Lieutenant General Lake, general commander for the region.⁸⁹

The return letter included in a correspondence between Edmund McNaghten and Dublin Castle in November 1797 included two instructions for documents forwarded to the government from Ballymoney. Firstly, it was deemed that the evidence against Nathaniel Chestnut ‘does not appear to be so strong as to preclude the person it alludes to from benefit of the proclamation ... unless there are other circumstances against him’. He is advised that two letters from Lady Antrim and Lord Dungannon were being returned and were to be

⁸⁷ NAI, RP 620/37/30 McNaghten to Castlereagh, 620/46/38 Examination of Mary Dowdle.

⁸⁸ NAI, RP 620/28/226 George Moore on pike making in Ballymoney.

⁸⁹ NAI, RP 620/28/226 Response to George Moore.

forwarded to the lord lieutenant ‘in order that he may transmit it to the king, [as] it is more customary and upon the whole more respectful’.⁹⁰ This is a telling example of the tone of correspondence between McNaghten and Dublin Castle.

While the Steelboy disturbances would not indicate that all was well amongst the wider community of north Antrim, the 1772 declaration condemning these activities does provide some evidence of the relative unity of Ballymoney’s prominent citizens at that point to articulate a short condemnation of violent agrarian action. It is unquestionable that such a declaration would have not been possible by the end of the century, given the ideological divide in the town. Equally, it is unsurprising that radical political activity encouraged a younger generation to design plans of violence against the established order, when that pattern began to emerge on a national level. While it is clear that John Caldwell Snr. stressed non-violent political action and example as the vehicle for radical change, it is not clear that his children were receptive to his moderate tone.

⁹⁰ NAI, RP 620/31/165 Return letter to Edmund McNaghten.

Section Four - Local experience of the 1798 Rebellion

The battle of Antrim began on 7 June 1798 under the hastily appointed leadership of Henry Joy McCracken, a prominent United Irishman. This is significant as it marked the beginning of the rebellion in the wider theatre of conflict of which Ballymoney was a key component. Insurgents had been assembling in arms throughout the east of the county and the port of Larne had been attacked during the night. Thousands were said to be in arms on the peninsula of Islandmagee and in the area around Ballycarry, moving westward towards the rebel camp forming on Donegore Hill. In the centre of the county, disciplined bodies of armed men were streaming into Ballymena where they were to be met by rebels from the north the following day. A.T.Q. Stewart described the valley of the Sixmilewater as ‘the cradle of the rebellion’, since every village in the area appears to have produced its quota of men to swell the rebel camp at Donegore Hill.⁹¹

Given McCracken’s inexperience as a military commander, the plan of battle he devised was a noteworthy effort. However, he afforded too much time to the tiny garrison in Antrim town to prepare their defence and waited too long before entering through the Scotch Quarter. He also failed to employ roadblocks over the territory he crossed, thus facilitating the advance of the main government relief force from Belfast.⁹² A military rendezvous point was fixed for around three miles to the south of the town. Colonel William Lumley, commander of the 22nd Dragoons, obtained permission to enter the town through Massarene Bridge and launched a cavalry charge at the rebels. Repulsed by the insurgent’s long pikes, his cavalymen were cut down by musket fire as they made their retreat. Colonel Durham bombarded the town for half an hour when he arrived with the main military force, before

⁹¹ A.T.Q. Stewart, ‘1798 in the North’ in *History Ireland*, vi, no. 2 (1998), pp 33-38.

⁹² Thomas Pakenham, 1798, *The year of liberty* (London, 1972), p. 222.

advancing with the Monaghan Militia who pursued and killed fleeing rebels and unfortunate loyalists alike in the aftermath of victory.⁹³

Thirty kilometres to the south of Ballymoney, a rebel force attacked and held the town of Ballymena on 7 June. They formed a local government called ‘The Committee of Public Safety’ which sought desperately to reconstruct a rebel high command.⁹⁴ According to a government notice printed in the *Belfast Newsletter* accounting for the actions of government troops in north Antrim during the insurgency, all of the yeomanry corps in the area had congregated in the heavily defended town of Coleraine on the evening of 8 June. Loyalist families from around the region had fled to Coleraine for protection from rebel forces. The official account details how information was received by Lord Henry Murray, Commander of the Coleraine Garrison, stating that rebels were in possession of Ballymoney in the early hours of 9 June. In response to this intelligence, Murray marched with part of his own regiment, the Dunluce Cavalry and Infantry, commanded by Edmund McNaghten and Captain Stewart respectively, and two field pieces. In total, a recorded 327 rank and file soldiers descended upon Ballymoney with the reported aim of engaging with rebel forces. The government troop found that the insurgents had left the almost deserted town, ‘most of its men having joined the ranks of treason’, and were reported to be forming a camp at Kilraghts Hill, less than ten kilometres from the town. Murray’s troop ‘inflicted exemplary punishment on Ballymoney’ and ‘the greatest part of the town being the property of the rebels was burned; a few house of Loyalists unavoidably suffered from their bad neighbourhood’.⁹⁵ The government’s account of proceedings, dated almost one month after the events in question, indicated that the military objective of engaging the insurgent forces in combat, and not premeditated vengeance, was the primary reason for the march on

⁹³ A.T.Q. Stewart, ‘1798 in the North’ in *History Ireland*, vi, no. 2 (1998), pp. 33-38.

⁹⁴ Ballymoney Borough Council, *Ballymoney and the Rebellion 1798* (Ballymoney, 1998) p. 8.

⁹⁵ *BN*, 10 July 1798.

Ballymoney. Robert McKerlie from Galloway in Scotland, stationed with the 2nd Battalion, Royal Manx Regiment of Fencible Infantry was one of those ordered to burn Ballymoney on 9 June. His diary entry for that day recorded the unease with which he carried out his duties, stating

I cannot say precisely what could have been the reason for wreaking our vengeance on this devoted town. Our commanders were perhaps informed that the inhabitants were rebels, or partly so, but, from whatever cause it proceeded, they did not hesitate to make a signal advantage of this unfortunate place. The town was speedily set on fire and misery in an appalling form was no doubt the consequence of doing so.⁹⁶

Between the hours of two and three in the morning on 9 June, rebels attacked the home of Lieutenant Richard Hutchinson of the Dunluce Cavalry. Richard was a brother to local magistrate George Hutchinson of Ballymoney. His servant, James Crosbie, testified to having been taken prisoner by the rebels and being brought to the rebel camp forming at Kilraghts. According to Crosbie, the rebels attempted to break down the door at Hutchinson's house at Stranocum until he asked them not to, 'for he would open [it] for them'. Having demanded a full set of keys, the rebels removed all articles of meat and drink from the house and a mare from the stables for the benefit of their commander.⁹⁷

James Clarke of Ballymena, a Revenue Officer, was taken prisoner by rebels on the morning of 9 June. According to his evidence at court martial after the rebellion, Richard Caldwell, the nineteen-year-old son of John Caldwell Senior of Ballymoney, who was described as 'about five foot ten ... brown hair rather heavy made' and 'smooth faced', was Colonel of the rebel force assembled at Kilraghts.⁹⁸ James Crosbie also testified to having seen Caldwell marching the rebels around Kilraghts Hill with fifes and drums while being taken before him and requested to take up arms in their cause. Crosbie stated that he refused the request. James Clarke testified to having been brought before Caldwell to be examined

⁹⁶ A.T.Q. Stewart, *The summer soldiers: the 1798 Rebellion in Antrim and Down* (Belfast, 1995), p. 145.

⁹⁷ PRONI, D 272/26 The trial of Richard Caldwell of Harmony Hill for treason.

⁹⁸ NAI, RP 620/3/51/5 Reward for the capture of John Gunning.

after his capture, charged with having been a spy. While Caldwell did not have the time to carry out this examination, he requested that Clarke be looked after by the rebels until he could tend to the duty. After waiting some time in a ditch, Clarke stated that he made a personal application for his release to Caldwell ‘from liking his countenance and not considering him as one of the desperadoes which the rest appeared to be.’ When this was refused, Clarke returned to the ditch where he observed the rebel party receive a letter stating that the army and yeomanry were in Ballymoney and intended to pursue them. James Crosbie testified to having been in Caldwell’s presence when the note was received, requesting that he be released. The request having been refused, Caldwell ordered that the rebel force march to Ballymena and that Crosbie be kept as a prisoner. Caldwell mounted the black mare, stolen from Richard Hutchinson, and ‘rode at the head of the party with a drawn sword in his hand ... until they got into the town of Ballymena’. In the confusion which ensued, ‘the rebels stayed scarce two minutes’ on the hill after news of the army presence in Ballymoney was received. At Kilraghts, James Clarke waited until the rebel party were out of view, at which point he left the ditch and walked towards Ballymoney and later to Coleraine.⁹⁹

On the morning of 9 June Major William Bacon arrived at the Caldwell family home at Harmony Hill with an order from Lord Henry Murray stating that their house and property was to be burned. The family were given five minutes to gather their possessions before the order was carried out.¹⁰⁰ A Quaker neighbour, James Hunter,¹⁰⁰ came to their assistance. A woman named Mrs Perry also arrived from the village when she saw the flames. For the next few days the family lived under a carpet thrown between two hedges until the bleaching house, which had been spared, was ready as a shelter.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ PRONI, D 272/26 The trial of Richard Caldwell of Harmony Hill for treason.

¹⁰⁰ PRONI, T 3541/5/3 John Caldwell; particulars of history of a north county Irish family, pp 107-108.

¹⁰¹ PRONI, D/1518/1/1 J.B. Hamilton papers

Upon the arrival of the Kilraghts rebels at Ballymena, James Crosbie stated that Richard Caldwell made a report to General James Dickey of what they had obtained from the house of Richard Hutchinson. Crosbie was then imprisoned with Lieutenant Brady of the Dunluce Infantry and Lieutenant McCambridge of the Dunservick Infantry.¹⁰² Dickey was an attorney from Crumlin, County Antrim who was notorious for his brutal conduct during the course of the disturbances. Earlier that morning, Dickey had stabbed United Irish colonel Samuel Parkes to death at his home in Kells, County Antrim as he suspected him of leaking information regarding the plan to seize the Antrim magistrate. Upon returning to Ballymena at around noon, Dickey took a Mr Crawford from the makeshift prison on the suspicion that he was a government informer and inflicted a blow with his sword that was so severe it almost severed his head. The Committee of Public Safety decided from their Dixon's Inn headquarters that all remaining prisoners were to be put on trial on similar charges. This plan was interrupted by the commotion surrounding the arrival of Richard Caldwell and the Kilraghts rebel camp in the town.¹⁰³

An agreement of surrender had been reached between government forces and rebels at Randalstown when a commander of government forces, Colonel Clavering, demanded the return of two hostages from the insurgents. When he threatened to burn the town of Randalstown if his request was not complied with, a large rebel contingent offered a full surrender if their lives and properties were spared. Ultimately, the town was burned but up to six hundred rebels surrendered arms and dispersed, while the remaining two hundred departed for Ballymena to continue the insurgency.¹⁰⁴ When Clavering's troop of the 64th Infantry Regiment and a detachment of Monaghan Militia made their way to Ballymena, a deputation headed by Dr Wilson of Cullyback met the military force to discuss terms. During

¹⁰² PRONI, D 272/26 The trial of Richard Caldwell of Harmony Hill for treason.

¹⁰³ A.T.Q. Stewart, *The summer soldiers: the 1798 Rebellion in Antrim and Down*, (Belfast, 1995), p. 129, p. 132, p. 148, p. 160, p. 247.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

the night up to 5,000 rebels, including members of the Committee of Public Safety, had defected and returned home fearful of military retribution. Wilson was a non-violent United Irishman who had been instrumental in saving the lives of George Hutchinson and David Leslie on 7 June when both men had been dragged from their carriage by rebels yielding pikes. Hutchinson and Leslie were magistrates and both can be described as being loyalists and active participants in the Ballymoney's political dispute in the government's interest.¹⁰⁵ These actions must have increased Wilson's integrity and credibility to perform his current task. The proclamation issued by Clavering demanded the full surrender of rebel forces and for the town to be evacuated within four hours. Government forces entered the deserted town at around ten o' clock on the morning of Sunday 10 June.¹⁰⁶

After the rebellion, George Hutchinson rewarded the local Roman Catholic population for their loyalty during the disturbances by donating land at Dunloy for the building of a chapel. He also helped collect donations for the first Catholic place of worship in Ballymoney. According to the records of the Court Leet for the Manor of Dunluce, Hutchinson made two appearances as foreman of the jury in 1798 and signed official records with this authority. He appears to have been appointed as Seneschal on 11 October 1799.¹⁰⁷ He was appointed High Sherriff for County Antrim in 1825.¹⁰⁸ Hutchinson's home on Main Street in Ballymoney had been unintentionally burned by the military with the rest of the town in June 1798. For the loss of his house, furniture and rent Hutchinson claimed £651 11s. 3d. in compensation.¹⁰⁹ Although it is not confirmed whether the whole sum was allowed, local oral folk memory recorded the vastly superior house which Hutchinson built with the

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁰⁷ James B. Hamilton, *Records of the court leet, manor of Dunluce, County Antrim 1798 to 1847* (Ballymoney, 1934), p. 10.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ *Journal of the House of Commons of the Kingdom of Ireland*, xix, 7 Feb. 1800, pp 158 – 498.

compensation money he received.¹¹⁰ Hutchinson's role in the draconian judicial process was also recorded in folk memory with some scorn and ghost stories featuring 'bloody Hutchinson' persist to this day in Ballymoney. A letter written to George Hutchinson at his address at in Dublin, beside the Four Courts at Greek Street, by William Henry of Ballymoney on 30 November 1799 detailed recent events in the town. An attached affidavit was requested by Henry to be signed and sent by return of post. Henry informed Hutchinson that a troop passing through the town 'were common thieves and plunderers' and had twice broken his potato pit. He concluded the correspondence by stating 'I need not mention to you the melancholy loss of your good mother, who was interred this morning'.¹¹¹

While Hutchinson emerged from the conflict with his position enhanced, the same could not be said of the Caldwell family. William Dickson of Ballymena, a brewer, testified to having seen Richard Caldwell surrender to Colonel Clavering and take the benefit of Clavering's proclamation on 10 June. Around this time, Lieutenant Brady of the Dunluce Infantry launched an escape attempt from the makeshift prison at Ballymena, having been made aware that General Dickey sought him for summary punishment. According to Brady's account of events, he encountered Richard Caldwell while both men were attempting to escape Dickey's vengeance. Caldwell was being pursued by Dickey, who had threatened 'to blow [his] brains out for taking the benefit of the proclamation'. Soon after their initial encounter, Brady noticed Caldwell open the door of a broken carriage in which he was concealed to take him into it, and the two men waited out against their common aggressor.¹¹² Dickey was eventually captured and executed. His defiance or thirst for blood does not appear to have dissipated during the final moments of his life. According to his final

¹¹⁰ Hamilton, *Records of the court leet, manor of Dunluce, County Antrim 1798 to 1847*, p. 2.

¹¹¹ NAI, RP 620/56/105 William Henry to George Hutchinson, 30 November 1799.

¹¹² PRONI, D 272/26 The trial of Richard Caldwell of Harmony Hill for treason.

statement, as reported in the *Belfast Newsletter*, ‘he knew well that had the north been successful, they would have to fight the battle again with the Catholics of the south’.¹¹³

Richard Caldwell’s exact movements after this point are difficult to ascertain. He eventually made his way to Cushendall by 14 June with John Gunning, identified by James Crosbie as an officer on Kilraghts Hill, before the two men crossed the Mull of Kintyre into Scotland under the feigned names of Matthew Strachan and John Stewart. On 16 June Lord Henry Murray, Commander of the Coleraine Garrison and local yeomanry, signed a reward offer of fifty guineas each for the capture of James Dickey, John Gunning, John Nevin and Richard Caldwell.¹¹⁴

Richard Caldwell and John Gunning were apprehended at Campbeltown in Scotland by Alex Campbell of Kilcalmonel, a volunteer in the local company.¹¹⁵ In April 1798 the provost of Campbeltown had written to Edmund McNaghten to inform him that they were ‘very much pestered with people from [his] side of the water and [they were] at some loss how to treat them’.¹¹⁶ Gunning was described as being ‘very thin and tall, near six feet, round shouldered, long black tied hair’.¹¹⁷ In 1795 a former employer had taken the trouble to print a notice in the *Northern Star* informing that Gunning had ‘quit his employment’ as clerk and that ‘neither rents nor debts are to be paid to him in future’ on his account.¹¹⁸ Both Gunning and Caldwell were transported to Carrickfergus from Campbeltown jail for their trial by court martial, which was to be held in Coleraine that July.

Prior to the uprising in the north, on 19 May 1798 John Caldwell junior, Richard’s brother, was arrested in Dublin for high treason when Dublin Castle was breaking up United Irish structures within the capital. Caldwell was a United Irishman who claimed in his

¹¹³ *Belfast Newsletter*, 24 July 1798.

¹¹⁴ NAI, RP 620/3/51/5 Reward for the capture of John Gunning.

¹¹⁵ NAI, RP 620/3/51/5 Reward for the capture of John Gunning.

¹¹⁶ ATQ Stewart, *The summer soldiers: the 1798 Rebellion in Antrim and Down*, (Belfast, 1995), p. 142.

¹¹⁷ NAI, RP 620/3/51/5 Reward for the capture of John Gunning.

¹¹⁸ *NS*, 27 July 1795.

memoirs to have shunned the violent activities of the organisation in favour of organising a lottery for fundraising purposes.¹¹⁹ It is unclear whether this was, in fact, his only activity as a United Irishman. He was listed as a member of the Belfast Committee on 7 January 1798 in the ‘Black Book of the Rebellion of the North of Ireland’.¹²⁰ This was a government document listing suspected United Irishmen and their supposed crimes. He and his younger brother Richard also claimed to have kept their revolutionary ideals secret from their father, John Caldwell Senior, who believed such activities would only result in ‘slaughter and death’ and were more likely to postpone the eventual day of freedom.¹²¹ If this was true, John Caldwell Senior’s son-in-law, John Parks, an attorney from Bushbank, must also have been complicit in concealing United Irish activities in the younger generation of the family.¹²² This would appear to be the case from correspondence between the two men after the rebellion, when speaking of a former United Irishman who swore against him Parks asserted ‘if he stuck to the truth I fear him not, but I trust I will get the matter cleared up’.¹²³

In Dublin, the details of John Caldwell Jnr.’s arrest conformed to eighteenth-century ideals of polite middle class conduct. Major Swan and his assistant were invited to stay for breakfast after they had searched Caldwell’s room for incriminating documents. During this time, Caldwell claimed to have burned a list of United Irish sympathisers he had secreted on his person, while the lady of the house had distracted their guests. Swan later asked Caldwell to deny having any personal papers on him when he was arrested.¹²⁴ Caldwell’s account stated that he was interrogated by Privy Council and afterwards lodged in the Birmingham Tower. Caldwell does not state which members of the Privy Council were present during his interrogation. Here, he claimed to have seen Lord Edward FitzGerald with ‘his head

¹¹⁹ PRONI, T 3541/5/3 John Caldwell; particulars of history of a north county Irish family, p. 96.

¹²⁰ PRONI, MIC575/1 D272/1 McCance MS Black book of the Rebellion of the north of Ireland.

¹²¹ PRONI, T 3541/5/3 John Caldwell; particulars of history of a north county Irish family, pp 107-8.

¹²² PRONI, D/1518/1/1 J.B. Hamilton papers.

¹²³ PRONI, T 3541/1/5 John Parks to John Caldwell Snr. 11 Aug. 1798.

¹²⁴ PRONI, T 3541/5/3 John Caldwell; particulars of history of a north county Irish family, p. 98.

bandaged in a bloody handkerchief' after his arrest later that day. FitzGerald had stabbed Major Swan three times during his capture and Caldwell recorded that he heard 'the heartrendering groans' of his arresting officer amongst those who had been attacked by the rebel Lord.¹²⁵ Caldwell appears to have been treated rather well during his eight-week detention in Watkins' Tavern on Castle Street, a holding area for United Irish prisoners from where he was moved to the Birmingham Tower. Books were brought to him by the American consul in Dublin, who was a close friend; and he was provided with a good bed, fine food and had his clothes regularly washed. By his own admission, Caldwell still felt the need to sleep with a pair of 'immense carving dinner knives' by his side. He had received information on progress of the rebellion from waiters sympathetic to the united cause and a warning that local Orange men intended to massacre prisoners if the government forces were defeated at Naas. A combination of government opposition to Orange vigilantism and rebel failure ensured that the massacre never came to pass.¹²⁶

A letter written to Lord Castlereagh by the MP for County Antrim, Edmund McNaghten, on 23 May from Ballymoney detailed how the arrest had caused 'much confusion' in the area and that John Parks had written an account of the arrest to John Caldwell Snr. 'Old Caldwell', McNaghten stated, was informed that his son had been arrested as he was an inhabitant of Belfast and had 'been reading this letter to almost every person' in Ballymoney. It is unlikely that this was the sole reason for Caldwell's arrest as he was a known United Irishman. McNaghten had learned of the letter reading through Mr Hall, the curate of the parish, who was among the many inhabitants who had the letter read to him. McNaghten believed that evidence implicating James Parks, brother of John Parks, in seditious activity could be extracted from Caldwell during interrogation, 'beyond all doubt ...

¹²⁵ PRONI, T 3541/5/3 John Caldwell; Particulars of history of a north county Irish family, pp 101-2.

¹²⁶ David Wilson, 'John Caldwell's memoir; a case study in Ulster American radicalism' in David A. Wilson and Mark G. Spencer (eds), *Ulster Presbyterians in the Atlantic World* (Dublin, 2006), pp 104-27.

[as] certainly his majesty has no worse subject than he'. In addition to these requests, McNaghten enclosed the signatures of ninety men who were engaged to serve in his Dunluce cavalry corps 'as a supplementary force in case the lord lieutenant should think proper to call them for that purpose'. McNaghten finished his correspondence with Castlereagh by offering his services 'in case it should be advisable to take any steps against any of the fraternity in this part of the world'. McNaghten underlined the word 'fraternity' in this sentence. He may have done so to inform Castlereagh that the subjects of their discourse were Freemasons, stating rather ominously 'I am watching them as closely as I can'.¹²⁷

Prior to the burning of the Caldwell family home near Ballymoney, Mc Naghten had informed Lord Henry Murray, the commander of the Coleraine garrison who carried out the order, that the Caldwell's were in mourning for United Irishman William Orr of Farranshane, who had been executed in October 1797. In fact, the family were still in mourning for Elizabeth Caldwell, the wife of John Snr., who had died ten months previously. Murray apparently told Flora Caldwell, a daughter of John Snr. who was married to John Parks, that he regretted the way in which the family had been treated and made an offer of compensation, which was ignored.¹²⁸

John Caldwell Jnr. was taken to Belfast after his eight week detention at Watkins' Tavern. Upon entering the town, he saw 'the terrific sights of the heads of our countrymen' who had been hanged and decapitated for involvement in the United Irish plot. It was here that he claimed to have learnt of his younger brother Richard's exact role in the insurgency.¹²⁹ Caldwell learned of the burning of his family home at Ballymoney from government troops before being interrogated by Crown solicitor John Pollock at a makeshift prison in the Donegall Arms. Caldwell recorded that Pollock was 'too much under the

¹²⁷ NAI, RP 620/37/132 Edmund McNaghten to Lord Castlereagh.

¹²⁸ PRONI, D/1518/1/1 J.B. Hamilton papers.

¹²⁹ PRONI, T 3541/5/3 John Caldwell; particulars of history of a north county Irish family, p. 106.

influence of the brandy bottle' during the interrogation and that his 'rage and fury ... became that of a maniac' when Caldwell refused to turn informer.¹³⁰ Edmund McNaghten was also reputed to have sent a paper for Caldwell to sign, implicating many of his friends in United Irish activities. Caldwell reportedly returned the paper and marked it 'rejected with scorn'.¹³¹

On 25 June a soap worker named Alexander Gamble was hanged from the tower of the Market House at Ballymoney and buried in Main Street at the foot of the tower. Gamble had been found guilty of treason and rebellion at Court Martial for having been in the rebel contingent at Ballymena on 8 June. The *Belfast Newsletter* noted that 'he was extremely penitent, confessed his crime and acknowledged the justice of his sentence.'¹³² Gamble was alleged to have refused an offer of clemency in return for becoming an informer as 'he would die some day, and he knew not how soon; but it should never be cast in the face of his children that their father betrayed others to save himself'.¹³³ He had lived in Church Street in Ballymoney with his wife and seven children.

The Court Martial of Richard Caldwell, charged with 'treason and rebellion and having a command in the rebel army', began at eleven o' clock on 13 July in Coleraine. The trial was presided over by Edmund McNaghten, as Captain of the Dunluce Cavalry. James Clarke, the Ballymena Revenue Officer, taken prisoner by rebels on 9 June, was the first to be sworn by the court. He testified that Caldwell was introduced to him as the rebel colonel at Kilraghts. Clarke attempted to portray Caldwell in a favourable light, given the circumstances, and stated that he had approached him on several occasions 'liking his countenance'. James Crosbie, the servant of Richard Hutchinson at Stranocum, also implicated Caldwell with command of the rebel force at Kilraghts and Ballymena. Thomas McNeil, a Ballymoney linen weaver, admitted to having been on Kilraghts Hill on the

¹³⁰ PRONI, T 3541/5/3 John Caldwell; particulars of history of a north county Irish family, pp 110-11.

¹³¹ PRONI, D/1518/1/1 J.B. Hamilton Papers.

¹³² *Belfast Newsletter*, 29 June 1798.

¹³³ Reverend W.S. Smith, 'Memories of 98' in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 2nd series, ii (1896) pp 86-90.

morning of 9 June although he claimed that this was not of his own accord. McNeil stated that Caldwell's final command to the detachment of rebels selected to plunder local magistrate and government supporter George Hutchinson's house at Stranocum was 'boys, injure no man, woman or child'.¹³⁴ McNaghten countered McNeil's assertion by reasoning that Caldwell's expression illustrated that he knew where the rebel party were going; thus negating McNeil's attempt to portray Caldwell in a sympathetic light and furthering his culpability for the charges of which he stood accused.

A Ballymoney grocer and publican named Benjamin Cooper testified to having been in company with Richard Caldwell and that he 'considered him as a United Irishman by the discourse which passed'. Cooper named James Huey, John Gunning and James Parks amongst those whom he further implicated in United Irish activities. James Parks of Bushbank, an attorney whose brother John was married to Richard's sister Flora, testified that he did 'not recollect he ever sat in any society of United Irishmen in company with the prisoner [Richard]'.¹³⁵ Neil McLaughlin, a tobacco spinner from Ballymoney, was sworn at the court and admitted to having been on Kilraghts Hill on the morning of 9 June. McLaughlin then appears to have dramatically denied his former testimony, which presumably contained further evidence against Caldwell and was 'therefore committed to close custody' by McNaghten.¹³⁶

When opening his defence on the following morning, Richard Caldwell called a Ballymena linen draper named Robert Kelso to give evidence. Kelso testified to having seen James Crosbie, servant to Richard Hutchinson, in an intoxicated state at Mr. Adair's Castle Garden in Ballymena on 9 June. He alleged that Caldwell advised Crosbie that 'he ought to go and get a bed'. Crosbie replied that 'he had no friends to get him a bed', at which point

¹³⁴ PRONI, D 272/26 The trial of Richard Caldwell of Harmony Hill for treason.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

Caldwell instructed a man to accompany Crosbie to Mr Dickson's for that purpose. This allegation was later denied by Crosbie and Lieutenant Brady of the Dunluce Infantry. Brady also testified to having received Caldwell's assistance when attempting to conceal himself from James Dickey. Kelso's testimony directly implicated Dickey with the murders of a Mr. Davidson and Samuel Crawford at Ballymena. In relation to Kelso's testimony and denial of having been a United Irishman, McNaghten questioned 'how did it happen that you say so many loyal men were killed in the town Ballymena by the rebels and you, who call yourself a loyal man, passed and repassed without any molestation'. Kelso's response accounted for his initial departure from Ballymena on Friday morning, while his testimony implied that he returned at some point on Saturday. He reiterated that he never heard that Caldwell held any command in the rebel army.¹³⁷

William Dickson, a Ballymena brewer, testified to having witnessed Caldwell surrender himself to Colonel Clavering on 10 June. The written certificate confirming Caldwell's surrender was produced into court to confirm this. When questioned about a discourse which passed between Caldwell and James Hamilton, uncle to John and James Parks, Dickson recollected 'a conversation, the purport of which was that, let what would happen, Hamilton who was then present and pointed at by the prisoner [Richard Caldwell] was the cause of it; which Hamilton confessed and burst out crying'. Dickson also observed that when asked if he was likely to take up arms again, Caldwell replied 'no; if I was to be shot into horse tails I never would'.¹³⁸

As president of the court, Edmund McNaghten found Caldwell guilty of all the charges exhibited against him and sentenced him 'to be hanged in the town of Ballymoney by the neck until dead, his head to be severed from his body and placed upon a pike on the market house in the town of Ballymoney on whatever day the commanding officer of the

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

town of Coleraine thinks proper'. Caldwell's property 'real and personal' was also forfeited to the crown. McNaghten's judgement was approved by General Nugent.¹³⁹

The sentence handed down by McNaghten prompted an intense campaign by the Caldwell family to save Richard's life. Employing all their contacts and resources, the extended family exerted every pressure it could to mitigate the draconian sentence handed down by the local magistrate. John Parks, Richard's brother-in-law, had an address on Stafford Street, Dublin and appears to have been active as an attorney in the city at this time. He visited Dublin Castle ten times in one day to secure an audience with Lord Castlereagh and expressed an initial confidence to John Caldwell Snr that a formal pardon could be obtained from this meeting.¹⁴⁰ The extent to which Richard's fate depended on the inner machinations of Dublin Castle and the national network of government communications is evidenced by concerns expressed by Parks that Lord Henry Murray, Commander of the Coleraine Garrison, might not recommend a pardon if Lord Cornwallis, the Lord Lieutenant, deferred to 'the people before him'. Murray had signed the order which had led to the burning of the Caldwell family home at Harmony Hill.

There is also evidence of a rather difficult relationship between Edmund McNaghten and Lord Castlereagh. McNaghten's demands for warrants for the arrest of suspected United Irishmen had been rebuffed by Castlereagh on several occasions. Often, the requests to detain prisoners were based on little more than McNaghten's conviction that they were 'disaffected'. The tone of the correspondence also carried a hint of reluctance on the part of McNaghten to submit to Castlereagh's authority. On one occasion he made a little entertained attempt to placate Castlereagh by making enquiries over rather menial matters of officer's pay in his cavalry corps.¹⁴¹ Parks recommended that Caldwell Snr. should petition

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ PRONI, T 3541/1/1 John Parks to John Caldwell Snr., July 1798.

¹⁴¹ NAI, RP 620/37/30 Edmund McNaghten to Lord Castlereagh, 7 May 1798.

Cornwallis, advising that ‘great moderation must be used’.¹⁴² Ultimately, the family’s efforts proved successful and Cornwallis granted a pardon to Richard ‘on condition of his transporting himself to America, and not returning to any of his Britannic Majesty’s dominions for life’. Bail of £1,000 and two sureties of £500 each were also provided as conditions of the pardon.¹⁴³ By 31 July, John Parks had written to John Caldwell Snr. in anticipation of Richard’s release from prison to suggest that he should join the Cork fleet for America immediately.¹⁴⁴ A similar letter dated 9 August advised that Richard should ‘rigidly abstain from political discussions of any kind’ with his fellow countrymen in America. Parks was mindful that John Caldwell Jnr. was still in custody, although likely to be soon released.¹⁴⁵ Richard became the first of the family to reach the United States when he arrived in Norfolk, Virginia on 1 September 1798.¹⁴⁶

The emphasis placed on Richard’s pressing need to travel to America, as stressed by John Parks, may have been the result of a concerted campaign directed against the family by McNaghten and local magistrates. Presumably, the clemency offered to Richard was greeted with great frustration and anger by McNaghten and his peers. On 27 July a series of affidavits were sent to General Nugent by senior officers in the Dunluce Cavalry requesting that the protection granted to James Parks be removed. Among those who made this request were Captain James Stuart, 1st and 2nd Lieutenants Richard and George Hutchinson and 1st Lieutenant James Brady.¹⁴⁷ When John Parks wrote to John Caldwell Snr. on 11 August he expressed a concern that James Huey had sworn an examination against him, adding ‘if he has done so, God help us, for who dare we trust’.¹⁴⁸ Unfortunately for Parks, his fears were

¹⁴² PRONI, T 3541/1/2 John Parks to John Caldwell Snr., July 1798.

¹⁴³ PRONI, D 272/26 The trial of Richard Caldwell of Harmony Hill for treason.

¹⁴⁴ PRONI, T 3541/1/3 John Parks to John Caldwell Snr., 31 July 1798.

¹⁴⁵ PRONI, T 3541/1/4 John Parks to John Caldwell Snr., 9 Aug. 1798.

¹⁴⁶ David Wilson, ‘John Caldwell’s memoir; a case study in Ulster American radicalism’ in David A. Wilson and Mark G. Spencer (eds), *Ulster Presbyterians in the Atlantic World* (Dublin, 2006) p. 118.

¹⁴⁷ PRONI, D 272/24 Affidavits for the removal of protection granted to James Parks.

¹⁴⁸ PRONI, T 3541/1/5 John Parks to John Caldwell Snr., 11 Aug. 1798.

entirely justified as Huey had sworn an examination against him in the presence of George Hutchinson on 3 July. Huey testified to having been present when John Parks took the oath of secrecy to the society of United Irishmen in the office of his brother James.¹⁴⁹ By unfortunate coincidence, Huey was on board the same ship which carried Richard Caldwell to America in September 1798.¹⁵⁰

The concerns which John Parks expressed at the prospect of Richard Caldwell's fate lying in the hands of Lord Henry Murray at Coleraine, and his instruction to John Caldwell Snr. to petition the Lord Lieutenant, illustrates the local influence which was exerted by the land owners and local magistrates around Ballymoney. A strategy of securing damning examinations against local United Irishmen, encouraging each one to implicate another, was in operation around the time of the rebellion. A Ballymoney woollen draper named Robert Getty was examined by McNaghten on 22 June 1798, the day of Richard Caldwell's capture at Campbeltown. Getty named James Hamilton, James Hopkins, James Parks, Richard Caldwell and James Huey amongst those whom he implicated in United Irish activities in Ballymoney.¹⁵¹ On 25 June local United Irishman Alexander Gamble was hanged from the tower at Ballymoney Market House in the centre of the town. It appears to have been widely known that Gamble had refused to inform on his peers. On 27 June James Hopkins admitted to having been a United Irishman for two years in an examination carried out by George Hutchinson. Hopkins corroborated all of Getty's previous testimony, adding that Richard Caldwell and John Gunning had been appointed officers and that James Huey had sworn him to the United Irish constitution.¹⁵² When James Huey was examined by George Hutchinson and George Moore on 3 July, ten days before the trial of Richard Caldwell, he provided a damning account of the activities of the local United Irish cell. This will be explored further

¹⁴⁹ PRONI, D272.26 Examination of James Huey.

¹⁵⁰ PRONI, T 3541/1/5 John Parks to John Caldwell Snr. 11 Aug. 1798.

¹⁵¹ PRONI, D272/27 The examination of Robert Getty.

¹⁵² PRONI, D272/25 The examination of James Hopkins.

in section four of this chapter. As early as 1791 Huey was named in a prospectus of the *Northern Star* as a collector of subscriptions to the seditious newspaper.¹⁵³ Huey was also ‘bound in sum of £500 to appear and prosecute at the next assizes’. Huey continued the trend, evident in the depositions of captured United Irishmen, of implicating a previous examinant, James Hopkins, in the swearing of oaths and naming a new suspect, who in this instance was schoolmaster David Shearer.¹⁵⁴ Shearer was examined by George Hutchinson the following day.¹⁵⁵ Benjamin Cooper, who testified against Richard Caldwell at his Court Martial, was implicated in United Irish activity by the examination of Alexander Hamilton of Ballymoney around this time.¹⁵⁶

John Caldwell Snr petitioned Lord Cornwallis in November 1798 for an extension to stay in Ireland until May 1799 due to the difficulties he had encountered while attempting to sell his family’s property, as his dwelling house and offices were set on fire by ‘his Majesty’s Yeomanry forces’. His sons had already departed for America. Caldwell was obliged to petition Cornwallis as he had agreed to emigrate as part of Richard’s clemency.¹⁵⁷ John Caldwell Jnr had departed Ireland for America on 9 October 1798 with his twelve-year-old brother William, heavy gales and bad weather forcing them to return to Cork harbour by 11 November. He was detained once more in Dublin for questioning.¹⁵⁸ It is unclear if he was arrested in Cork and transported to Dublin for questioning or if he travelled to Dublin of his own volition and was arrested there. Nonetheless, a pass was issued on 28 January 1799 to his address at 50 Capel Street, Dublin instructing him to ‘proceed forthwith to [his] fathers house in the county of Antrim’ with William.¹⁵⁹ In April 1799 a pass was issued to John Caldwell Snr and family to pass ‘from Harmony Hill to Belfast in order to embark for

¹⁵³ TNA, HO 100/34, fo. 50 Prospectus of the Northern Star

¹⁵⁴ PRONI, D272/26 Examination of James Huey.

¹⁵⁵ PRONI, D272/27 The examination of David Shearer.

¹⁵⁶ PRONI, D272/27 The examination of Alexander Hamilton.

¹⁵⁷ PRONI, T 3541/6/2 Petition of John Caldwell Senior.

¹⁵⁸ PRONI, D/1518/1/1 J.B. Hamilton Papers.

¹⁵⁹ PRONI, T 3541/6/4 Pass from Dublin Castle issued to John Caldwell.

America'.¹⁶⁰ Having spent their final months in Ireland under a cloud of suspicion, surveillance and control, the younger Caldwells arrived in New York on 12 June 1799. John Caldwell Snr. let the rest of the family sail ahead to America as he had business to settle and he later joined them in August 1799.¹⁶¹

As a military conflict, the United Irish insurgents from Ballymoney stood little chance against the professional and disciplined government troop. The wholesale inexperience of the appointed commanders ensured that no sustained campaign or engagement could be maintained by the 'summer soldiers', as they became known. The relentless pursuit of power by Edmund McNaghten was best attained in a sphere of local influence and his interactions with Dublin Castle seem to have proved frustrating and yielded little return. McNaghten suffered the indignity of having the sentence of death he passed on Richard Caldwell commuted to transportation for life by the lord lieutenant. He also had several requests for warrants rebuffed by Lord Castlereagh, who also met with John Parks on the issue of Richard Caldwell's pardon. Despite this, at a local level, McNaghten's power and influence was absolute. It is highly likely that his knowledge of local affairs and the ninety men he had enrolled in his Dunluce Cavalry, at the disposal of Lord Henry Murray at Coleraine, ensured that he could exert considerable military authority in the locality. His influence can be assumed in the decision to burn Ballymoney and the Caldwell family home at Harmony Hill.

If the military victory of government forces can be largely accredited to the ineptitude of rebel forces, so too can judicial success be accredited to the organised and strategic campaign of local magistrates. Alexander Gamble could have avoided being hanged from the Market Hall at Ballymoney Diamond had he sworn an examination against his United Irish peers. As he acknowledged having been at Kilraghts Hill on 9 June, he may have been requested to provide testimony against Richard Caldwell. Gamble's execution took place

¹⁶⁰ PRONI, T 3541/6/5 Permit John Caldwell.

¹⁶¹ PRONI, D/1518/1/1 J.B. Hamilton papers.

three days after Caldwell's capture at Cambeltown. Following the precedent set by this act, local United Irishmen capitulated in the face of pressure exerted by local magistrates and successively implicated one another in seditious activity. George Hutchinson proved particularly effective in extracting damning evidence from his suspects and pursuing this strategy until he achieved the 'game changing' cooperation of James Huey. Although the sentence of death handed down by McNaghten to Caldwell was commuted to transportation for life by the lord lieutenant, the strategic campaign which he conducted consolidated his power over the judicial, military and political institutions which operated around Ballymoney and wider area in north Antrim.

Conclusion

In Ballymoney, social, political and personal grievances came to be expressed under the umbrella of the rebellion. The relentless pursuit of power by Edmund McNaghten mirrored his long standing struggle with the Caldwell family. His influence was best exercised in a sphere of local influence and his interactions with Dublin Castle seem to have proved frustrating and yielded little return. This struggle for power must also be considered in the context of a society that had been steadily losing a certain unity of purpose that may have been present in previous generations.

In many respects, the political activities of John Caldwell Snr. appear to have imbued his sons with a strong credence in radical politics and a sense that the system was in need of drastic reform. It is perhaps telling of the era that Richard Caldwell took up arms to wage a war in a manner that his father believed would merely damage the cause he had pursued ideologically. The victories of enrolling the Catholic Maxwell in the Volunteer corps and leading a walkout of the town meeting improved Caldwell's political platform and provided a tangible, local means of undermining the established order. The articulation of international politics in local clubs encouraged radical principles amongst the inhabitants of Ballymoney and John Caldwell appears to have been a key figure in this domain. It is perhaps unfortunate that his agitation for enlightened reform and the subversive activities of his children have so direct an ideological link.

Edmund McNaghten was appointed Sheriff of county Antrim by a patent dated 15 February 1793 and was returned as MP for county Antrim at the 1797 election.¹⁶² At a local level, McNaghten's power and influence was at its utmost. It is highly likely that his knowledge of local affairs and the ninety men he had enrolled in his Dunluce Cavalry, at the disposal of Lord Henry Murray at Coleraine, ensured that he could exert considerable

¹⁶² E.M. Johnston-Liik, *The history of the Irish parliament 1692-1800* (6 vols, Belfast, 2002), v, 171.

military authority in the locality. His influence can be assumed in the decision to burn Ballymoney and the Caldwell family home at Harmony Hill.

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The sentence of death handed down by McNaghten to Richard Caldwell must be considered in the context of his long standing feud with his wider family. It must, however, be seen as more than simply revenge as it had its own ideological underpinning. Although it was commuted to transportation for life by the Lord Lieutenant, the Caldwell's later emigrated *en masse* to America, as McNaghten's crusade against them did not relent. The strategic campaign which McNaghten appears to have personally controlled consolidated his power over the judicial, military and political institutions which operated around Ballymoney and wider area in north Antrim.

Chapter 2

Clonsilla, County Dublin

At an annual festival celebrated in Persia, the king dined in public and the chief farmers had the honour of sitting at the table with him when he addressed them in words to this effect. I am one of you, and my subsistence and that of my people rests on the labours of your hands, the succession of the race of man depends on the plough and without you we cannot exist, but your dependence on me is reciprocal, we ought therefore to be brothers and live in perpetual harmony.¹

(Farmer's Society for the Union of Castleknock, 27 November 1797)

This chapter examines the response of the inhabitants of Clonsilla to the social disorder, violent attacks and civil unrest that were a feature of their community throughout the 1790s. In contrast to Ballymoney, the sphere of local influence managed to maintain a largely united front despite the pressure of maintaining the local economy and managing security concerns. That this power base was centred largely in the same Church of Ireland congregation may help to explain this.

As an agricultural community, the local gentry managed and promoted the local economy through the Farmers Society. Security concerns were addressed at meetings of the Association for the Protection of Private Property from 1792 and by the armed Clonsilla Cavalry Yeomanry corps later in the decade. Each organisation also became the venue for the practise of parish politics and reputation building. Detailed minute books, account sheets and parish registers originating from the gentry are utilised to convey this aspect of the community's experience.

The examples of violence and deception that visited the parish are reflective of the underlying tensions of the period. Where a consolidated power base existed at some social distance from their tenants, the vast majority of whom were of a different religion, it is unsurprising that much seditious activity took place under the 'radar' of local gentry. From their perspective, the area was prone to explosions of carefully planned, pre-meditated

¹ RCB, P.0352/28/3.

violence. The power struggles fought between the local gentry were carried out with the same ideological purpose to uphold the state in mind, on the whole.

The tenant population of Clonsilla lived under the proprietorship of the powerful Luttrell family. As documentary evidence outlining their outlook and beliefs is scant, their actions are the clearest indication of their true sentiments at this time. Both sides of this conflict organised themselves along pragmatic economic, social and geographical lines. As a result, interaction between the parish and the populations of Lucan, Castleknock, Dunboyne, Leixlip and surrounding neighbourhoods are a crucial factor in understanding the events as they are outlined in this study.



Source: *John Rocque's map of Dublin, 1756.*

Section One - The locality in context

Clonsilla was a parish in the barony of Castleknock in Co. Dublin, located 10 kilometres north-west of the metropolis. The county of Dublin was a separate administrative unit from the city of Dublin and the barony of Castleknock was one of nine. Lewis's *Topographical dictionary of Ireland* (1837), describes the parish of comprising of 2,943 statute acres, 'the whole of which is arable land'.² According to the census of 1821, the total population of Clonsilla was 718, with an even distribution between the sexes.³

The total population for the county of Dublin was recorded as 150,011. Castleknock was the least populated barony in the County of Dublin. Within Castleknock itself there were 10 subdivisions of parish and village, of which Clonsilla, with a population of 718, represented approximately 10 per cent of the overall population of the barony. Therefore, the mean population of the parishes in the barony of Castleknock would have been similar to that found in Clonsilla.⁴

A map of the proposed route of the Royal Canal was drafted in 1791 and it appears to have been drawn for the purpose of assessing who was to be in receipt of compensation owing to the path of the canal crossing their lands. It outlined the intended passage through the village of Clonsilla.⁵ Seemingly, John Binns, who sat on the board of directors of the Grand Canal Company, was suitably angered by a perceived attack on his character and position by his fellow board members, who reportedly called him 'a cobbler', that he hastily departed his seat by telling them 'You may think me a very insignificant person, but I will show you the contrary. I will sell out forthwith, start a rival canal, and carry all the traffic.' Binns supposedly convinced a number of west Dublin gentlemen to back his canal venture

² Samuel Lewis, *A topographical dictionary of Ireland* (3 vols, London, 1837), i, p. 375.

³ *An act to provide for taking an account of the population of Ireland, and for ascertaining the increase or diminution thereof ... 1824*, p.11, H.C. 1823 (577) xxii, 411.

⁴ *An act to provide for taking an account of the population of Ireland, and for ascertaining the increase or diminution thereof ... 1824*, p.11, H.C. 1823 (577) xxii, 411.

⁵ NLI, 21/F/51/66 Longfield maps

from Dublin to Mullingar. Petitions were presented to the House of Commons in 1789 seeking aid to build the newly proposed canal and on 24 October of that year the Royal Canal Company was enrolled. The Canal itself was said to have cost five times its original estimate and one of the most controversial stretches was known as the ‘deep sinking’ between Blanchardstown and Clonsilla. It cost approximately £40,000 to blast through the hard block of calcareous stone which was embedded in that area.⁶ That stone is clearly visible along the canal bank to this day.

In terms of the religious outlook of the community. Clonsilla was a rectory in the Church of Ireland diocese of Dublin and was part of the union of Castleknock. The church at Clonsilla was described as ‘a small neat building’ by Samuel Lewis in 1837.⁷ The local gentry who featured most prominently in associations and societies which governed the area and promoted the economy were members of the established church. As will be discussed in more detail, the gentry formed a Farmer’s Society to sponsor the local economy, advance a humanitarian mission and promote their own social values. Security concerns were also addressed by the main body of men when the Association for the Protection of Private Property was established.

The Roman Catholic parish also formed part of the union or district of Castleknock and had ‘a neat chapel’ at Porterstown.⁸ It would appear that the majority of those suspected of seditious activity in the area were less affluent Catholics and a sectarian dynamic is evident in local disturbances. Clonsilla was significant as the birthplace of the Catholic archbishop of Dublin, John Thomas Troy. The Troy family originated in Annfield, in a house which stood facing the present Porterstown Catholic Church only a few kilometres from Clonsilla. Evidently, they were a prosperous family as they also held a house at Smithfield in

⁶ Charles and Mary Hulgraine, *St Mochta’s Church Porterstown* (Dublin, 1990), p. 35.

⁷ Samuel Lewis, *A topographical dictionary of Ireland* (3 vols, London, 1837), i, p. 376.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Dublin, which at that time also counted the earl of Bective as one of its inhabitants. John Troy was the eldest of seven children and at 16 he was sent to study in Rome where he distinguished himself over a period of 21 years.⁹ John established himself as a scholar of some note overseas, at a time when Irish Catholics still had to travel abroad for higher education. His brother Walter had remained as a farmer in the area. Though he was a Catholic, he undertook the role of church warden of the local established church.¹⁰ Due to the close legal relationship of state and established church, the position of warden was also effectively that of government agent. The role involved managing the parish account books and outgoings, thus involving important monetary trusts and responsibilities. A reputable Catholic may have taken on the role publicly to display and demonstrate his loyalty and respectability.

It was the opinion of Archbishop John Troy that if Catholics were given a share in the franchise they would fall under the influence of their natural leaders - the clergy, the gentry and merchants. These leaders would, in turn, become more resistant to radical ideas; with their own position secured the influence of the United Irishmen, the Catholic Society and other radical groups would be weakened.¹¹ In contrast to Ballymoney, there was no dissenter presence in the parish of Clonsilla. This may go some way to explaining the relative harmony of social relations amongst the gentry as there was little dispute as to which congregation was in the ascendancy.

In 1837, Samuel Lewis recorded that the parish of Clonsilla comprised of 2943 statute acres, 'the whole of which is arable land'. Agriculture was the primary industry of the

⁹ Charles and Mary Hulgraine, *St Mochta's Church, Porterstown* (Dublin, 1990), p. 30.

¹⁰ RCB, P.0353/05/1

¹¹ Dáire Keogh, 'Archbishop Troy, the Catholic Church and Irish Radicalism' in, Dickson, Keogh and Whelan (eds), *The United Irishmen* (Dublin, 1983), p. 124.

locality. In addition, limestone quarries were said that were exploited in the area and a flour mill had been erected by the Liffey.¹²

Occupations were recorded in the 1821 census under three broad categories, 'agriculture', 'trades, manufactures or handicrafts' and 'not comprised in the preceding classes'. What we are not told is whether these statistics included women.¹³ According to local records, it would also appear that women held no positions of civic responsibility within the community. In the county of Dublin, those listed as employed chiefly in agriculture represented thirty per cent of the total persons occupied. The returns for trades, manufactures or handicrafts were thirty-two per cent, whereas those not comprised in the preceding classes were at thirty-eight per cent. Returns for Castleknock indicated a rise of forty-nine per cent for those working in agriculture, emphasising the rural nature of the barony as a whole. Accordingly, a mere thirteen per cent were employed in trades, manufactures or handicrafts and the same percentage of thirty-eight per cent were otherwise occupied.¹⁴

In Clonsilla, 54 per cent of the population was employed in agriculture and 37 per cent was recorded as being otherwise occupied. The remaining 9 per cent employed in trades, manufactures or handicraft. This figure contrasts sharply with Ballymoney, where 63 per cent were employed in the latter category. The results for Clonsilla show a continuation of this trend towards an overwhelmingly agricultural way of life. Clonsilla was second to Bantry in terms of percentage of the population employed in agriculture, both at over 50 per cent. This is significant as the landed gentry in both communities were the most successful at containing rebel activity in their communities and pacifying their areas with minimal violence.

¹² Samuel Lewis, *A topographical dictionary of Ireland* (3 vols, London, 1837), i, p. 376.

¹³ Margaret E. Crawford, *Counting the people* (Dublin, 2003), p. 51.

¹⁴ *An act to provide for taking an account of the population of Ireland, and for ascertaining the increase or diminution thereof ... 1824*, p.11, H.C. 1823 (577) xxii, 411.

A mere 2 per cent of the population attended school, with an even split between the sexes. When these figures are adjusted to account for the ages of persons they show a far higher proportion attending schools. These figures must also be altered to account for the barony as a whole, as this is the only source data that exists for ages of persons. Therefore, it can be stated that 30 per cent of the population of the barony of Castleknock who were under the age of ten attended school according to the 1821 census. Castleknock barony had the highest percentage of children under the age of ten attending school between the four communities, while Clonsilla parish has the lowest. Given the available source data it is not possible to account for this anomaly, but it may be speculated that an ageing population lived in Clonsilla parish by 1821.¹⁵

According to an 1825 report of the commission of Irish education inquiry, there was one school located in the parish of Clonsilla, with eleven in the barony of Castleknock as a whole. In terms of the schools religious denomination, seven of them had a Roman Catholic master and four were of the established church. There were no Presbyterian school masters in the barony. The total annual income of the masters is broadly similar, at around £30 per annum with two extremes at either end of the scale; William Moffitt of Ashtown earning £100 while his counterpart Archibald Ryan of Kilsallaghan earned £2. Both men were Protestant and held lessons in houses made of lime and stone. Significantly, Moffitt's school was a free school funded by the trustees of the will of a Mr Morgan. There was also a free school mastered by a Roman Catholic at Abbotstown that was funded by a Mrs Ellis. Equally, the description in quality of the school buildings is broadly similar, the mode of buildings being constructed of lime and stone.¹⁶ The significance of school provision and widespread literacy in a locality lies in the ability of radical publications to make an impact on the local population. A literate population was more susceptible to these influences.

¹⁵ *An act to provide for taking an account of the population of Ireland, and for ascertaining the increase or diminution thereof ... 1824*, p.11, H.C. 1823 (577) xxii, 411.

¹⁶ *Second report of the commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry*, p.246, H.C. 1826 (12) xii, 1.

It is worthy of note that free schools catering for the two dominant religious groups were located in the barony and this should account for the high numbers attending school in Castleknock as a whole. The Catholic free school at Abbotstown was located four kilometres from Clonsilla, so it is not immediately apparent why attendance figures were so low for the parish. An appendix to Archer's statistical survey in 1801 may go some way to explain this. It reveals the discovery of manganese 'of good quality' and rich iron ore 'of great abundance' on the lands of Porterstown during the construction of the Royal Canal, near which are 'two regular courses of lead ore and one which appears to be copper'.¹⁷ Donald Stewart, a mineralogist of the Dublin Society, provided an account of one such discovery in the locality. It reads:

In the making of the canal at Porterstown, a quantity of fine purple marble was thrown upon the bank. This was of so pure a nature, and such a beautiful colour, that a paper stainer had a car load for trial for colouring walls, which succeeded so well that if Mr [Walter] Troy, the proprietor chose, he informed me that he could make a considerable advantage of it, by converting it to that use, for which it was so well adapted.

In the same range, for a considerable extent, are some great quantities of good limestone. If coal could be had in this neighbourhood, with the above advantages, what accumulation of wealth might it yield?

This may account for an influx of men of working age in the parish; thus explaining the low school attendance. Given that the period of time that is our focus, employment in agriculture for Clonsilla was likely to have been even higher than the 54 per cent recorded in the census of 1821.

¹⁷Joseph Archer, *Statistical survey of the county of Dublin* (Dublin, 1801), p. 248.

Section Two – The locality and the state

By 1798, Henry Lawes Luttrell, the second earl of Carhampton, was head of the Luttrell family, owner of much of the lands of Clonsilla and occupier of Luttrellstown Castle and demesne. Sir Geoffrey Luttrell was the first member of the Luttrell family to come to Ireland with King John in 1210 and the family's connection to the area would seem to date from then.¹⁸ A passage from the *Letters of Junius* (1769-71) seems to best typify popular opinion towards the family at that time. It reads;

there is a certain family in this county on which nature seems to have entailed a hereditary base of disposition. As far as their history has been known, the son has regularly improved upon the vices of his father, and has taken care to transmit them pure and undiminished into the bosom of his successor.¹⁹

Local folklore recorded that Simon Luttrell, father of Henry Lawes Luttrell, sold his soul to the devil in return for the overnight construction of a mill, on the banks of the Liffey along the road to Lucan from his demesne. That mill is known locally as 'the devil's mill' to this day.²⁰ The transaction is said to have been agreed, although never honoured, in the notorious Hellfire Club in the Wicklow Mountains. Locals attributed Luttrell's rumoured inability to cast a shadow to his dealings with such unsavoury business partners. In 1717, Carhampton's grandfather Henry, a traitor to the Jacobite cause, was assassinated by persons unknown in Dublin en route to his house in Stafford Street.²¹

The second earl of Carhampton is said to have enjoyed a rather tempestuous relationship with his own father, who once challenged him to a duel with the invitation 'if you can forget that I am your father'. It is said that the son responded 'My Lord, I wish I could at any time forget that you are my father'.²² Many of the Catholic inhabitants of Clonsilla are said to have been tenants of the earl of Carhampton,²³ and while outward

¹⁸ Francis Elrington Ball, *A history of the county Dublin ...part fourth* (Dublin, 1902), p. 3.

¹⁹ James O'Driscoll, *Cnucha: a history of Castletknock and district* (Dublin, 1977), p. 116.

²⁰ Jim Lacey, *Candle in the window* (Dublin, 1999), p. 40.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² James O'Driscoll, *Cnucha: a history of Castletknock and district* (Dublin, 1977), p. 40.

²³ NAI, RP 620/18/14 Higgins to Cooke, 29 December 1796.

compliance and an apparent subjugation to so powerful a landlord is probable, it is equally likely that this masked a deep seated loathing of their landlord. That he had, in his lifetime, narrowly escaped conviction for the abduction and rape of a child can have done little to tackle his perceived predisposition to hereditary debauchery.²⁴

On 22 March 1792 the ‘Association of the Inhabitants of the United Parishes of Castleknock, Leixlip, Chapelizod and Dunboyne’ was formed at the Royal Exchange in Dublin. Local gentry felt compelled to ‘adopt extraordinary measures for the protection of (their) persons and properties’ following ‘the frequent outrages in many parts of this united district’. On that day, the gentlemen present passed several resolutions in response to these activities, chief amongst them to ‘pay the sum of £50 over and above all rewards offered by government’ and ‘£20 to any persons who shall detect and apprehend any in the act of carrying away or thieving any part of plundered property’.²⁵ To put that amount in context, the annual salary of James Lyons, the clerk of Clonsilla Church, was £10 in 1792.²⁶ The Association resolved ‘collectively and individually [to] give immediate assistance when called upon by any inhabitant of the aforesaid parishes to apprehend or pursue any offender or gang of suspicious persons who may be pointed out to us in any quarter of this united district’.

The first page of the Association minute book captured their determination to pursue ‘every person who shall kill, cut open or skin any bull, ox, cow ... with an intent to steal the whole, or any part of the fat, flesh, skin or carcase’ to the full rigours of the law. At this time, to be convicted of such crimes carried a sentence of death, ‘without the benefit of clergy’.²⁷ On that first meeting of the Association, sixty-nine signatories in total contributed to a monetary subscription determined by their respective status and wealth. The earl of

²⁴ Thomas Bartlett (ed.), *Revolutionary Dublin, 1795-1801*, (Dublin, 2004), p. 24.

²⁵ RCB, P.0352/28/2. Minute book of the Association of the Inhabitants of the United Parishes of Castleknock, Leixlip, Chapelizod and Dunboyne.

²⁶ RCB, P.0353/05/1 Vestry minute book for Clonsilla, 1705-1800.

²⁷ RCB, P.0352/28/2.

Carhampton's subscription amounted to £22 15s. 0d. whereas the secretary of state, J.H. Hutchinson, contributed £10. Prominent local gentlemen such as Alexander Kirkpatrick, Francis McFarland, Robert Wynne and Walter Troy each subscribed £5 13s. 9d.

Alexander Kirkpatrick bought Robert Bolton's estate at Coolmine for £14,500 in 1782. He was a director of the Royal Canal Company and his family were said to be wealthy wool merchants who had originated in Scotland.²⁸ The parish register recorded that his wife, Mary, gave birth to a child in 1792. Elizabeth Kirkpatrick was the eldest of three daughters, Margaret and Anne being born in 1793 and 1794 respectively.²⁹ He seems also to have had a son, Alexander, who was born at an earlier date. Kirkpatrick was to play a very active role in the association and in the community as a whole. As new organisations and initiatives were undertaken, he was chief amongst the earliest signatories and also acquired several administrative roles. Indeed, at an Association meeting on 1 November 1792 which he presided over, he was appointed treasurer in place of Robert Mahon Wade and entrusted to resolve the recurring problems relating to the collection of members' subscriptions. He was granted permission to employ someone for this purpose and at a meeting on 7 December 1792, it was decided to pay this individual the commission of 1s. from every £1 collected.³⁰

A 1794 survey of the lands of Lord Carhampton let to Henry Blackwood in Castaheaney, around two kilometres to the east of Clonsilla, shows the significant land holding Francis McFarland held in that area. According to a map surveying the lands of Capt. George Vesey in Westmanstown on 20 July 1796, McFarland also held a considerable portion of land on the road between Clonsilla and Lucan, about one kilometre from Clonsilla Church on Carhampton's Lutrellstown demesne.³¹ He was a regular and productive attendee of meetings and often directed proceedings from the Chair. As a widely respected elderly

²⁸ Jim Lacey, *Candle in the window* (Dublin, 1999), p. 66.

²⁹ NLI, GO MS.495.

³⁰ RCB, P.0352/28/2.

³¹ NLI, 21/F/51/64 Longfield maps.

gentleman with a large family in the locality, McFarland, in his sixties by 1792, seemed the ideal candidate for such a sensitive and impartial role.

In order to illustrate how the Association intended to function, it is necessary to investigate the first major ‘outrage’ to occur in the newly united districts in its lifetime and how this first challenge was dealt with by the members. At a meeting in Kearns Hotel in Lucan on 7 June 1792, George Vesey, in the chair, reported that

a burglary, rape and robbery attended with some circumstances of great barbarity has been committed by a gang of ruffians in the parish of Castleknock since the establishment of this association, and whereas the only person taken up on suspicion of being concerned with the said outrage has been freed and acquitted – [it is] resolved that every effort of this association be exerted until the persons guilty of the said offences be brought to justice.³²

The committee approved sums of two guineas to be paid to a Clonsilla gentleman Peter Jackson for attempting to prosecute Patrick Daly for the crime and the same also was paid to Rev David Bricketh, Church of Ireland curate of Clonsilla, for the purpose of ‘obtaining private information’ relating to the gang.³³ The significance of the meeting can be measured by the fact that the earl of Carhampton was in attendance.

On 7 December 1792, the Association agreed that Bricketh be paid ‘such sums as he has advanced to the persons who apprehended and lodged in Kilmainham Gaol the body of Daniel Leals, charged with housebreaking and rape’. An undated entry from 1793 details payment of a reward of £30 to be paid to John and Thomas Butler, Michael Connolly and James and John Tiernan for apprehending Daniel Leals, and a further £20 be paid to E. Tiernan ‘for prosecuting to conviction Daniel Leals’.³⁴

Clonsilla farmer Robert Wynne was the fourth son of the influential Wynne family of Hazelwood, Co. Sligo. The family was of Welsh heritage, but had settled in Ireland during the seventeenth century and acquired their Sligo estate in 1722. For 300 years, the head of the

³² RCB, P.0352/28/2.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

family, with one exception, was the eldest son who bore the forename of Owen.³⁵ Born in 1760, he married Elizabeth Singleton of Drogheda around thirty years later. According to parish registers, Elizabeth had given birth to the couple's third surviving child in 1793. Emily Wynne was preceded by Robert in 1792 and Harriet in 1791. Their family grew consistently during the first decade of the Wynne's marriage, Lucy being born in 1794, John in 1796 and Francis in 1800.³⁶ The couple also suffered the loss of two children at this time, Sydenham died in infancy in 1794 and James died in 1800.³⁷

Wynne was returned as MP for County Sligo by his elder brother, Owen, upon the death of their father on 18 March 1789. He was again returned in 1797 but vacated the seat for his brother William upon his appointment to office of Comptroller of Household. As it was an office of profit with a salary of £300 per annum he was obliged to do so. Edith Mary Johnston Liik has stated that when questioned about the union in November 1798, Wynne was unsure how he would vote. She has also noted that he did not 'appear to have been a very energetic parliamentarian'.³⁸

While Wynne may not have exerted himself in parliament, he was certainly active in the many local associations around Clonsilla. The Farmers' Society for the union of Castleknock first met on 27 November 1797 with the Chief Secretary of Ireland Robert Pelham in the chair. Pelham became Chief Secretary in March 1795 and much was expected of him. Unfortunately, his ill health meant that he was frequently absent from office. Similar in composition to the Association for the Protection of Private Property, the chief aims of the Farmers' Society were 'the improvement of agriculture, [and] the encouraging and rewarding [of] faithful, industrious and sober servants and labourers'.³⁹ During the first meeting of the society, Alexander Kirkpatrick was elected treasurer and Matthew Weld was nominated as

³⁵ Winston Guthrie Jones, *The Wynnes of Sligo and Leitrim* (Leitrim, 1994), p. 5.

³⁶ NLI, GO MS.495.

³⁷ In conversation with David Parsons, genealogist and 2nd great grandson of Robert Wynne.

³⁸ E.M. Johnston-Liik, *The History of the Irish Parliament 1692-1800*, (6 vols, Belfast, 2002), vi, p.568.

³⁹ RCB, P.352/28/3.

secretary. Also present on that day were Robert Wynne, William Kirkpatrick, the Rev. David Bricketh, Rev George O'Connor, Francis McFarland, Francis McFarland junior, Henry McFarland and Thomas and William Blair.

In comparison to Ballymoney, there were very few alternative industries to agriculture in the area. When the local gentry formed a Farmers' Society in Castleknock, they could effectively regulate the economy as a whole through that society. This was not the case in Ballymoney where political conflict existed between different economic units. It appeared in Ballymoney that the Farmers' Society was lagging behind other interests in their organisation, insofar as their congregation appears to have been less frequent and their impact less noticeable than their rival linen merchants. As will be discussed, the remit of the Farmers' Society in Castleknock was not solely based on agricultural improvements and it also advocated a strong humanitarian ethos.

The Longfield map surveying the lands of George Vesey in Westmanstown also apportioned part of the land opposite McFarland's holding to a Mr Blair. James and Thomas Blair were also members of the Association for the Protection of Private Property, each paying the standard subscription of £5 13s. 9d.⁴⁰ A large iron mill on the banks of the River Liffey in Lucan was the property of William Blair, as his will of 17 October 1833 testifies.⁴¹ This iron mill, described as 'extensive' by Musgrave⁴², is listed in Lieutenant Joseph Archer's 1801 statistical survey of Co. Dublin as comprising eight functioning wheels, over double that of Stokes & Co. of Clonskeagh, the second largest iron mill in Dublin.⁴³ A standard subscription of £2. 5s. 6d. was required for membership of this society and that same amount was requested from Pelham, Carhampton, Wynne, Kirkpatrick, the Blairs and Francis

⁴⁰ RCB, P.0352/28/2.

⁴¹ NAI, IWR/ 1833/ F/ 617.

⁴² Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland ...* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1801) p. 277.

⁴³ Joseph Archer, *Statistical survey of the county of Dublin* (Dublin, 1801), p. 205.

McFarland. A lesser rate of £1. 2s. 9d. was requested from the younger McFarlands, the clergy and Walter Troy.⁴⁴

At a meeting of the Farmer's Society on 29 January 1798, those present pledged to take into consideration the price of labour and of provision in this union and examine whether ... the sober and industrious labourer [is able to] procure for himself and family such a comfortable subsistence as we think all such labourers justly entitled.⁴⁵ It was also resolved to establish a village shop in the area, to be 'furnished with such articles as are generally made use of by labourers, manufacturers ... To be under the inspection and subject to the regulation of this society.'⁴⁶

A meeting of the Farmer's Society on 26 March 1798 postponed the considerations of labour, provisions and village shops. The organising of a ploughing match provides further evidence of the competitive spirit which existed among members, which they attempted to foster within the labouring class through the promise of substantial rewards for performance. The Association for the Protection of Private Property was not meeting during the summer of 1798, although it is likely that these affairs and concerns were being addressed during yeomanry business, given the nature of that body and the senior personnel involved.

On 2 April, owing to his deteriorating health, Thomas Pelham, a founder member of the Farmer's Society, ceded the Chief Secretaryship in Dublin Castle to Lord Castlereagh. A copy of a letter sent by Pelham, dated Stanmer, 3 December 1798, is transcribed into the Farmers Society minute book. It read:

Although the state of my health has made it necessary for me to relinquish my situation as chief secretary and I cannot expect to attend your agricultural meetings at Castleknock, I hope you will allow me to remain a member of that society and to remit my annual subscription. I fear that the disturbances have prevented any meeting this summer, but I hope not. -You will persist in your plan and if I can be of use in collecting information or otherwise you may command me.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ RCB, P.352/28/3.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

On 7 April, the final meeting of the Farmer's Society prior to the outbreak of rebellion (headlined 'special meeting' in the minute book) empowered Alexander Kirkpatrick 'to lay out as much of the premium fund as can be spared ... in laying the new materials for the spinners of woollen and yarn'.⁴⁸ As the month drew to a close, Lieutenant General Gerard Lake succeeded Sir Ralph Abercromby as commander-in-chief of the armed forces of the crown in Ireland.

Francis McFarland chaired the first meeting of the Association for the Protection of Private Property after the rebellion on 30 October at the Royal Exchange in Dublin. Indicative of the change in local power structures that the rebellion had instigated, Robert Wynne formally resigned as secretary and Thomas Blair was appointed in his place. Prior to the attack on the iron works in May, the Blairs played little or no active role in the Association. Despite having paid the original subscription in 1792, they were only recorded as having attended one subsequent meeting, on 13 September of that year. McFarland noted that Alexander Kirkpatrick retained his role as treasurer before stating that the meeting was 'too thinly attended to enter into business.'⁴⁹

A meeting on 5 November 1798 provided evidence of continuing disturbances within the area, as a reward of £50 was offered following 'the many robberies and murders [that] have been lately committed in different parts of these districts by an armed banditti'.⁵⁰ The problem of armed banditti was experienced, to various extents, across Ireland in the months and years following the rebellion. By the end of the year, the process of socially excluding those involved in the rebellion and the subsequent disturbances had already begun. During a meeting of the Farmers Society, it was 'resolved that who shall appear to the society to have

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ RCB, P.0352/28/2.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

been concerned in the rebellion or in any further disturbances of the county shall never receive any of the premiums offered by this society'.⁵¹

When Carhampton sold his estate at Luttrellstown after the rebellion, a Dublin bookseller named Luke White purchased the property and renamed the estate 'Woodlands'. His desire to be active in the public life of Clonsilla and the wider community is evidenced by the way he attempted to breathe new life into the Association for the Protection of Private Property, after a meeting at the Royal Exchange on 10 March 1800. The Association had met infrequently and entered into no meaningful business in quite some time but White's appearance had inspired a new set of resolutions to be approved. The same fervour with which the Association had been established was again in evidence as the scribe hastily noted the minutes of the 'extraordinary meeting.' Social disorder had reached such a scale within the area that it was felt necessary to employ a constable, 'vested with the proper authority', who was to be paid a sufficient salary to allow him, in turn, to employ assistants in order to help police the locality. It was further resolved that 'any person who shall refuse his [the constable's] aid and assistance, on any sudden emergency, shall be considered as an enemy to the peace and tranquillity of this neighbourhood'. While the consequences of being considered 'an enemy' can be presumed to have been severe, obedience and cooperation was also actively encouraged. Any servant or labourer who would 'faithfully aid and assist his master or employer in the defence of his house if attacked by Banditti, or the successful pursuit and recovery of his master's property' was to be suitably rewarded by the Association.⁵²

The organisation of the local gentry 'on-the ground' in Clonsilla was strong and supported by the highest offices of national government. That such eminent local figures combined in a pro-active manner to secure their property and possessions through a variety of

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

initiatives may go some way to explaining the relative calm around Clonsilla during this period. The violence which did take place was quite focused and directed at certain individuals or institutions, with a twinge of sectarianism present in some attacks. The attack on the Luttrell grave at Clonsilla was meant as a direct message to that family and, knowing that United Irish propaganda, built on existing socio-economic grievances, it is likely that the Luttrells were a *bête noire* amongst the tenant population. That specific plans were not designed against the gentry around the barony of Castleknock is significant as they should have presented ideal targets of attack .

In order to assess the nature of the state's presence within the community of Clonsilla, it is necessary to establish which institutions were most prominent in the locality. The legal position of the Church of Ireland as the established church ensured that it acted as a form of local government in the community. The local gentry who played an active role in the church vestry were also of influence in the Association for the Protection of Private Property and the Farmer's Society. Through these bodies, they assumed the responsibility for maintaining law and order and developing the local economy.

David Bricketh, curate of Clonsilla, made an entry on Easter Monday 1794 into the vestry minute books which detailed that Robert Wynne and Peter Jackson were to be appointed church wardens 'in the room of Mr W. Troy and Tho[ma]s Bryan, late wardens who not settling their account for the last two years of their office'.⁵³ A member of the Association for the Protection of Private Property, Peter Jackson had failed to secure the conviction of Patrick Daly for the robbery and rape of the widow Tiernan two years previously.⁵⁴ The Mr Troy in question was Walter Troy, also a member of the Association and brother to the Catholic archbishop of Dublin, John Thomas Troy.

⁵³ RCB, P.0353/05/1.

⁵⁴ RCB, P.0352/28/2.

The first vestry meeting after the appointment of Wynne and Jackson took place ten days later on 1 May 1794. It was immediately adjourned owing to the ‘late church wardens not appearing with their respective accounts’. The next meeting, attended by Carhampton on 29 May, sought to ‘take into consideration some effectual means of repairing and enlarging this Church which is at present much out of repair and found to be too small at present to contain the usual congregation’.⁵⁵ This entry would explain the pressing need for clarity in terms of parish finances. Elements of a village scandal were in evidence as both former wardens were again summoned to return their accounts on 9 June, but failed to appear. The attendance of the earl at the 29 May meeting measures the significance of this issue from a local perspective and his involvement should have exerted suitable pressure upon the former wardens to settle their accounts at the earliest possible convenience. It is conceivable that a considerable amount of local debate would have surrounded the issue, compounded by the former wardens repeated failure to clarify the parish finances. When the accounts were eventually settled on 17 June, it is interesting to note that the signatures of the former wardens appear last on the registry, highlighting their humble and compromised position during that night’s proceedings.

An ‘extraordinary meeting of the landholders and inhabitants of the parish of Clonsilla’ took place on 29 April 1795 in St Mary’s Church, Clonsilla. The purpose of the meeting was to ‘take into consideration the most effectual means of conforming to the late militia act of parliament’, an act which impressed upon a locality to provide a portion of the adequate number of able bodied men deemed necessary to ensure the defence of the country. The fact that the local church should be the venue for meeting to discuss an act of government is informative of the church’s position in the apparatus of state. At that meeting it was decided to levy the sum of £35, ‘at the agreeable rate of five pence per acre’ on each

⁵⁵ RCB, P.0353/05/1.

inhabitant's landholding. This money was to be paid 'into the hands of the treasurer of the county of Dublin to provide substitutes for the six men drawn by ballot as the quota of men to be furnished by this parish'.⁵⁶ This new levy may have been viewed by others in the area as merely another government tax, collected locally by members of the established church.

In Clonsilla, there does not appear to have been major disturbances over the militia act. Thomas Bartlett has accounted for the degree of violence used by both rioters and the authorities during widespread disturbances which spread to almost every county in every province. Bartlett has argued that the militia act represented the breakdown of the 'moral economy' in much of Ireland, the disintegration of the relationship of the governor and the governed and the destruction of the social contract which had existed previously. Conversely, the response of the gentry of Clonsilla may have represented an attempt to preserve the moral economy; the duty of the wealthier gentry to provide for the wider population was confirmed by a levy which was determined by the size of a gentleman's land holding. Bartlett recorded that resistance to the militia act came to an end when assurances were given that it would not comprise service overseas, when the ballot was dropped and when provision for the families of militia men was improved.⁵⁷ The action of the Clonsilla gentry neatly side-stepped these concerns and resolved the issue through a collective action of paternalistic sponsorship.

On 17 May 1796 Alexander Kirkpatrick was appointed as Robert Wynne's fellow Church warden of Clonsilla parish. During that same meeting it was recorded that the church repairs and enlargement were 'nearing completion'. A little over a month later, on 28 July, it was reported that the 'enlarging and repairing of this church being now finished and completed by the Right Honourable earl of Carhampton at considerable expense'. The deepest gratitude of the wardens and of the parish was expressed during this meeting and a

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Thomas Bartlett, 'an end to moral economy: the Irish militia disturbances of 1793' in *Past and Present*, no. 99, (1983), pp 41-64.

gesture of goodwill for the Earl was decided upon. It was proposed that ‘wardens, inhabitants and parishioners ... Who occupy the new seats should pay certain sums of money for their respective seats to remember him [Carhampton] in some part for his expenditure’.⁵⁸ The actual sum advanced by the earl was not alluded to, but it can be presumed to have been a significant amount as the sum total of the ‘compensation’ scheme proposed by the parishioners only aimed to reimburse Carhampton ‘in some part’.

On 20 October a printed notice in the *Freeman's Journal* announced that Robert Wynne had been commissioned as captain of the Clonsilla Cavalry, with Alexander Kirkpatrick as his lieutenant.⁵⁹ It would appear that the commanders of the Clonsilla Cavalry experienced some local opposition to their intentions to establish an armed force in the area, as a letter sent by Francis Higgins to Dublin Castle on 29 December would indicate. It reads: the Clonsilla Horse, many of whom are tenants to the earl of Carhampton never have assembled because Mr Troy (brother to the titular archbishop of Dublin) thought proper to deny the measure of arming (after he was enrolled) and by much address the troop for the first time meet under Mr Wynne, their officer, on tomorrow.⁶⁰

During much of 1796 and 1797, Carhampton was commander-in-chief of the armed forces of the crown in Ireland. It was said that he kept ‘a parcel of Highlanders’ at his estate during this time.⁶¹ Befitting to his reputation, he won few admirers in this role. In January 1797 the under secretary at Dublin Castle, Edward Cooke, wrote of him: ‘he has different opinions about the defences of Ireland and the conduct of war from every officer in the whole army’.⁶² His turbulent spell as commander-in-chief was ended when Sir Ralph Abercromby acceded to the role in his place.

⁵⁸ RCB, P.0353/05/1.

⁵⁹ *FJ*, 20 Oct. 1796.

⁶⁰ NAI, RP 620/18/14.

⁶¹ *A report of the trials of James Dunn and Patrick Carty for conspiring to murder the earl of Carhampton* (Dublin, 1797), p.12.

⁶² BL, Add. MS 33103, fo. 130-1.

After the rebellion, Carhampton removed himself to his English estates at Painshill in Surrey. Despite having lived there until his death in 1821, the *Dublin Evening Post* reported his passing on 5 May 1811. When he instructed the newspaper to correct their error, they did so under the headline ‘Public Disappointment’ four days later. The passing of a decade had not helped to redeem Carhampton’s reputation in Ireland, as the editor’s printed apology bears witness. It read:

It had been announced (and the report instantly diffused universal satisfaction in Ireland) that Henry Lawless Luttrell, earl of Carhampton, had departed this mortal life on the fifth of last month. The feeling arose not from revengeful motives, but from an opinion that providence had kindly interfered.

The noble earl is still alive. His Lordship has therefore yet an opportunity of displaying, in the decrepitude of old age, such novelties as may rival the most celebrated actions of his youth or manhood.⁶³

Robert Wynne and Alexander Kirkpatrick continued as church wardens at a meeting of the vestry on 7 April 1801. Both men had retained their coveted positions as church wardens over the turbulent years of the rebellion. At this time, new funds were required for the renovation of the church at Clonsilla. Despite the collection of a second subscription, the funds of the parish were deemed inadequate to complete the necessary repairs to the church, which were said to have been left unfinished. In 1802, Wynne and Kirkpatrick jointly resigned from their positions and Luke White and Thomas Kinsley took their place as wardens. White had become the new proprietor of the Luttrellstown estate after the rebellion. Wynne, who did not attend the meeting, appears to have left the parish around this time.⁶⁴ On 24 May 1802, the Farmer’s Society unanimously declared him an honorary member and his name ceased to appear on any of the local registers. On 7 June, at a vestry meeting, his pew and seats in Clonsilla Church were assigned to fellow Dublin Farmers’ Society member Samuel Garnett,⁶⁵ whose wife Mary had been buried in May of that year.⁶⁶ During that

⁶³ *DEP*, 9 May 1811.

⁶⁴ RCB, P.0353/05/2.

⁶⁵ RCB, P.0352/28/3.

meeting, the Rev David O'Connor complained 'whereas it appears that the late church wardens, not having made the repairs ordered by act of vestry, it is resolved that present wardens be empowered to complete said repairs'. In addition to these repairs, it was decided to erect a new gate, to put new shutters on the vestry and belfry windows, to apply two new coats of paint and purchase a new lock with two keys. While not expressly stated, it can only be presumed that White was to fund these improvements in the financially strained parish.

Print media represented a vital line of communication which facilitated the spread of information in each community. White's predecessor at Luttrellstown, Lord Carhampton, was praised in the *Freeman's Journal* of 26 May 1795 and singled out for his vigorous (and illegal) campaign against the Defenders in Connacht, which resulted in the forced enlistment of hundreds in the Royal Navy. Local magistrates had been encouraged to condemn many with questionable levels of culpability to the fleet.⁶⁷ The *Freeman's Journal* had produced quite a liberal editorial before it was acquired by the notorious 'sham squire' Francis Higgins, as a judge in a fraud case once labelled Higgins after he impersonated a wealthy Catholic land owner in order to marry Maryanne Archer, the heiress daughter of a rich Catholic merchant.⁶⁸ The newspaper would go on to resume its previous position after the departure of Higgins, but for the duration of this period it remained little more than an organ of Castle opinion and outlook. Its rabid loathing and criticisms of 'French' principles at times boarded on the farcical, a shortage of French brandy in the country in 1792 being attributed to the fact that 'the French consume all that kind of spirit they manufacture among themselves, as their atrocities are like the ravages of intoxication'.⁶⁹ The issue of the newspaper for 17 October reported that 'Lord Carhampton, we are happy to announce is perfectly recovered from his late alarming indisposition', although details were not entered into. The same edition detailed

⁶⁶ NLI, GO.MS.495.

⁶⁷ Bartlett (ed.), *Revolutionary Dublin 1795-1801*, p. 102.

⁶⁸ Bartlett (ed.), *Revolutionary Dublin 1795-1801*, p. 23.

⁶⁹ *FJ*, 20 Sept. 1792.

the formation of ‘the Association for the Protection of Property and the Constitution in the District of the Metropolis’, to which Carhampton was a primary signatory. The ‘inhabitants of the city of Dublin’ pledged that they would ‘at all times be ready to assist the civil power for the suppression of tumult and disorder’. They took this measure due to ‘the metropolis and its neighbourhood having lately become a receptacle [for] disturbers of the peace, titling themselves Defenders’.⁷⁰

The forming of societies and associations provided opportunities for networks of communication with like minded individuals in different localities. One example of this was evidenced on 10 February 1798, when the Dublin Agricultural Society accepted a proposal to become a corresponding society to that of Castleknock by expressing their ‘great satisfaction of hearing of the commencement of an institution so likely to become highly useful to farmers in general’. As a goodwill gesture they forwarded several essays and hints on agriculture and farming written by Sir John Sinclair, president of the Agricultural Board in London, for the perusal of the Castleknock members.⁷¹

A letter sent to Major William Brady by Bricketh on behalf of the Association for the Protection of Private Property on 8 June reads:

I feel very sensible satisfaction in conveying to you the unanimous vote of thanks for your spirited and very active exertions in endeavouring to apprehend the gang of desperate ruffians who committed the late atrocities of robbery and rape on the widow Tiernan – when offended laws of the country have such magistrates determined to support their dignity and enforce the strict sense of justice, the poor may live secure of meeting redress for their wrongs, and the daring villain will shrink from the committal of those crimes that must bring down inevitable punishment on his own hand.⁷²

The magistrate’s response, sent from Leixlip the following day, thanked the gentlemen of the Association ‘for the great honour they have done me in approving so highly of my endeavours in the execution of my duty to bring the villains to justice’.

⁷⁰ *FJ*, 20 Sept. 1792.

⁷¹ RCB, P.0352/28/3.

⁷² *Ibid.*

A plan of assassination was designed against Carhampton by two workers on his estate. It was revealed at his trial for conspiracy to murder that James Dunn had travelled to a baronial meeting of the United Irishmen in Dublin city to receive his orders. Dunn had been employed as a smith on the Luttrell estate.⁷³ This fact implies that a baronial committee of the United Irishmen was not active in Castleknock at this time, although defender activity had featured in the area and networks existed to bring Dunn to the attention of the United Irishmen. Contact between the Dublin leadership and rebels in the Dunboyne area is indicated by the mission of Fr John Martin, a messenger of the Dublin United Irishmen, who arrived in Dunboyne at the start of June.⁷⁴

⁷³ *A report of the trials of James Dunn and Patrick Carty for conspiring to murder the earl of Carhampton* (Dublin, 1797), p.6.

⁷⁴ Liam Chambers, 'The 1798 rebellion in North Leinster' in Thomas Bartlett, David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (eds), *1798- a bicentenary perspective* (Dublin, 2003), p. 130.

Section Three: Conflict and the locality

Serious Defender disturbances took place in Meath, Louth and Armagh in the winter of 1792.⁷⁵ Similar Defender activity spread to Clonsilla by the end of 1793. Two separate incidents were addressed at meeting of the Association for the Protection of Private Property on 22 November. It was recorded that on the night of 23 October, two sheep, the property of Robert Wynne, were killed on the lands of Clonsilla. Also, on the night of the 20 October, three sheep were killed on the lands of Francis McFarland. During the same meeting, it was resolved to pay the sum of £50 to any person ‘who shall within six months from the date hereof discover or prosecute to conviction, persons concerned in the above mentioned inhumane practices’.⁷⁶

Local gentry formed associations and employed a range of strategies to address incidents of agrarian activity while attempting to tackle the root cause of the dissent. It appears to have been pursued as a matter of policy to prosecute to conviction those who carried out defender style attacks on the property of the gentry, through the auspices of the Association for the Protection of Private Property. When the same body of men assembled as the Farmers’ Society and the parish vestry, they sought to address underlying triggers for dissent through a range of humanitarian initiatives and reward schemes.

At a meeting of the Farmers’ Society on 29 January 1798, those present pledged to take into consideration the price of labour and of provision in this union and examine whether ... the sober and industrious labourer [is able to] procure for himself and family such a comfortable subsistence as we think all such labourers justly entitled.⁷⁷ It was also resolved to establish a village shop in the area, to be ‘furnished with such articles as are generally made use of by labourers, manufacturers ... To be under the inspection and subject to the regulation

⁷⁵ Thomas Bartlett, ‘An end to moral economy: the Irish militia disturbances of 1793’ in *Past and Present*, no. 99, (1983) p. 41.

⁷⁶ RCB, P.0352/28/2.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

of this society.’⁷⁸ This measure would have suited the dual purpose of ensuring that labourers and tenants were adequately provided for, thus improving social cohesion and reaffirming the control and the hold of the members over the local community. These actions account for the attempts by local gentry to preserve and extend the ‘moral economy’ in a commercialised society. The necessities provided by the village shop represented a broad base of consumer goods which were accessible to workers in the locality.

Incentives for labourers to carry out their work in the most efficient and effective manner were also provided for, as these ‘rewards for excellence in husbandry’ testify.

- The best ploughman with oxen £2 5s. 6d.
- The best ploughman with horses £2 5s. 6d.
- The labourer who shall appear to have brought up the greatest number of legitimate children in habits of industry to the age of twelve years £2 5s. 6d.
- The labourer who has given the greatest number of years service £2 5s. 6d.
- The dairy maid who has given the greatest number of years service £1 2s. 9d.
- To three boys and three girls under the age of twelve ... to have earned the most money in the year in country business £3 0s. 3d.
- To six boys and six girls at school in Castleknock, Blanchardstown and Porterstown as most attentive to learning and best behaved. £3 0s. 3d.⁷⁹

Robert Wynne, Alexander Kirkpatrick, David Bricketh and Walter Troy were appointed as inspectors for Clonsilla and it was also decided to present a medal to the farmer ‘who has most comfortable habitation for his labourers’. Such rewards support the opinion that the gentry farmers were engaged in an attempt to preserve the ‘moral economy’ through their paternalistic sponsorship of local initiatives. If the ‘moral economy’ represents the unwritten rules by which the rulers and the ruled could live by a mutually agreed code, perhaps the associational initiatives represent an attempt to record such rules more formally; in effect, to write them down.

Prompted by the high number of children being buried in the parish, two years after the rebellion, the local gentry assembled and attempted to alleviate the suffering. The vestry

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

minute book of that year described the period from 27 December 1799 to 31 August 1800 as ‘a year of great calamity and distress’. A subscription totalling £299 13s. 16d. was amassed from the gentry of the parish, in order to supply the poor of the area with fuel and provision at a reduced price.⁸⁰ An example of six such items is displayed in the table below.

Table 3.1 Examples of provision and fuel sold to the poor at reduced price.

	Prime Cost	Sold For
Oaten Meal	£939 7s. 7d.	£705 9s. 8d.
Rye	£11 0s. 0d.	£10 2s. 6d.
Turf	£87 3s. 9d.	£32 5s. 10d.
Bacon	£12 0s. 8d.	£12 0s. 8d.
Candles	£5 8s. 12d.	£4 5s. 6d.
Tobacco	£5 3s. 0d.	£5 9s. 0d.

Source: The farmers’ society of Castleknock minute book (RCB, P.0353/05/2)

On 31 October 1800, David O’Connor delivered a report to the Farmer’s Society on the progress of two competing village shops, after both had been in operation for seven months. The two shops were sponsored by the society and the successful shop would be given permanent status. Initially, Andrew Comber appeared to be outselling his counterpart, Christopher Bentley, by a considerable amount. At this stage, however, Bentley had sold articles to the amount of £262 5s. 2d. whereas Comber’s intake amounted to £77 0s. 11d. Bentley’s shop had, in that time, made a profit of £22 11s. 3d. and no explanation was given or alluded to as to why this reversal in fortunes had taken place. The complete list of articles sold in the shops at this time, those being the ones most desired and required by the labouring

⁸⁰ Ibid.

classes, was as follows; herrings, soaps and candles, tobacco and snuff, starch, bread and butter, tea and sugar, thread and pins, pepper and salt, liquorice and pipes.⁸¹

Upon hearing the report, the members of the Society recalled a £5 loan advanced to Comber and forward it to Bentley, whose own £5 loan was extended by a further six months. Bentley was continued in the position ‘on act of his punctuality, diligence and honesty’ and Comber’s shop was shut down. The following month, Bentley was also appointed as clerk of Clonsilla Church after the death of William Dobbs.⁸²

Christopher Bentley’s village shop in Castleknock reported a profit of £31 9s. 0d. in 1802. A total of £211 worth of bread was sold in the preceding year, as well as 2,602 lbs of butter, 252 lbs of tea, 139 stones of sugar and 172 lbs of tobacco. In 1803 the total intake of the shop was £882 10s. 1d., amounting to a profit of £60 13s. 2d.⁸³ In 1805 he reported a profit of £135 10s. 11d. to the society, who in turn offered to pay his license for the previous year and ‘hereafter, so long as his merit shall appear to deserve it’. The final entry in the society meeting book, which appears to have been made by Bentley himself, was an account of the items sold in the shop in 1805. In addition to the products first available in 1800, bacon, wheatmeal, oatmeal, potatoes, soup, linen, corduroy, mustard, pepper, eggs, milk and sugar candy were now easily obtainable by the labourers of the area.⁸⁴

In October 1796 parliament passed the Habeas Corpus Suspension Act in response to the general spread of disorder throughout the country. This meant that any person suspected of treasonable offences could be detained by a warrant signed by the lord lieutenant.⁸⁵

Parliament had also approved proposals for the establishment of locally raised Yeomanry corps throughout the country. Similar in ways to an army reserve force, it was expected that

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ R.B. Mc Dowell, *Ireland in the age of imperialism and revolution (1760 – 1801)* (Oxford, 1979), p. 557.

these bodies of loyal citizens would assist the military in case of invasion and also carry out police duties within their localities.⁸⁶

There had been some reservations in government circles to repeat the practice of raising locally based defence forces following the experience of the Volunteers twenty years previous. During the American war of independence, when France and Spain entered on the colonists' side, the British military were stretched to a point that an invasion of Ireland was a real possibility. In response to this, public-spirited landlords and loyal citizens formed volunteer corps across the country. Ultimately, volunteering became a fashionable pastime and reviews and parades of impressively clad part time soldiers were a regular occurrence. As evidenced in Ballymoney, the volunteer corps developed into political debating societies and it soon became clear that a drastic shift in power had taken place. Armed force was controlled by the politically minded public and not the government.⁸⁷ When Henry Grattan began to agitate for greater legislative freedom for Ireland, his ideas spread rapidly amongst the volunteer corps. Eventually, the British authorities were obliged to concede ground to the calls for political reform and while the vast majority of Volunteers were far too respectable ever to use force against the government, it had set a dangerous and worrying precedent in terms of popular politics and undermining the existing civil authority through intimidating tactics.

Evidently, the establishment of the yeomanry corps sparked a similarly fervent response from loyal citizens across the country in 1796. The emphasis on the pageantry and fashion opportunities afforded by the occasion were evidenced by an advertisement which frequently appeared in the *Freeman's Journal* around this time. Michael Murphy of 55 Fishamble Street enthusiastically boasted that he has had the 'honour of supplying the

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ R.B. McDowell, 'The Protestant Nation' in T.W. Moody and F.X. Martin (eds), *The course of Irish history* (Cork, 1967), p. 232.

gentlemen of the army these thirty years past, and was the first to establish a button factory in this kingdom'.⁸⁸ The advertisement is also printed in the issue of 20 October which announces that Robert Wynne has been commissioned as captain of the Clonsilla Cavalry, with Alexander Kirkpatrick as his lieutenant.⁸⁹

The desperation of the army's situation in October 1796 is surmised by a declaration by the lord lieutenant which states that 'several deserters from different regiments in this kingdom who might be induced to return to their duty ... shall receive his majesty's pardon for such offences of desertion'.⁹⁰ It would appear that the commanders of the Clonsilla Cavalry experienced some local opposition to their intentions to establish an armed force in the area, as a letter sent by Francis Higgins to Dublin Castle on 29 December would indicate. It reads

the Clonsilla Horse, many of whom are tenants to the earl of Carhampton never have assembled because Mr Troy (brother to the titular archbishop of Dublin) thought proper to decry the measure of arming (after he was enrolled) and by much address the troop for the first time meet under Mr Wynne, their officer, on tomorrow.⁹¹

Whether Walter Troy's motives for opposing Wynne and Kirkpatrick's intentions to arm the inhabitants of Clonsilla were concerns he may have held over the suitability of the rank and file of the cavalry to bear arms responsibly, or indeed, loyally, his position must have been compromised by the fact that Wynne had so publicly called his character into question by his own competent and dependable managing of the vestry accounts. Regardless, his resolve to oppose the commanders was eventually broken. The first meeting place of the Clonsilla Cavalry took place as news filtered through that seven days previously, only bad weather had prevented a French invasion fleet to effect a landing while within touching distance of Bantry Bay, County Cork.

⁸⁸ *FJ*, 7 Oct. 1796.

⁸⁹ *FJ*, 20 Oct. 1796.

⁹⁰ *FJ*, 22 Oct. 1796.

⁹¹ NAI, RP 620/18/14.

The position of Wynne and Kirkpatrick, in attempting to recruit Catholics in the yeomanry corps, contrasted sharply with that of Edmund McNaghten in Ballymoney. It represents an extension of the progressive and ‘improving’ ethos which was instilled in other local organisations. McNaghten had resisted all attempts to enrol Daniel Maxwell in the Volunteer corps and did likewise in the yeomanry corps he commanded. Clonsilla does not appear to have had a Volunteer corps and such tensions had not been exposed previously. The arming of Catholics was nonetheless a divisive issue in Clonsilla; a decision which a prominent local Catholic felt was a naive move to make.

Some months previously, on 7 August 1796, the bodies of William Connolly and Thomas Carney were discovered in Dunboyne, a County Meath village about six kilometres from Clonsilla. The coroner of the County of Meath recorded that they were killed by having their throats cut across. A recurring notice in the *Freeman’s Journal*, signed by Carhampton amongst others, pledged a reward of £100 for the perpetrators of the crime.⁹² An oral account taken in 1989, recorded and reproduced in a local historical journal, may shed some light on the incident in question. It reads,

a dance was being held at the junction opposite where Dunboyne National School is now. It was being used to swear in members of the United Irishmen. This was observed by someone who immediately set out to report the occurrence to the authorities. He was seen leaving and a young man followed him up the Rooske road. The young man caught up with the would-be informer and dispatched him by cutting his throat. The young man returned to the dance with blood on his clothes. A quick-thinking young lady feigned a fight and struck the young man on the face, which bled and covered the traces of the dead man’s blood.⁹³

A recurring notice in the *Freeman’s Journal*, signed by Carhampton amongst others, pledged a reward of £100 for the perpetrators of the crime.⁹⁴ While this oral account mentions a single assassin and victim, it is conceivable that details of the crime have been altered as it passed from generation to generation. If they are indeed separate, yet almost identical,

⁹² *FJ*, 6 Oct. 1796.

⁹³ Michael Kenny, ‘Dunboyne in 1798’ in Dunboyne Historical Society, *Dunboyne, Kilbride and Clonee – A Picture of the Past* (Dublin, 1989), p. 10.

⁹⁴ *FJ*, 6 Oct. 1796.

incidents it is equally likely that similar motivations and methods were employed in the execution of both crimes.

On 11 February 1796 a party of up to fifty Defenders attacked the house, near the mills adjacent to the Luttrellstown demesne, of a 'poor man' named Patrick McCormick. They murdered both him and his fifteen year old brother, whose brains they reportedly 'beat out with the butt end of their rifle'.⁹⁵ Murders of this nature occurred frequently around this time. Only nine days previously, the *Freeman's Journal* reported a similar incident at a small public house on the Trim road during which a husband and wife were murdered for having supplied information on local Defenders. One of the attackers was said to have 'fired a loaded blunderbuss at the unfortunate man, and being near him, shot the head off his body'. The incident near Luttrellstown, however, seems to have attracted particular attention and was widely debated in the national press and parliament. It was cited by both as being symptomatic of the deterioration of law and order, the barbarity of their enemy and the gravity of the security concerns that the country now faced.

McCormick had been due to give evidence for the crown at the trial of some Defenders in Dublin. A report on the trial of 'The King versus Read and White' which was published in the *Freeman's Journal* on 16 February 1796 revealed that Mr. Kells, as council for the crown, had moved to postpone the trial for a second time. Previous to this, McCormick was a material witness for the crown and had been sworn to provide evidence before the grand jury. It appears that some objections were then raised as to the credibility of McCormick's intended testimony and 'because it appeared that the crown was unprepared', the trial was postponed and a date was fixed for 15 February. Unfortunately for McCormick, however, it was now public knowledge that he was to assist the prosecution of the defendants. A military guard had been posted on the Luttrellstown estate for the protection of

⁹⁵ James Kelly (ed), *Proceedings of the Irish House of Lords 1771 - 1800* (3 vols, Dublin, 2008), iii, p. 11.

local inhabitants, but it was within a few hundred yards of their post that the murder was committed.

The Mc Cormick murder indicated a ruthless efficiency on the part of Defenders to act upon such information as they received and the relative inadequacy of conventional security measures to prevent such attacks from occurring. While the crown prosecution could have been accused of woefully inadequate attention to duty, the fact still remained that Defenders were employing the due process of law, an instrument designed for their prosecution, to their own advantage. In this context, the response of government to the issue was to accelerate the debate and process that was to result in the passing of appropriate legislation. The day after the murder, Lord Dillon, speaking in the House of Lords, cited the incident as evidence that ‘if strong measures were not adopted before the rising of parliament ... to wait until the next session, would be too late’.⁹⁶ In the same address, Dillon praised Carhampton’s campaign in Connacht and stated his belief that the adoption of military law in disturbed districts, as it was previously understood, would be ineffective. The executive power, he felt, ‘should be invested with some new authority for immediately suppressing that spirit of anarchy and rebellion that degraded the nation’ and ‘such districts in which those offences prevailed should be declared out of his majesty’s peace’. The day’s proceedings at the House of Lords were dominated by similar statements of intent and praise from nobility across the country. Their sentiments were best summarised by the lord chancellor’s declaration that

the ordinary purposes of the law are incompetent to check the licentiousness of the times. If this session should pass over without the enacting of laws strong enough to meet the smothered rebellion in the country, there will be a revival of the miseries of 1641. The traitors proceed systematically to deter witnesses and make conviction impossible; how then, unless magistrates are empowered to repress treason in a summary way, can it be put to an end?⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

On 25 May 1797 there was an assassination attempt made on Lord Carhampton involving two workers on the Luttrellstown demesne, James Dunn, a farmer and blacksmith, and a labourer named Patrick Carty. Carhampton claimed that the latter was a labourer on his estate 'since he was almost an infant'.⁹⁸ During Carty's trial Carhampton also stated that his father lived rent-free in one of the houses on the earl's estate.⁹⁹ Richard Musgrave described the former as having 'constantly experienced the most striking instances of kindness from him [Carhampton]'.¹⁰⁰ In his account of the plot to assassinate the earl, Musgrave described how Dunn had attended a meeting in the house of Maurice Dunn, a relation in Dublin, and 'offered to a committee of sixteen United Irishmen to 'do out' his friend and benefactor. Carhampton's campaign in Connacht was cited as a key motivation in designing the plan.¹⁰¹ From this meeting, a committee of seven were appointed to procure weapons for the clandestine operation, which, if properly executed, Musgrave outlined as such

Three of them on horseback, having loose coats and blunderbusses under them, and six mounted as yeomanry cavalry with pistols, were to fire into his lordships carriage, as it passed through a narrow road near Luttrellstown, and at the same time to murder his servants and any persons who might be with him.

The plot was betrayed by a man named Ferris, who was the head of the United Irish committee of sixteen, and whom Musgrave described as 'the only Protestant member of it'. He was so 'struck with horror at the atrocity of the plot [when he] discovered it' that he was compelled to inform on the would-be assassins and their conspiracy. Carhampton is said to have visited Dunn in his cell prior to his execution to express his dismay at his former friend's devious intentions. He reportedly stated, 'considering the kindness I showed you, I did not imagine that you would be concerned with an attempt on my life', to which Dunn responded that he felt the assassination was 'a good act'. Dunn also explained to the earl that

⁹⁸ *A report of the trials of James Dunn and Patrick Carty for conspiring to murder the earl of Carhampton* (Dublin, 1797), p.18.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.30.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland ...* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1801), p. 175.

¹⁰¹ *A report of the trials of James Dunn and Patrick Carty for conspiring to murder the earl of Carhampton* (Dublin, 1797), p.9.

while he hadn't proposed the murder, 'he was sworn to execute it and if he were out again, he would perpetrate it if he could'.¹⁰² Carty was also sent to the gallows for his part in the plot.

Access to consumer goods was clearly identified as a need of tenants by the local gentry; that these goods should be offered at competitive prices was ensured by the dual shop system that was put in place. It is noteworthy that the gentry sought to control access to the range of goods available in the stores and ensure that the increasing demand for consumer spending took place under their watch. It is not recorded whether a substantial black market was in operation prior to the establishment of the village shops but some activity in this regard can be presumed. Equally, low-level rebel activity is not recorded in the minute books of the various local associations. The area around Clonsilla appears to be prone to spectacular outbreaks of pre-meditated, targeted violence which struck right to the very core of government and judicial process. From the perspective of the local gentry, this violence is difficult to understand, yet alone counter. The difficulty that Luke White appears to have experienced in rejuvenating the Association for the Protection of Private Property is testament to this fact.

¹⁰² Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland ...* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1801), p. 176.

Section Four - Local experience of the 1798 Rebellion

At six o'clock in the morning of Thursday, 24 May 1798, Clonsilla Cavalry commander Robert Wynne was informed by two of his yeomanry corps of an armed rebel attack on the neighbouring village of Dunboyne. A considerable number of rebels had entered the town and attacked the local police house, where it was alleged that they murdered three Protestant constables and spared an equal number of Catholics. A Mr Creighton, a Protestant revenue officer, was also said to have fallen victim to the rebels. The local vicar, the Rev Duncan, was believed to have fled in time but his house was attacked and stripped of valuables to the value of £500. Upon hearing of the outbreak of rebellion, Wynne proceeded to the County Meath village of Ratoath, less than 10 kilometres from Clonsilla, with four of his own cavalry and 11 regular Angus Highlanders, commanded by George Armstrong of the artillery. The group was said to have been reinforced by Frederick Falkiner and 18 of the 5th Dragoons.¹⁰³ In Ratoath, the rebels had captured Captain Hamilton Georges MP for Co. Meath, Elias Corbally, lieutenant of the yeomanry corps which he commanded, and several privates of that corps. When Wynne and his rescue party arrived in the village, the rebels were on the point of hanging their captives. Wynne led two successful cavalry charges, killing 35 rebels and forcing the rest to flee.

Later that morning, a private from George's Ratoath cavalry arrived in Navan and informed John Preston of the attacks in Dunboyne, a similar occurrence in the town of Dunshaughlin and of their own lucky escape in Ratoath.¹⁰⁴ Given the direction of the main route between County Meath and Dublin city, Navan was presumed to be the next port of call for the rebels. After their successful rescue, Wynne's party returned for home without the 18th Dragoons who had reinforced them during the attack. In the meantime, the dispersed rebels had regrouped and must have observed the diminution of Loyalist numbers. They pursued the

¹⁰³ Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland ...* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1801), p. 276.

¹⁰⁴ L.J. Steen, *The battle of the Hill of Tara*, (Trim, 1991) p. 12.

returning party as far as Clonee Bridge, located on the then main Dublin-Navan road and a little over one kilometre from Clonsilla, where six of the Highlanders under Lieutenant Armstrong were said to have been killed halting the progress of the rebels.¹⁰⁵

On that same day in Clonee, the rebels were said to have intercepted another detachment of Fencibles, killed a number of them, taken some prisoner and stolen all of their baggage.¹⁰⁶ The *Freeman's Journal* of the following day reported; yesterday, two companies of the Rea Fencibles arrived in town [Dublin] after a fatiguing march. They came from Belfast, but last from Clonee, near Dunsoughlin, in which neighbourhood they were surprised by a considerable number of insurgents, and all their baggage taken from them.¹⁰⁷

Later that morning, Thomas Connor and Thomas Atkinson of Dunboyne entered the house of James Brassington of Ballymacarney at Kilbride, backed by a considerable party of United Irish rebels. Brassington held the position of Church warden in Dunboyne Church of Ireland.¹⁰⁸ At the court martial of the two men, this party was claimed by Brassington to be in the region of about 'thirty or forty others, all of whom were armed'.¹⁰⁹ Brassington also claimed that they spent about half an hour in the house that morning, during which time he heard Connor boast of how he burned Dunboyne police house, murdered the policemen, killed some Highlanders and stole some of their baggage. He stated that Atkinson then threatened to burn his house down but left without doing so, only to return, oddly, and invite Brassington to join them. The rebel party was claimed to have taken a sword, a blunderbuss, a musket, a pistol, some balls and four horses from the house. He then concluded his evidence by saying that he had known Connor for sixteen years and Atkinson for three or four, and specified that the two were ringleaders on that morning.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland ...* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1801), p. 276.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Kenny, 'Dunboyne in 1798' in *Dunboyne, Kilbride and Clonee: a picture of the past*, (Dunboyne, 1998) p. 11.

¹⁰⁷ *FJ*, 25 May 1796.

¹⁰⁸ RCB, P.0560/5/1/2. Vestry minute book for Dunboyne.

¹⁰⁹ NAI, RP 620/3/16/14 'The Court Martial of Thomas Connor and Thomas Atkinson in Dublin Castle, 12 July 1798'.

During the court martial, Richard Brassington, brother of James, corroborated what had been said, and also identified Connor as the principal leader of the two, wearing ‘a white jacket with green facings’.¹¹⁰ The testimony of Patrick Condrón, rebel and former servant to the Brassingtons, who was captured by the lawyer’s cavalry and interrogated at the royal exchange in Dublin, describes the rebel commander as having been ‘dressed in white faced with green’. The commander appeared to be unknown to Condrón, who also ‘heard that he was in the Kildare militia’. Given the proximity of Kilbride to Dunboyne and the face-to-face nature of the rural community which resided in that area, it is unlikely that Condrón would not have recognised Connor as the commander on that morning. This casts some doubt over the legitimacy of Brassington’s testimony but also raises questions over Condrón’s honesty. Atkinson and Connor were later sentenced to death for their part in that morning’s events. Jane Connor, widow of Thomas, made a final plea of mercy for her husband at his court martial, claiming that they were sleeping at the outbreak of the rebellion and he was induced from his bed by a large group of men. She was unsuccessful, however, despite the evidence of several corroborating witnesses.¹¹¹ It was said that the Brassingtons never returned to Ballymacarney after the rebellion, as it was believed locally that they had perjured themselves at the trial, and they justifiably feared retribution as a result.¹¹² Equally, they may have been killed simply in revenge for their indicting statements, be they perjured or not.

In the opinion of Liam Chambers, ‘the fundamental purpose of the United Irish rebellion of 1798 was the overthrow of the Irish administration in Dublin; hence their primary military objective was the capture of the capital’.¹¹³ Thomas Graham, in his work *Dublin in 1798*, illustrates that a three-phase insurgency plan gradually emerged to achieve this aim and

¹¹⁰ NAI, RP 620/3/16/14.

¹¹¹ NAI, RP 620/38/56.

¹¹² Michael Kenny, ‘Dunboyne in 1798’ in *Dunboyne, Kilbride and Clonee*, p. 11.

¹¹³ Liam Chambers, ‘The 1798 rebellion in North Leinster’ in Thomas Bartlett, David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (eds), *1798- a bicentenary perspective* (Dublin, 2003), p. 122.

to build upon it.¹¹⁴ The first part of this plan involved the capture of key sites in Dublin. Effective government suppression in the metropolis seriously hampered this integral first step of rebellion – not only was Lord Edward Fitzgerald arrested, but so too were the Sheares brothers, Henry and John. John had assumed command of the United Irish organisation after the arrest of the Leinster Directory at Oliver Bond's house. Samuel Neilson, who had been editor of the Belfast-published United Irish newspaper *Northern Star*, issued the orders for rebels to mobilise just hours before he was arrested on 23 May while attempting to rescue Lord Edward. Also, Dublin Castle's effective spy network ensured that their intelligence information was reliable, allowing them to occupy projected rebel points of assembly upon the outbreak of insurrection; thus forcing the would-be insurgents to disengage and quietly return home.¹¹⁵ The stopping of the mail coaches in Dublin was to be the signal for a general uprising in more outlying areas, their non-arrival in those various districts would be an indication to local United Irishmen that the uprising had begun.

The second phase of the military plan involved the region immediately outside the capital. Government informer Francis Higgins had informed the Castle that this 'involved the rebel occupation of positions from Garretstown, Naul ... and Dunboyne and circuitously round the metropolis to Dunleary'.¹¹⁶ The intention of this phase of the plan was to ensure that reinforcements arriving from other parts of the country would be engaged with rebels in these outlying areas for some time, in order for the rebellion within the capital to take hold. The next phase of the plan was less clearly defined but was to involve rebels in the remaining counties engaging the military presence in their own localities, further hampering attempts to reinforce Dublin militarily and preventing the second layer of rebel mobilisation from coming under attack.

¹¹⁴ Thomas Graham, 'Dublin in 1798: the key to the planned insurrection' in Dáire Keogh and Nicholas Furlong (eds.), *The mighty wave: the 1798 rebellion in Wexford* (Dublin, 1996), p. 26.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ NAI, RP 620/18/14.

At around 11 o'clock on the night of Friday 25 May, George Cummins led a party of rebels who attacked the extensive iron works of William Blair at Lucan, located about one hundred metres from the bridge over the river Liffey into the village. Cummins, said to be a Catholic member of the Clonsilla Yeomanry corps, had defected upon the outbreak of the rebellion despite having taken an oath of allegiance to the king.¹¹⁷ The raiding party which he now led, said to number up to 100 men, entered the iron works variously armed with guns, pikes and sticks and demanded the key to Blair's office.¹¹⁸

William Blair, was from a prominent local family many of whom were members of the Association for the Protection of Private Property and of the Farmers Society of Castleknock. As the owner of a large local iron mill of eight wheels and an acquaintance of the local yeomanry commanders, it is conceivable that Blair received commissions or requests from them to manufacture the weapons and munitions necessary to arm the new local defence corps. This was a measure which had met with some opposition from Walter Troy, a member of the local gentry and brother to the Catholic archbishop of Dublin. Cummins had been advised where to find arms and many of Blair's workmen had joined his raiding party after the attack. They were reported to have declared their intention to march to Dunboyne and meet 'the others', before advancing to the rebel camp now forming at the hill of Tara.¹¹⁹

A private from Captain George's Ratoath cavalry immediately set out to inform John Preston of the Navan Militia of their own narrow escape from rebel hands on the morning of Thursday 24 May. Suitably anxious that Navan appeared to be the next logical point of rebel attack, Preston wrote to the commanding officer of Kells for reinforcements. A reconnoitring unit made up from numbers from both corps soon reported that the Co. Meath was in a

¹¹⁷ Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland ...* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1801), p. 277.

¹¹⁸ NAI, RP 620/3/16/9 The court martial of George Cummins in Dublin Castle, 12 July 1798.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

general state of insurrection. Preston was also made aware that the regiment of Rea Fencibles were then on a march from Belfast to Dublin as reinforcements for the capital. Preston intercepted this body and it was agreed with their commander, Captain Scobie, that a detachment of Fencibles would join up with local yeomanry units in Navan and launch an attack on Dunshaughlin, a United Irish rallying point in rebel hands. The Fencibles arrived in Navan on the night of 25 May, the same night as the attack on the iron mill at Lucan.¹²⁰

Unaware of the rebel camp now forming on the hill of Tara, the joint units marched on Dunshaughlin to find it completely deserted. Scobie is said to have steadfastly refused to stay in the county any longer, at which point Preston informed him that he would personally ride to Dublin and obtain orders from the lord lieutenant commanding him to do so. As a compromise, Scobie left Preston three companies, a battalion cannon and a promise to return. In a letter written a few days later, Scobie named Captain McLean as commander of the unit that marched on to Tara later that day as reports began to circulate about the substantial insurgent army forming there.¹²¹

The Hill of Tara may have seemed an ideal rallying point for United Irish rebels, both symbolically and strategically. It provided a commanding view of the surrounding countryside and was well situated for cutting off the Dublin-Navan road, a likely route for reinforcements. In addition to the ancient earthen fortifications which provided defensive cover at its base, the hill itself was strongly identified in Irish folklore as a symbol of independence by having been the ancient seat of the Irish high king. The rebels, who assembled there over a period of three days and were reputed to have numbered up to 5,000, were said to be in high spirits due to a perceived Loyalist reluctance to attack them. At the point of bayonet, the Fencibles who had been captured at Clonee were forced to instruct the rebels in the use of the captured set of arms. Three pairs of green colours had been set up and

¹²⁰ L.J. Steen, *The battle of the Hill of Tara* (Trim, 1991), p. 14.

¹²¹ *FJ*, 29 May 1798.

forty camp fires were providing boiled mutton and other food. The 25 May edition of the *Freeman's Journal* reported that the house of Samuel Garnett had been attacked near Clonee and that 125 of his sheep taken away.¹²² Garnett was James Brassington's fellow church warden at Dunboyne.¹²³

The rebels may have been relatively well armed after the capture of Fencible arms and the successful attack on the iron works in Lucan. However, their organisation was poor, they did not possess a plan and discipline was said to have been nonexistent. On Saturday morning, just before Loyalist forces converged on the site, three horse loads of whiskey in barrels was said to have been seized by the rebels, who proceeded to get drunk in spite of their leader's orders. It has been suggested that Lord Fingall, whose cavalry unit fought at Tara, paid a Navan distiller by the name of Cregan to send the cargo past the rebel camp.¹²⁴ Captain Blanche of the Fencibles wrote an account of the battle from the army's perspective, describing how, as the Loyalist force approached, the rebels 'put their hats on top of their pikes, sent forth some dreadful yells and at the same time beginning to jump and put themselves in various singular attitudes, as if bidding defiance'. The rebel commander, identified by his green and white uniform, also came forward and made a 'very pompous salute' before returning with 'great precipitation'.¹²⁵

The infantry then advanced to within 50 yards of the insurgents and opened fire, the cavalry deployed on the left and right to prevent the rebels from outflanking them. As confusion, eagerness to fight and drunkenness reigned within the camp, the rebels made a fatal mistake early in the day by abandoning their strong position and charging down the hill. Initially, the Loyalist infantry ran as they were unable to get near the rebels behind the eight to ten foot long pikes, but as the infantry were fleeing downhill, the Loyalist cavalry charged.

¹²² *FJ*, 25 May 1798.

¹²³ RCB, P.0560/5/1/2.

¹²⁴ L.J. Steen, *The battle of the Hill of Tara* (Trim, 1991), p. 22.

¹²⁵ TNA, WO 40/11. The account of Captain Blanche at the Hill of Tara. Cited in Steen, *The battle of the Hill of Tara*, p. 22

On the wide open ground the horses of the cavalry were able to charge, wheel and charge again, their swords hacking at the confused rebels. The final decisive blow, in terms of rebel chances of victory, occurred when the cannon began to open fire and the rebels scattered.

While the fighting continued, from this point there was never any doubt as to the outcome of the battle. As fighting raged on, rebel strategy seemed to focus on capturing the canon, a tactic that was without success. Of the latter moments of the battle, Blanche wrote ‘and finding the men’s ammunition almost expended, and our situation getting still more critical, I found it absolutely necessary to make one decisive effort which was gallantly executed by grenadiers’.¹²⁶ The grenadiers, who were the men of the greatest height and strength of each regiment and most effective for close combat fighting, captured the last rebel stronghold at the graveyard with a bayonet charge. As a final act of defiance, the rebels made one more desperate attempt for the cannon and almost succeeded in surrounding it before, as Blanche described, ‘the officer who commanded the gun, having laid the match to it, before they could completely surround it, prostrated ten or twelve of the assailants and dispersed the remainder ... Returning their invasion and crowned our operations with a complete victory’.¹²⁷

The *Freeman’s Journal* of 29 May printed a letter written by Captain Scobie of the Rea Fencibles to Lieutenant General Lake, informing him of his account of the comprehensive Loyalist victory at Tara, it reads

The division, consisting of five companies of his Majesty’s Rea regiment of Fencible infantry arrived here yesterday, accompanied by Lord Fingall’s troop of yeomen cavalry, Captain Preston’s troop of cavalry, lower Kells ditto and Captain Molloy’s troop of yeomanry infantry. At 3.30 p.m. I was informed that a considerable force of the rebel insurgents had taken station on the Tara Hill. I instantly detached three companies of our division with one field piece, and the above corps of yeomanry, to the spot, under the command of Captain Mc Lean of the Reas. The rebels fled in all directions, three hundred and fifty were found dead on the field this morning, among whom is their commander, in full uniform – many more were

¹²⁶ TNA, WO 40/11.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

killed and wounded. Our loss is inconsiderable, being nine rank and file killed, sixteen rank and file wounded.

(Dated Dunshaughlin, Sunday morning, 27 May 1798)¹²⁸

Also on that day, the lord lieutenant, Earl Camden, wrote to the duke of Portland, secretary of state and Whig cabinet member in charge of Irish affairs, and provided a similar narrative of the day's events. His letter stated:

I have the satisfaction to inform your grace that the body of rebels, who for some days had been in considerable force to the northward of Dublin, were yesterday defeated, with very great loss on their part, by a party of the Rea Fencibles, and the neighbouring yeomanry corps, on the Hill of Tara. Five companies of the Rea Fencibles, under the command of Captain Scobie, had halted yesterday at Dunshaughlin on their march to Dublin; and hearing that the rebels were in great force, and had taken station on Tara Hill, Captain Scobie detached three of his companies, under the command of Captain McLean, with one field piece to the spot.¹²⁹

Elsewhere in Ireland, rebel fortunes were not greatly dissimilar to those witnessed on the Hill of Tara. The intended plan for rebellion centred on the raising of an insurgency within the metropolis of Dublin, so failing that, the actual rebellion as it occurred made little military sense. Letters conveyed out of Kilmainham Jail suggest that a number of insurgents who should have rallied had not done so and that those who did were poorly organised and inadequately commanded. Higgins wrote on Friday 25 May

There has been letters conveyed out of Kilmainham Jail and at Humphrey's at Usher's Quay ... in which complaints were made that their sworn friends beyond Drogheda and in the county of Louth had shamefully kept back! – that if the United force from Dunleary [had gone] round the mountains, bringing forward part of the Wicklow men, and obtaining the Meath and Dunboyne numbers to act with them by Whitsun Monday [28 May], 'Ireland would still be saved.'¹³⁰

These sentiments only further highlight the effectiveness of the Castle's pre-rebellion campaign of arrests and intelligence gathering while emphasising the frustration of the United Irish leadership at their incarceration and inept second line of command.

¹²⁸ *FJ*, 29 May 1798.

¹²⁹ TNA, HO 100/76/258-9 Camden to Portland, 27 May 1798.

¹³⁰ NAI, RP 620/18/14.

The court martial of George Cummins took place in the barracks of Dublin on 11 July 1798. Also charged on that day were Thomas Connor and Thomas Atkinson of Dunboyne.

Cummins was charged with being;

principally concerned with a party of the rebels in an attack on Mr Blair's works at Lucan ... and of carrying off a considerable number of arms and ammunition and several of the artificers in said works and having afterwards joined the rebels at Tara Hill and fought there against the King's troops, he having been heretofore a yeoman in the Clonsilla Cavalry and taken the oath of allegiance.¹³¹

Francis McFarland junior was the first witness to be sworn and he identified Cummins as a former member of the Clonsilla cavalry. The 1796 maps surveying the lands of Captain George Vesey in Westmanstown attributed a significant land holding to the McFarlands, adjacent to the earl of Carhampton's Luttrellstown demesne.¹³² Contemporary maps, such as Taylor and Skinner's road maps of Ireland,¹³³ illustrate that the route between Clonsilla and Lucan is unchanged from that of today, and as such, Cummins would have passed the McFarlands' land on the way from Clonsilla or Dunboyne to Lucan.

The next witness to be sworn was John Lyons, a workman at the iron mill. He identified Cummins as having entered the mill carrying a sword and demanding arms before making him a prisoner, along with several of Blair's workmen, and marching them towards Dunboyne. He also conclusively stated that many of the men who entered the yard empty handed left well armed. Upon his being marched to Dunboyne, Lyons was said to have overheard 'several of the party say that they were going to the battle of Tara'. Lyon's answers are short, precise and damning.¹³⁴

After Lyons's evidence, James Carroll took the stand and provided an identical testimony which incriminated Cummins as the ring leader on the night of 24 May. When questioning Carroll, Cummins disputed the statement that he entered the iron mill with any

¹³¹ NAI, RP 620/3/16/9.

¹³² NLI, Longfield maps 21/F/51/64.

¹³³ George Taylor and Andrew Skinner, *Map of the roads of Ireland* (Dublin, 1778), p. 7.

¹³⁴ NAI, RP 620/3/16/9.

arms. Carroll seems to have conceded eventually on this point, only to reiterate the fact that he certainly mounted the hill back to Dunboyne with a gun which he had procured from the yard. John Lunders, a 14 year-old boy, testified that he was brought to the battle at the Tara Hill by Cummins, who was armed with a pistol. He also stated that he had known Cummins for between two and three years.¹³⁵

The prosecution having made their case, Cummins was called to make the case for the defence. In response to the question ‘what is the general character of John Lyons?’ Captain John Rickey stated; ‘I do not think that John Lyons is a man deserving credit on his oath’. This being the only recorded testimony of Captain Rickey, the transcript abruptly ends ‘the pris[oner] here closed his defence’, but not before the scribe noted and hastily crossed out what clearly states ‘W[illia]m Blair sworn’. What cannot be concluded was whether Blair had the opportunity to be cross-examined by Cummins or if the nature of that testimony was deemed unsuitable for inclusion by the court martial scribe. Regardless, Cummins was sentenced to death and the area commander, Lieutenant-General Craig, was ordered to make the necessary arrangements for the execution.¹³⁶

After the convictions of Cummins, Atkinson and Connor, a large number of United Irish rebels met in Dunboyne on the night of 11 July 1798. Higgins reported to Dublin Castle:

On Wednesday [11 July], Power, one of the people I have long retained and received intelligence from, went with two others to Dunboyne and was at the meeting of a large body of rebels there on that night. They consisted of some thousands, where the question of rescuing Bond, Jackson etc. was agitated and they declared (those who acted as officers) ‘that were they supplied with ammunition as promised, they would risk everything; but being deceived in that point, they could not until such was obtained for them, and Bond had in his hands many thousands accounted for. Power says there was cavalry among them, as well mounted and armed as any in the city, that wore green uniform.’¹³⁷

While not hinted at by Higgins, the fact that the timing of the meeting coincided with the convictions of local United Irishmen must surely have instigated calls for a rescue attempt.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ NAI, RP 620/18/14.

The finality of the sentences handed down would have contributed to the feeling amongst sympathisers that immediate and decisive action was necessary. Higgins further stated:

a considerable number of the infantry (or foot) were ragged, forlorn poor devils, armed with scythes, pitchforks, pikes, muskets, etc. Some of the officers are tradesmen from the city who boast that an immediate supply would be had from France, that people from all quarters flocked to their standard. Their body when fully assembled was 18,000 and the detached party's that would be collected in twenty four hours would be more than 80,000 through Kildare, Wicklow, etc., etc... Their emissaries induce the wretched, misguided people of the country to unite in their infernal plan, they have in every part held out the lure of plunder, and that the city of Dublin, with all its spoils and riches would be theirs in a few days.¹³⁸

Transcripts of a letter conveyed out of the lord lieutenant's office on 14 July 1798 to General Meyrick 'acknowledge the receipt of your two letters sent by express to Lieutenant General Craig and communicate his Excellency's appreciation of the execution and decision with which you have acted against the rebels in county Meath.'¹³⁹ Five days later, a letter sent to General Craig from the same office listed several recent courts martial, including that of Cummins, and cast some doubt over the legitimacy of the sentences passed down by them, it reads

The lord lieutenant, having taken into due consideration proceedings of several court martials and having observed that those who have been convicted of charges alleged against them have been sentenced to death or to transportation for life directs me to acquaint you that, in his opinion, most, if not all, of the above cases will admit of mitigation. His Excellency is further of the opinion, on consideration of the enormous expense and inconvenience attending such transportation, that it would be more conducive that the sentences should be commuted to service for life, wherever His Majesty shall be pleased to direct, should the persons convicted appear, upon examination by a staff surgeon, to be fit for such service.

The cases of Thomas Connor and Thomas Atkinson, it was reported, remained for further consideration. On 27 July another letter dispatched to General Craig informed him that

The lord lieutenant, having taken into mature consideration the proceedings of the court martial of Thomas Atkinson and Thomas Connor, is pleased to approve of the sentence passed upon them and desires you will direct the same to be carried into execution at the place where the offence was committed.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ NLI, MS 1133/ 14 Kilmainham Papers.

¹⁴⁰ NLI, MS 1133/ 98 Kilmainham Papers.

The cases of Cummins, Atkinson and Connor are indicative of Cornwallis's policy of severity and compassion. Lord Charles Cornwallis, had succeeded the earl of Camden as viceroy on 20 June 1798. In most instances, rebel leaders were severely dealt with while their misguided followers were allowed a considerable measure of leniency, after they surrendered their weapons and subjugated to an oath of loyalty to the crown. These examples illustrate the fine line which potentially existed between those terms of reference, and the misfortune of those people who found themselves on the wrong side of the policy.

Conclusion

One notable aspect of the events outlined in this study is the manner in which several seemingly unconnected areas were intrinsically linked owing to their geographical location, similar economies and interaction of populations. Upon the outbreak of the insurrection, Wynne immediately sprung to the defence of his counterpart Elias Corbally at Ratoath, while his enemies also seemed to act in tandem with their county Meath allies at the decisive moment. The movement of George Cummins and his band of rebels from Clonsilla towards Lucan and on to Tara via Dunboyne, Clonee and Dunshaughlin, and prearranged interaction with rebels along the way, provides further evidence of the existence of a 'human unit' which transcended county and administrative definitions. The Association for the Protection of Private Property united the inhabitants of several districts, including Castleknock, Clonsilla, Leixlip, Lucan, Clonee and Dunboyne, in the need to face a common enemy, who evidently did the same. Then, as now, each of these areas lay in separate, clearly defined administrative units and it seems irrelevant whether these units are termed barony, county or council. While these areas have undergone a significant change in recent times, there can be no doubt that they are still unofficially connected by the same three situations which united them in the late eighteenth century. The growth of the commuter belt and suburbs, often presented as a recent phenomenon, could also be viewed as an ongoing process of parallel evolution which has been experienced by the populations of these neighbouring districts for hundreds of years.

The disturbances which took place around Clonsilla during the 1790s can be distinguished by their design of intent. Despite some Defender activity in the locality, most other incidents can be said to have taken place with a wider strategic purpose in mind. The attack on Blair's iron mill in Lucan was carried out to procure arms, Patrick McCormick was murdered to prevent him giving evidence at trial and the plan of assassination designed against Carhampton coincided with his brutal campaign in Connacht. The paternal

sponsorship of the local economy through work initiatives, a reward scheme and outlets for competitive energies, such as ploughing matches, ensured that the 'moral economy' remained relatively strong throughout this period. The intent of the gentry to preserve and extend the 'moral economy' is evidenced by their reaction to the militia act; whereby a levy was paid determined by a gentleman's landholding. The village shop initiative ensured that the gentry could both provide and control access to consumer goods by the wider community. At times of economic hardship, this could also be the venue of a humanitarian project to alleviate suffering.

Through the Association for the Protection of Private Property and the Clonsilla Cavalry, the same body of gentry assumed responsibility for maintaining law and order in the locality. Following serious disturbances, the gentry displayed their intent to punish collectively those responsible to the full rigours of the law. Some controversy appears to have existed regarding the decision to arm the local yeomanry corps and Robert Wynne's insistence that they do so may have compromised his reputation somewhat after the rebellion. Nonetheless, it must be remembered that no vengeful attack took place against the property of those involved in the local associations. Despite the body of Lord Carhampton's grandfather being exhumed from Clonsilla graveyard and his being skull smashed with a pickaxe, vengeance or acts of violence were not directed at the local gentry.

Chapter 3

Killala, County Mayo

It is possible to detect in almost every eighteenth-century crowd action some legitimising notion. By the notion of legitimation I mean that men and women in the crowd were informed by the belief that they were defending the traditional rights or customs; and, in general, that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community.¹
(E.P. Thompson)

Killala was the seat of the bishop of Killala and as such it appears to have served as a focal point for the Church of Ireland community in north-west Connacht. Within the community of Killala, the Bishop was the most powerful single individual and his seat was identified as the centre of power in the area. There was a modest Church of Ireland cathedral in the town and the bishop's palace was located nearby.

Amongst the wider population, there appears to have been a considerable social distance between the class levels in society. For the most part, members of the Church of Ireland appear to have operated within a tight network which was centred on the military, civil and religious authority of the region. Anecdotally, there does appear to have been some religious mixing within the social classes. The contemporary diarist Rev. James Little suggests a certain level of mutual toleration prior to the rebellion although it testifies to the disparity of wealth between the two groups. For example, there appears an acute awareness on the part of Little of just how important his possessions are in separating him from the people around him.

Killala seemed an unlikely venue for the arrival of a French invasion fleet. There was little strategic advantage in holding the town and there were more disaffected locations in Ireland where the French could cause a stir. Nonetheless, the local population did swell the ranks of the Franco-Irish army and governed the region for a short period of time. In this context, it is difficult to establish the nature of agrarian disturbance in this region previous to

¹ E.P. Thompson, *Customs in common* (New York, 1993), p.188.

the rebellion. It would appear that Fr. Henry O' Kane of the French army was a native of this region who had to flee to the continent due to his involvement in Whiteboy agrarian disturbances.² It is unquestionable that the arrival of the French invasion fleet was the most remarkable event to have occurred in the area for generations.

There does not appear to have been a significant altering of power structures in the post rebellion society of Killala. The bishop came under suspicion for his close relationship to the French invasion fleet and the apparent conviviality which existed between him and French General Humbert. Stock's diary is a crucial primary source for this period.

² Guy Beiner, *Remembering the year of the French* (Wisconsin, 2007), p. 153.

Section One - The locality in context

County Mayo was divided into nine baronies; Tyrawley, Carra, Burrishoole, Erris, Murrisk, Kilmaine, Clanmorris, Costello, Gallen. Sixty two parishes were contained within those nine baronies. In 1792 Daniel Beaufort estimated the population of the county to be around 140,000 inhabitants. His calculation was arrived at by citing the returns of a Mr. Burke of Tyrawley, who estimated the mean family size of the county to be 5.8, in approximately 27,970 houses.³

Killala was located in the barony of Tyrawley. According to Samuel Lewis' *Topographical dictionary of Ireland* (1837), it was a 'sea-port, market and post-town, and parish, and the seat of a diocese ... twenty two miles north from Castlebar, and one hundred and thirty one miles north west from Dublin, on the road from Ballina to Ballycastle; containing 3875 inhabitants, of which number, 1,125 are in the town'.⁴ The census return for 1821 recorded a total of 3,650 residents in the parish.⁵ Brendan Hoban estimates that ninety-one per cent of the population in Connacht was Catholic, and possibly even higher in Mayo. It is noted that 'in some counties there were so few Protestant freeholders to serve on juries that the region could be scarcely be held to acknowledge the authority of the government'.⁶

According to the census of 1821, the total population for the county of Mayo was recorded as 293,112. There were nine baronial divisions within the county, of which Tyrawley was the largest with a population of 59,114. Within the barony of Tyrawley there were seventeen subdivisions of town, parish and village, of which Killala parish, with a

³ Beaufort, Daniel Augustus. *Memoir of a map of Ireland; illustrating the topography of that kingdom, and containing a short account of its present state, civil and ecclesiastical; with a complete index to the map.* By Daniel Augustus Beaufort, L.L.D. Rector of Navan in the county of Meath, and vicar of Collon, in the county of Louth (Dublin, 1792).

⁴ Samuel Lewis, *A topographical dictionary of Ireland* (3 vols, London, 1837), ii, p. 112.

⁵ Census of Population of Ireland, 1831; Comparative Abstract, 1821 and 1831 <http://pdf.library.soton.ac.uk/EPPI/8161.pdf>

⁶ Brendan Hoban, *Turbulent diocese: the Killala troubles 1798 – 1848* (Dublin, 2011), p. 43.

population of 3,650, represented approximately six per cent of the overall population of the barony.⁷

Occupations were recorded in the 1821 census under three broad categories, ‘agriculture’, ‘trades, manufactures or handicrafts’ and ‘not comprised in the preceding classes’. What we are not told is whether these statistics included women.⁸ In the county of Mayo, those listed as employed chiefly in agriculture represented 42 per cent of the total persons occupied. The returns for trades, manufactures or handicrafts were 49 per cent whereas those not comprised in the preceding classes were at 9 per cent. Returns for Tyrawley indicated a slight drop to 39 per cent for those working in agriculture. Accordingly, 49 per cent were employed in trades, manufactures or handicrafts and a percentage of 12 per cent were otherwise occupied. In Killala, 33 per cent of the population was employed in agriculture and 15 per cent was recorded as being otherwise occupied. The remaining 52 per cent employed in trades, manufactures or handicraft. This is second only to Ballymoney of the four communities in this category.⁹

Eight per cent of the population were attending school, with twice as many males as females doing so. When these figures are adjusted to account for the ages of persons they show a higher proportion attending schools. These figures must also be altered to account for the barony as a whole, as this is the only source data that exists for ages of persons. Therefore, it can be stated that 13 per cent of the population of the barony of Tyrawley who were under the age of ten attended school according to the 1821 census. This is the second lowest percentage of the four communities selected for study.¹⁰

⁷ *An act to provide for taking an account of the population of Ireland, and for ascertaining the increase or diminution thereof ... 1824*, p.352, H.C. 1823 (577) xxii, 411.

⁸ Margaret E. Crawford, *Counting the people* (Dublin, 2003), p. 51.

⁹ *An act to provide for taking an account of the population of Ireland, and for ascertaining the increase or diminution thereof ... 1824*, p.352, H.C. 1823 (577) xxii, 411.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

According to an 1827 report of the commission of Irish education inquiry, there were six schools located in the townland of Killala. In terms of the schools religious denomination, two of them had a Roman Catholic master and four were of the established church. There were no Presbyterian school masters in the townland. The total annual income of the masters was comparatively low, between £4 earned by John Argent and £36 earned by John Traynor, who conducted lessons in the vestry room adjoining the church. All the schools were pay schools, apart from a Protestant school run by George and Esther Townly, who operated as both a free and pay school, partly funded by the trustees of Erasmus Smith and the bishop of Killala. Equally, the description in quality of the school buildings does not favour well in comparison to the four communities, the mode of buildings being described as ‘a miserable cabin’.¹¹

The residence of the Protestant bishop of Killala was located at Killala Castle. This position held responsibility for the dioceses of Killala and Achonry, which had been united in 1622. This area of responsibility was considerable, covering much of Mayo and Sligo and large parts of Roscommon. The diocese of Killala included the baronies of Erris and Tyrrawley and the entire barony of Tireragh in Sligo. Achonry included the barony of Gallen, the northern half of Costello, most of south-west Sligo and two parishes in north-west Roscommon.¹² By this time, the united dioceses were served by the cathedrals of Saint Patrick in Killala and Saint Crumnathy in Achonry, each enjoying a separate religious bureaucracy and hierarchy. Killala contained thirteen churches and seven glebe houses,

¹¹ *Second report of the commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry*, p.1280, H.C. 1826 (12) xii, 1.

¹² RCB, Ts 61/2/9, f 5. Cited in Patrick Comerford, ‘Bishop Joseph Stock and the clergy of the diocese of Killala and Achonry during the 1798 Rising’ in Sheila Mulloy (ed.), *Victory or glorious defeat: biographies of participants in the Mayo Rebellion of 1798* (Dublin, 2010), p. 116.

whereas Achonry had nine incumbents, two of whom resided in their parishes. There were no glebe houses and one benefice had no church.¹³

By 1798, the bishopric was held by Rev. Dr Joseph Stock, described in the 14 December 1797 edition of the *Freeman's Journal* as being 'a clergyman regarded in society as a most benevolent character ... befitting that honourable ecclesiastic function' upon his appointment. His predecessor, Dr John Porter, had been chaplain to the lord lieutenant before being promoted to the see of Clogher in 1797.¹⁴ The previous incumbent, the Right Rev. John Lord, had been a vociferous critic of the remaining penal laws. Lord had used his position as bishop of Killala to attack the penal laws in the Irish House of Lords. During the 1792 debates regarding the Roman Catholic Bill, Lord launched a scathing attack in the house on the 'code under which the Roman Catholics ... were treated by former parliaments as men tame wild beasts', noting that Catholics were 'worshippers of the same God and subjects of the same realm'.¹⁵

Joseph Stock was born in Dublin between 1740 and 1742 and entered Trinity College on 10 October 1756, receiving his doctorate in divinity in 1776. On 3 March 1778 he married Catherine Palmer, who had been widowed a few weeks previously. Stock fathered eleven children between 1779 and 1791. This was in addition to the four surviving children from Catherine's previous marriage, all of whom lived abroad by 1798. Stock embarked upon an ambitious ecclesiastical career, which included appointments as vicar of Lusk, Co. Dublin, rector of Conwall, Co. Donegal and Headmaster of the Portora Royal School in Enniskillen; the latter position providing an annual income of around £2,000. At a later stage in his career, while seeking promotion in the House of Bishops, Stock was accused of having engaged in a number of dubious property transactions during his time at Portora. He would have received

¹³ Patrick Comerford, 'Bishop Joseph Stock and the clergy of the diocese of Killala and Achonry during the 1798 Rising' in Sheila Mulloy (ed.), *Victory or glorious defeat: biographies of participants in the Mayo Rebellion of 1798* (Dublin, 2010), p. 117.

¹⁴ *FJ*, 14 Dec 1797.

¹⁵ *FJ*, 28 Feb 1792.

the bishopric of Killala with reasonable anticipation of being able to progress his career in this office. Of his six immediate predecessors in the role, five were promoted within six years to more influential and lucrative dioceses. Stock resided in Killala Castle with his wife and eleven children following his consecration in the new chapel at Trinity College, Dublin by the archbishop of Tuam, William Beresford on 28 January 1798.¹⁶

The Roman Catholic bishop of Killala, Dominick Bellew was appointed in 1780 and held the position until 1812. He was the eldest son to parents from families of Norman descent which had settled in counties Meath and Louth. Leaving Ireland to study in Rome in 1764, Bellew excelled at his studies before ill-health forced him to move to the Irish college at Bordeaux, where he remained for around three years. His younger brother Matthew had joined him in Rome before being enticed into military service by some Austrian officers he had befriended. Matthew had not adapted to academic life with the same ease and discipline as his brother, who was appointed as parish priest of Dundalk upon his return to Ireland in 1772. There was considerable controversy surrounding this appointment, as Bellew was only twenty-seven years of age at the time and the interference of his cousin, Sir Patrick Bellew was presumed. Two local priests had been earmarked as the likely successors to the position. By 1779, Bellew was appointed to the bishopric at Killala made vacant by the death of Alexander Irwin.¹⁷

The Roman Catholic diocese was made up roughly of three baronies – Erris and Tyrawley in Mayo and Tirereagh in Sligo and up to 90 per cent of population within the district would have been of the Catholic faith. According the Brendan Hoban, Catholics in the

¹⁶ Patrick Comerford, 'Bishop Joseph Stock and the clergy of the diocese of Killala and Achonry during the 1798 Rising' in Sheila Mulloy (ed.), *Victory or glorious defeat: biographies of participants in the Mayo Rebellion of 1798* (Dublin, 2010), p. 118.

¹⁷ Brendan Hoban, 'Dominick Bellew, 1745-1812: parish priest of Dundalk and bishop of Killala' in *Seanchas Ardmhaca: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society*, vi, no. 2(1972), p. 356.

diocese of Killala were ‘largely unaffected by the Penal laws as they were abjectly poor and so limitations on their property or prospects of education didn’t really impinge on them’.¹⁸

When Bellew took charge of the diocese it contained one dean, one archdeacon, one precentor and twelve canons. The diocese was divided into three rural deaneries of twenty four parishes; of which twenty were served by parish priests and four by administrators. The total income amounted to around £1,600, of which the bishop received £315. He resided in Ballina for all but the first four years of his tenure in a modest town dwelling. There was no Catholic Cathedral and a chapel in Ardnaree served as the principal church. Thatched cabins acted as churches in the parishes.¹⁹ Throughout the eighteenth century, Killala diocese was served by a reasonable complement of priests. It appears that no parish in the diocese of Killala was without a priest, secular or regular, for any length of time during that period. Although the standard of education of priests was uneven; not all were trained in Irish colleges abroad.²⁰

Bellew’s appointment to the bishopric of Killala was not without its own controversies. He was the first bishop to reside in the diocese in several decades, and he insisted on introducing and enforcing the Decrees of Trent. Priests would have enjoyed a relatively ‘free hand’ in the running of parishes up to that point.²¹ A petition signed by eighteen priests was sent to Rome requesting that his appointment be withdrawn, echoing many of the criticisms made of him in Dundalk. His ignorance of Irish as the language of the people was also commented on. Following his consecration in Brussels in May 1780, Bellew arrived in Killala to a declaration of loyalty and assumed his position. During the earliest years of his tenure, Bellew made strenuous efforts to be transferred from the diocese, notably

¹⁸ Brendan Hoban, *Turbulent diocese: the Killala troubles 1798 – 1848* (Dublin, 2011), p. 34.

¹⁹ Brendan Hoban, ‘Dominick Bellew, 1745-1812: parish priest of Dundalk and bishop of Killala’ in *Seanchas Ardmhaca: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society*, vi, no. 2(1972), p. 356.

²⁰ Brendan Hoban, *Turbulent diocese: the Killala troubles 1798 – 1848* (Dublin, 2011), p. 37.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.50.

to either Tuam or Clonfert.²² The role of the Catholic clergy, in terms of encouraging their congregations to participate in the rebellion, remains a notable feature of mass recruitment to the rebel force. Brendan Hoban estimates that ‘if there were thirty Killala priests in 1801, then around one-third were involved in the rising to some degree.’²³ The influence of local priests could prove significant when considered with the patriarchal composition of society in terms of function and conduct. Richard Musgrave claimed that Fr Myles Prendergast, who lived near Westport was ‘active in an order of friars’ which sold scapulars at fairs. Prendergast was active in the rebellion and afterwards fled to the mountains where he died of disease.²⁴ Musgrave cited the influence of several Catholic priests in spreading seditious sentiment amongst their congregations, including Fr. Cowley of Castlecomer, who had received his holy orders from Bishop Bellew, had kept a number of Protestant civilians captive and threatened their lives on numerous occasions.²⁵

In contrast to most of their co-religionists, the cottier class of Addergoole, around thirty kilometres north of Killala, had fled for their lives upon hearing of the French landing at Killala. Their parish priest, Fr. James Conroy, had continually preached about the ‘infidel principles’ of the French Revolution. Fr Conroy was undoubtedly influenced by the testimonies of a local priest, named Fr. Richard McHale, who had recently returned to Ireland having borne eye witnessed to the excesses of the revolutionary period.²⁶

Bishop Bellew’s brother, Matthew, was a rebel commander and was sentenced to death following the rebellion. Edward Cooke wrote to Cornwallis telling him of information provided by a priest ‘taken in arms’ which implicated Bellew in coordinating the rebellion. Cooke expressed the view that he was ‘confident that it will appear by degrees that however

²² Brendan Hoban, ‘Dominick Bellew, 1745-1812: parish priest of Dundalk and bishop of Killala’ in *Seanchas Ardmhaca: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society*, vi, no. 2 (1972), p. 356.

²³ Brendan Hoban, *Turbulent diocese: the Killala troubles 1798 – 1848* (Dublin, 2011), p. 63.

²⁴ Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland ...* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1801), p. 140.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

²⁶ Brendan Hoban, ‘Dominick Bellew, 1745-1812: parish priest of Dundalk and bishop of Killala’ in *Seanchas Ardmhaca: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society*, vi, no. 2 (1972), p. 362.

the United Irishmen began the plot, the Catholics engaged in it from seeing it could be turned to their own interests solely'.²⁷ Bellew travelled to Dublin upon hearing the accusation and stayed until he received an official letter from government rebuking the claim. To display his loyalty, Bellew organised and chaired a pro-union meeting of 'Roman Catholics of the baronies of Tyrawley and Tireragh in the chapel at Ardnaree on 28 July 1799'.²⁸ He went as far as making an application for compensation from the committee of suffering Loyalists, which was rejected.²⁹

Fr. Henry O'Kane marched at the head of the French force which entered Killala upon its arrival in Ireland. Singularly employed as the public face of the invasion to the local Catholic masses, O' Kane was the son of a cow-herd of Lord Tyrawley who was born at Kilcummin, received his education at a local hedge school and went on to study divinity in Nantes. He received holy orders in 1788 but became an ardent supporter of the Revolution. He enlisted as private in French army and advanced to rank of Captain in the Grenadiers. During the Franco-Irish campaign, his proficiency in French, English and Irish ensured that he was invaluable as a means of communicating the aspiration of liberty to the local population.³⁰ Randall McDonnell of Killala, who was tried by court martial in Ballina, appealed in 1803 to 'the humanity and moderation of your Excellency' to have his sentence commuted to transportation or to serve on board the British navy. In support of his appeal he asserted that he was forced into insurgency by 'the priest Cain [sic]'.³¹ O'Kane displayed an acute awareness of the sensibilities and motivations of the Irish rebels, evidenced by his speech to an assembly of local Catholics at Ballina which Musgrave recorded. O' Kane

²⁷ NLI, Union Correspondence (Cornwallis), vol. 1, f381. Cited in Brendan Hoban, *Turbulent diocese: the Killala troubles 1798 – 1848* (Dublin, 2011), p. 56.

²⁸ *BN*, 23 Aug. 1799 Cited in Brendan Hoban, *Turbulent diocese: the Killala troubles 1798 – 1848* (Dublin, 2011), p. 57.

²⁹ NAI, RP 620/56/200 Cited in Brendan Hoban, *Turbulent diocese: the Killala troubles 1798 – 1848* (Dublin, 2011), p. 58.

³⁰ Guy Beiner, *Remembering the year of the French* (Wisconsin, 2007), pp. 150 – 56.

³¹ NAI, RP 620/12/141/6

declared that he had dreamt one night in France, that the virgin Mary had visited him and informed him ‘that her votaries in Ireland were suffering the most grievous persecution’ and she recommended that he go to their relief. He had a second similar dream, followed by a third, on which occasion she gave him a violent box in the ear; ensuring that he went forth to inform the directory to prepare the expedition to Ireland. ³²

It is important to contrast the Catholicism of the cottier class in Mayo with that of the poorer inhabitants of Clonsilla or the ‘loyal’ Catholics of Ballymoney. In Clonsilla, a sectarian element was also a feature of violence during the rebellion and religious delineations were evidently a point of socio-economic conflict. It could be argued, however, that the Catholicism of the inhabitants of Clonsilla was prone to more modernising influences and was less entrenched in the communal beliefs of a traditional society.

Had the French invasion been successful, communicating the French principals of *liberté* to ostensibly devout Catholics, albeit a Catholicism entrenched deeply in the local interpretations of a superstitious traditional society, would have proved a delicate and problematic process. The French officer Charost was said to have commented that having just driven the Pope out of Italy, they did not expect to find him so suddenly in Ireland. ³³ Irish rebels appear to have been generally disappointed that Protestant property was to be respected. An overturning of the social order was not necessarily implied by the *égalité* which the French aimed to instil in Ireland. Equally, the French were reported to have been astonished that so few Protestants had been enticed into their fraternal embrace.

In 1801 James Mc Parlan observed that County Mayo was ‘the remotest part of Ireland from intercourse with the interior of the kingdom and the capital’. He expressed ‘a considerable degree of pleasure in visiting it, and of curiosity in observing the genius of pure natives, and the degree of advancement in social manners of the upper ranks. The ‘upper

³² Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland ...* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1801), p. 139.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.134.

ranks' he noted were,' in manners and customs, just like the gentry of the other parts of the kingdom' while 'no particular degree of ferocity or grossness of ignorance identifies the natives'.³⁴ In the aftermath of the 1798 Rebellion, Mc Parlan had travelled to Mayo to draw up a statistical survey of the county, under the direction of the Dublin society.

At this stage, the local economy was quite dependent on agriculture, described by Mc Parlan in 1801 as being 'of the county at large ...still in a very backward state and in no very great progress of improvement'.³⁵ Throughout Ireland, an over dependence on agricultural output as an economic activity can be observed. Generally speaking, a bad harvest would signal an economic crisis defined by a slackening in revenue, a decline in manufacturing output and a reliance on imports. As merchants often provided banking services, a reduction in their balance sheets usually resulted in a restriction of credit to the local economy.³⁶ Rev. James Little of Lacken observed that agricultural and economic improvements had taken hold in the years before the French landing. The exportation of grain and potatoes was creating more private wealth. Growth of the market led to an influx of people to the towns, which created more demand for produce. Linen manufacture was creating a new source of paid employment. Due to the change in favourable circumstances, Little estimated that the price of land had doubled before leases had expired; thus allowing those who were *in situ* before this rapid commercialisation took place to take advantage. The social consequence which Little observed of a newly emerging commercial economy was the move to hedonism, typified by the growth of clandestine distilleries, 'which produced here as in every other place, money, profligacy, sedition and rebellion'.³⁷ The emergence of new markets is evidenced by a royal

³⁴ James Mc Parlan, *Statistical survey of County Mayo* (Dublin, 1802), p. vi.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³⁶ L.M. Cullen, *An Economic history of Ireland since 1660* (London, 1972), p. 71.

³⁷ James Little and Nuala Costello, 'Little's diary of the French landing' in *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 11 (1941), pp 69 – 75.

charter granted in 1796, bestowing the right to hold four annual fairs at Louisburgh on the earl of Altamont's estate.³⁸

There appears to have been a transformation in the manner and customs surrounding land-holding taking place by 1801. This process can be presumed to have been underway for some time previously. In Tyrawley, farm size is described as 'generally large, scarce one under one hundred acres'. Traditionally, Mc Parlan described that the gentlemen and graziers occupied wide tracts, whereas 'the common tenantry' held land in partnership. The practice of holding land in common, known as the rundale system, implied a communal manner of working and living in a social condition of considerable co-dependency. Often, a family group would take leases in partnership. Numerous entries in the rent books of the earl of Altamont from 1792 and 1796 show plots of land were often rented to unnamed tenants, simply termed as 'villagers' for the purpose of recording rental income.³⁹

As descendents acquired a stake in the land, the landlord had less knowledge of who the actual occupiers were. Such unchecked sub-division implied that the commercialisation of agriculture in the region had been limited.⁴⁰ By 1801, although the practice of letting land to the tenants in common was still in place they had begun 'to subdivide to ten and twelve acres each and every two or three, which number still wish to keep together, hold in that proportion'.⁴¹

This manner of holding and working land in common is evidenced by the observations of McParlan regarding the ownership of horses in the barony. It was noted that

a farmer, having a hundred acres, will not have more than five or six horses for the cultivation of his farm and the use of his family; but a farm of that extent occupied by villagers, will support ten families, each of whom always has a horse, which they join to make up a team and complete the spring ploughing, although they may have previously sub divided their farms, which is now most frequently done for their convenience.⁴²

³⁸ NLI, Westport Papers MS 40,918/35

³⁹ NLI, Westport Papers MS 40,923/7 , MS 40,923/8

⁴⁰ L.M. Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland since 1660* (London, 1972), p. 81.

⁴¹ James Mc Parlan, *Statistical survey of County Mayo* (Dublin, 1802), p. 61.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 69.

Leases to Catholics had been restricted to thirty one years for much of the eighteenth century, in accordance with the penal laws. In 1778 this restriction was removed at a time when a policy of granting shorter leases to Catholics and Protestants alike was being pursued. The price at which leases were taken out depended on the economic circumstances of the time they were agreed. Tenants who had rented lands at high rates around 1700 or in the 1760s had to endure the economic crises of the following decade, where prices fell significantly. Conversely, when prices rose during the course of the lease a tenant could sell their remaining interest and realise a profit on their investment.⁴³

A rent book from 1787 for the earl of Altamont's estates in Mayo and Galway recorded the 'probable rise' of rents beside the 'present rent' being paid for leases. The 'probable rise' anticipated for the whole estate totalled £2,706. The rent book records the proprietor's anticipation of rising rents achievable from his land by individual lease. Examples of this include John Gibbons' farm at Westport Hill, which was described as 'out of lease will rise'. Ian Mc Greal's estate contained the entry 'will rise next May'. As many leases were held for the duration of a life or of consecutive lives some estates, such as the Fitzgeralds of Westport Town was noted as 'one life will rise'. Another aspect of this practice is recorded in Tawnyard, where the condition of Edward Bourke's estate was recorded as 'at the doctor at death will rise'.⁴⁴

A random sample of ten rental agreements from the Westport estate, which remained in the same ownership between 1792 and 1796, shows that five leases were in arrears in 1792 but all were fully paid up by 1796. One of those who found their leases in arrears by 1792, John Wilson of Ayle, had a 'probable rise' of £6 attached to his account in 1787; the actual rise was from £20 0s. 9d. in 1787 to £21 0s. 9d. in 1792. While a more modest rise in rent

⁴³ L.M. Cullen, *An economic history of Ireland since 1660* (London, 1972), pp 77-79.

⁴⁴ NLI, Westport Papers MS 40,923/5, rental of estates 1787.

took place than previously was anticipated, Wilson's account was £2 5s. 6d. in arrears by 1792. By 1796, the account was cleared despite a rise in rent to £22 0s. 9d.⁴⁵

The cottier class existed in a precarious and servile condition, taking land in smaller amounts from more substantial farmers. Those who discharged their rent in labour to their immediate landholder enjoyed some security. The less fortunate were obliged to pay an inflated price for a small tract of land and seek employment to pay the rent, where available. Their wages did not rise when prices and their rent increased. By the end of the century, cottiers tended to keep a pig in their homes which they fed from the family stock of potatoes. When common land became privatised as the commercialisation of agriculture gathered pace, cows could no longer be kept and families were forced to buy milk from local farmers. While forced to participate in a cash economy at the lowest level, a cottier remained the most vulnerable element of society to economic fluctuations and maintained little stakehold with which to prosper.⁴⁶ The peasant's diet consisted of potatoes, oaten bread, milk, butter, herrings and on 'two or three grand festival days of the year some bits of flesh-meat'.⁴⁷

French Officer Jean Louis Jobit recorded the squalid conditions in which the mass of people lived in his diary of the French expedition. He recalled that the French soldiers were surprised at the poverty they witnessed upon their arrival; scantily clad locals prostrated themselves at their feet, in front of wretched cabins which they shared with poultry. Jobit contrasted this situation with the 'gentle life' of the local Protestant, 'almost all of whom possess great riches'.⁴⁸

In the barony of Tyrawley, potatoes, oats and barley were sowed and exported to the north across the Atlantic bay, described 'in some places not twenty miles over which divides

⁴⁵ NLI, Westport Papers MS 40,923/7 rental of estates 1792; NLI, Westport Papers MS 40,923/8 rental of estates 1796

⁴⁶ L.M. Cullen, *An economic history of Ireland since 1660* (London, 1972), pp 80-82.

⁴⁷ James Mc Parlan, *Statistical survey of County Mayo* (Dublin, 1802), p.86; Jean Jobit and Nuala Costello, 'Journal de l'expédition d'Irlande' in *Analecta Hibernica*, no.11 (1941), p. 16.

⁴⁸ Jean Jobit and Nuala Costello, 'Journal de l'expédition d'Irlande' in *Analecta Hibernica*, no.11 (1941), p. 16.

Connaught from Donegal'. The same journey over land was about seventy miles long.⁴⁹ The significance of the sea, in terms of commerce, communication and interaction with the outside world, should not be underestimated when considering the isolated and remote communities of north Mayo.

Mc Parlan recorded that fifty fishing boats were plying about Killala and that 'the fishery is frequently a good one here'.⁵⁰ A report in the *Freeman's Journal* in March 1786 reported that a network of fisheries was being developed along the coast of Galway, Killala, Sligo and Ballyshannon and that 'extensive private companies ... and all ranks of people ... were determined to engage in a pursuit productive of an inexhaustible fund of wealth ... which foreigners wisely embraced, when they saw the natives so blind to such a valuable source of riches'.⁵¹ When the French invasion fleet required smaller crafts to bring ammunition to shore, the Killala fishermen were said to have initially refused high prices for their boats.⁵²

In terms of manufacturing and industry, the production of yarns and linen is described as 'very considerable' in Tyrawley.⁵³ By the time of the 1821 census, this sector had developed into the dominant employment category. McParlan's observation that 'the poor take care to raise besides a sufficiency for their own use, as much as their families can spin into yarn and larger quantities of it [yarn and linen] are sold at market in Ballina and neighbouring fairs' should also be noted.⁵⁴ Like many 'improving' landlords of the period, Lord Altamont was anxious to stimulate local markets and commerce in the area in order to increase currency circulation and through higher rents improve the towns and villages

⁴⁹ James Mc Parlan, *Statistical survey of County Mayo* (Dublin, 1802), p. 3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁵¹ *FJ*, 23Mar 1786.

⁵² Joseph Stock, *A narrative of what passed at Killala* (Dublin, 1800), p. 36.

⁵³ James Mc Parlan, *Statistical survey of County Mayo* (Dublin, 1802), p. 108.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

surrounding his estate.⁵⁵ A desire to accumulate private wealth and consumer goods may also be implied, at the consequent expense of their peers and those with whom they had held land in common until relatively recently.

Throughout the rest of the county, linen production appears to have been in a state of general increase at this time. In the barony of Burrishoole, Mc Parlan informs that ‘almost all the cabins have everyone a loom’ and that ‘straw manufactory was encouraged here by Mrs. Graydon’ with upwards of 100 children employed in this industry. The participation of the youngest generations in this form of economic activity is evidenced by the case of Newport, where ‘very small girls earn from six pence to sixteen pence per day’ manufacturing hats and bonnets which cost from 4s. to 26s. It was reported that ‘the most fashionable ladies of this and the adjacent counties buy and wear them, not for charity, but for their fineness and excellence’.

In the barony of Carra, linen manufacture is described as being at a ‘high degree of improvement’ whereas Clanmorris supported ‘none but the linen manufacture, which has increased’. In Gallen ‘the linen and yarn trades are here in an infant, trifling yet increasing process’. In Kilmaine, the chief manufacture is that of yarn, while ‘there are some but very few weavers’. Costello was producing large quantities of flax and yarn which were being sold as both raw material and in linens. Mc Parlan noted that the earl of Altamont was instrumental in developing linen manufacture in the barony of Murrisk, where two extensive bleach greens were at full work.⁵⁶ The manufacture of linen implies the increasing participation of ‘the poor’ in conventional economic and commercial activity. Previously, the

⁵⁵ Gordon Kennedy, ‘The Brownes of Westport House: aristocracy, politics and the exercise of power in County Mayo: 1700-1830’ (PhD thesis, St Patrick’s College, Dublin, 2010), p. 63.

⁵⁶ James Mc Parlan, *Statistical survey of County Mayo* (Dublin, 1802), p. 108.

resident gentry had provided the sole consumer base for market produce, until a significant number had become absentees.⁵⁷

Denis Browne M.P. for County Mayo, brother to Lord Altamont of Westport House, wrote to Thomas Pelham in Dublin Castle on 29 June 1796 to inform him that over 490 families had ‘taken shelter in and about Westport’. Browne was describing the arrival in Mayo of northern refugees fleeing the religious conflict centred largely around Armagh.⁵⁸ Lord Altamont wrote to Under-Secretary Edward Cooke in July 1796 to express his concern that ‘ill-intentioned persons’ had mixed with the ‘well-affected ... industrious ... [and] timid’ northern Catholics who had ‘taken refuge where the numbers of their own persuasion gave them more confidence and security’. Some of those who had fled to Connaught were later accused of orchestrating night-time assemblies which sought to make pre-emptive attacks on Protestant communities.⁵⁹

Altamont expressed his concerns that ‘plunder, religious prejudices and a wish for disturbance from disaffection to the state’ formed the basis for attacks which drove the northern Catholics from their homes. The development of linen manufacture by Altamont, a primary occupation of the northern refugees, must be considered in terms of the apprehension he expressed that those who ‘have neither interest, connection nor property’ would be lead to disturb the peace in the ‘desire for revenge’ which he predicted would follow.⁶⁰

By his own calculation, from information provided by a network of priests, Altamont estimated that almost 4,000 persons had fled to Mayo around this time.⁶¹ Ultimately, Altamont’s response to the situation was to petition the lord lieutenant on behalf of the

⁵⁷ James Little and Nuala Costello, ‘Little’s diary of the French landing’ in *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 11(1941), p. 70.

⁵⁸ NAI, RP 620/23/206. Cited in Patrick Hogan, ‘The migration of Ulster Catholics to Connaught, 1796-96 in *Seanchas Ardmhaca: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society*, ix, no. 2 (1979), p. 289.

⁵⁹ Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland ...* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1801), p. 113.

⁶⁰ Patrick Hogan, ‘The migration of Ulster Catholics to Connaught, 1796-96 in *Seanchas Ardmhaca: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society*, ix, no. 2 (1979), p. 297.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

refugees, in order to provide housing and adequate resources to integrate them into local society. It was suggested that the government should nominate a board of trustees and provide £2,000 from public funds for this purpose, in addition to £1,000 from Altamont's own accounts.⁶² Many eventually settled in a tight triangle formed by the towns of Ballina, Foxford and Crossmolina.⁶³

The Linen Board had been established in 1711 to regulate the industry and encourage growth through subsidies, sharing best practice and improving manufacturing techniques. The Board had limited success outside Ulster until later in the century, when its influence appeared to be in decline. Louis Cullen has emphasised the availability of working capital through short-term loans from Dublin as a crucial factor in the industry's expansion. By 1770, there were an estimated 1,000 looms in co. Galway producing cloth for local markets which amounted to £40,000. Often, the amount of cloth sold at markets understated the actual production as much of the cloth produced outside Ulster was sold in Dublin by the landlord or manufacturer who had acted as patron to the industry. A newspaper report from 1790, which reported on the opening of a linen hall in Ballina, stated that the industry had become 'the principle source of the wealth and independence of the county'. While this must be judged with some scepticism, it appears that linen was as likely as agricultural produce to pay rent by this time. Spinning employed women and children and a day's labour could be worth around 1d. or 2d. per day, while a labourers wage was around 6d.⁶⁴

The gentry's patronage of the linen trade outside of Ulster ensured that much of the politicisation which occurred 'from above' within that trade was absent. As was witnessed in Ballymoney, the linen trade had produced a vibrant, organic and wealthy community of merchants who developed their trade to such an extent that it began to challenge the

⁶² Ibid., p. 297.

⁶³ James Patterson, *In the wake of the great rebellion* (Manchester, 2009), p. 113.

⁶⁴ L.M. Cullen, *An economic history of Ireland since 1660* (London, 1972), pp 62-65.

established order. They operated within a strict network based on high expectations of produce and mutual interest. When radical ideals began to be articulated within this community they were quickly adopted and spread rapidly. The anti-establishment sentiment which featured prominently within that community produced ideologically driven leaders such as John Caldwell who was attentive to international politics and questioned the *modus operandi* of the state. No such network of wealthy, independent minded and politically active linen merchants existed in Killala or the wider region. Instead, a certain politicisation ‘from below’ can be observed. Denis Browne’s once sympathetic opinion of northern weavers had hardened by 1797. Writing to Thomas Pelham in Dublin Castle, after attending a secret committee in the capital, he declared ‘I know that the northern immigrants here are United Irishmen and that they are poisoning the minds of the inhabitants of this place, though I know and you probably know that they have doomed me to death, yet they shall not have me and I am proud of the distinction that implies that they think me an enemy of some consequence’.⁶⁵

James Patterson has highlighted the importance of the black market as an agent of politicisation at this time. The smuggling culture, Patterson notes, was essential in developing the region’s ‘deep-rooted alienation from the state’. Fugitive rebels were safeguarded and transported through smuggling networks after the rebellion. In one example, James Joseph MacDonnell escaped from Mayo to France by this means. Smuggling networks were said to have remained vibrant throughout the nineteenth century.⁶⁶ The significance of this economic activity is informative of local interpretations of state presence and state power. It could also serve to illustrate that the traditional society had not been participative in the conventional economy and that their daily work contained little obligation to or protection by the state. If anything, their daily endeavour operated in opposition to the state and this was likely to have been reflected in their political outlook

⁶⁵ NAI, RP 620/30/271

⁶⁶ James Patterson, *In the wake of the great rebellion* (Manchester, 2009), p. 117.

Section Two – The locality and the state

Westport House, the ancestral home of the Browne family, was the most significant seat of political power in Mayo and the wider region at this time. John Denis Browne, the 3rd earl of Altamont and first Marquess Sligo, was born in 1756 as the eldest of son of Peter Browne and Elizabeth Kelly. His younger brother, Denis Browne, entered parliament in 1782 as M.P. for County Mayo, a seat he would hold for over forty years in the parliaments of both Ireland and the United Kingdom. Denis Browne was commissioned Cornet in the 5th Royal Irish Dragoons in 1779 at the age of sixteen, securing indefinite leave three years later to pursue a career in politics.⁶⁷ In his account of Denis Browne and the politics of Westport House, Desmond McCabe suggested that Browne was regarded with some scorn in higher political circles, due to his vociferous protection of the Westport interest and a certain crudeness of character. In terms of local power, McCabe succinctly describes how ‘his influence depended less in Mayo on the intellectual or rhetorical subtleties of his person, than on the effectiveness of crude political calculation and the main force of Browne wealth’.⁶⁸ While the Brownes were considered by government and the wider establishment to be liberal ‘patriots’ with a concern for Catholic grievances, by 1796 they were acknowledged by Dublin Castle as being a solidly loyal presence in an overwhelmingly Catholic county. With the continued influx of Ulster Catholic refugees into the county during 1796 and the gradual deterioration of the national situation, the Brownes importance to government in the region markedly increased.⁶⁹

The Browne family had made the near fatal mistake of backing the wrong side in the Jacobite wars of the 1690s. The family converted to Protestantism at some point before 1720,

⁶⁷ Desmond McCabe, ‘A small expense of blood’: Denis Browne and the politics of Westport House, 1782 to 1809’ in Sheila Mulloy (ed.), *Victory or glorious defeat: biographies of participants in the Mayo rebellion of 1798* (Dublin, 2010), p. 26.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Gordon Kennedy, ‘The Brownes of Westport House: aristocracy, politics and the exercise of power in County Mayo: 1700-1830’ (PhD thesis, St Patrick’s College, Dublin, 2010), p. 61.

when John Browne (later first earl of Altamont) was baptised into the Church of Ireland.⁷⁰

The rise to political dominance of the Browne family must be understood in the context of their pragmatic, ruthless and strategic manipulation of local politics in securing national interest. At the heart of their political impetus throughout the eighteenth century lay a consistent goal of furthering the political standing and sphere of influence of Westport House and the Browne family. A large, disenfranchised Catholic interest existed in much of north Connaught, and in the opinion of Desmond McCabe, the Brownes ‘conveyed to the Catholic gentry an assurance that they could get things done on their behalf, in a markedly Protestant administrative environment, once it was understood that the asking price was political emasculation’.⁷¹

Denis Browne was elected on the recommendation of Lord Altamont in July 1782 as M.P. for Co. Mayo upon the death of their uncle, George Browne, in office. At this time, Co. Mayo was a two-seat constituency. James Cuffe was first elected as M.P. for Co. Mayo in 1768, a position which he held until the election in July 1797, when George Jackson was elected to the role until the abolition of the Irish parliament in 1801.⁷² Cuffe was the only other significant landowner who experienced an influx from Ulster onto his estate at Deel Castle, Crossmolina in northern Mayo. In addition to holding a seat in parliament for Mayo, he was a magistrate and captain of two companies of mounted yeomanry in Kilmaine and Tyrawley. He was made a Lieutenant Colonel of the North Mayo Militia in February 1797 and created Baron Tyrawley later that same year.⁷³

⁷⁰ Desmond McCabe, ‘A small expense of blood’: Denis Browne and the politics of Westport House, 1782 to 1809’ in Sheila Mulloy (ed.), *Victory or glorious defeat: biographies of participants in the Mayo rebellion of 1798* (Dublin, 2010), p. 30.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁷² ‘Appendix: Table two: Representation of Co. Mayo, 1760 – 1850’ in Sheila Mulloy (ed.), *Victory or Glorious Defeat: Biographies of Participants in the Mayo Rebellion of 1798* (Dublin, 2010), p. 306.

⁷³ Gordon Kennedy, ‘The Brownes of Westport House: aristocracy, politics and the exercise of power in County Mayo: 1700-1830’ (PhD thesis, St Patrick’s College, Dublin, 2010), p. 62.

While the Browne family fled Westport for the duration of the rebel occupation of the town, it appears from testimony taken at court martial after the rebellion that it was intended for the earl of Altamont to be held prisoner by the rebels, in a similar manner to that of Bishop Stock. Gordon Kennedy has noted that Denis Browne was only seen at the head of his yeomanry corps when the course of the rebellion had turned in favour of the government.⁷⁴ Patrick Agan, a farmer from Kinnock in county Mayo, entered the vacated Westport House declaring that he was ‘sorry lord Altamont quitted his house, that had his lordship remained, a hair of his head should not be touched, but that he had quitted his house, he should never again enter it, nor should he ever again have a foot of his estates’. Altamont would have been entitled to ‘two or three rooms of his own choosing together with grass for two or three cows and horses’. Expressing the socio-religious interpretations which coloured much of rebel conduct in the field, Agan was credited with stating that there was ‘but one god therefore there should be but one church’ and that ‘a pig sty might stand but a church should not; that a Protestant should not exist in the town of Westport’.⁷⁵ At court martial following the rebellion, Agan was convicted of acting as a rebel but acquitted of being a commander and transported to New South Wales for seven years.⁷⁶

Having investigated significant local power structures, it is necessary also to analyse the nature of state presence within the community and its functional role in terms of civic functions and community structures. By 1801, the state of education provision for the cottier class in Co. Mayo could be summarised by McParlan as ‘notwithstanding the backward situation of this county, it cannot, in point of education common to the poor of the kingdom, be said to be inferior to the other parts of it’. There were ‘common county’ schools, which generally taught to read and write, in six of Mayo’s nine baronies. These ‘county schools’

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁷⁵ NAI, RP 620/2/9/31.

⁷⁶ NAI, RP 620/2/9/33.

appear to have provided basic skills to the children of those families that were frequently described as ‘the poor’, when they were not required for labour. It can be presumed that some nominal form of payment was required from parents for children to attend these schools. In Kilmaine, this fee was either 1s. or 1s. 6d. and was determined by the progress of the children. Such fees would have made education inaccessible to the poorest sections of society. In general, these schools appear to have been geographically dispersed, along pragmatic lines and in locations where they were required. It also appears that the emphasis on reading and writing was placed largely on the English language.⁷⁷

In the baronies of Burrishoole, Clanmorris and Costello, no ‘county schools’ appear to have been in operation. In Burrishoole and Costello, the funding of education for ‘the poor’ was provided by private patronage. Mr Costello acted as private patron to the school for ‘the poor’ of his estate, whereas Rev. Mr Vesey and Sir Neal O’Donnell had provided £600 and £200 respectively for a school in Burrishoole, into which ‘children of all descriptions are admitted’. In contrast, education provision in Clanmorris was recorded as being ‘very defective’, and tellingly that ‘the common school masters are much fewer than before the rebellion’.⁷⁸ When describing the character of Killala United Irishman Randal McDonnell after the rebellion, Lord Altamont noted that he had ‘fixed himself in this county as a school teacher, and like most others that affected that calling, he was forming the minds of those around him for revolution’.⁷⁹

The provision of endowed schools in the county was noted as being quite poor in 1801, such schools being located in Murrisk and Tyrawley only. McParlan also framed his disapproval of the state of education for the ‘upper ranks’ in Mayo in the context of the

⁷⁷ James Mc Parlan, *Statistical survey of County Mayo* (Dublin, 1802), p.97.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Stephen Dunford, *When Ireland lay broken and bleeding: The Franco-Irish Campaign 1798* (Enniscrone, 2009), p. 27.

country as whole. He recorded that of schools of 40s. endowment ‘few, very few are kept in this or any other county I am acquainted with’.⁸⁰

Bishop Bellew strenuously opposed the establishment of Hibernian Society charity schools in his diocese, due to their distinctively Protestant ethos. On Sunday 7 April 1811 Francis Boland, parish priest of Kilglass, read a letter in Kilglass Chapel written by Bellew, who vowed to attend the chapel in order to

... cry down the nefarious Deistical Schools which the unrelenting enemies of our religion have dared to establish, together with all their spurious productions. Assure all parents who will persevere in permitting the growing generation to attend such places, no priest shall console or absolve them, even at the hour of their death

When Bellew attended the Chapel at Kilglass he told the congregation that if he had any of the societies books he would tear them and trample them under his feet for he would suffer ‘but a few to read his own bible, and much less the Protestant bible, because it leads them into a thousand errors’. Two Catholic teachers who worked in the charity school at Kilglass confirmed that they had ceased their employment there, at the behest of Fr. James Haran of Castleconnor.⁸¹ Bellew decreed that five shillings of all marriage fees were to be allocated to fund exclusively Catholic schools. This policy was continued by his successor, Dr Waldron.⁸²

While the provision of education was unevenly distributed across the region, a more centralised apparatus of security was in existence during this time. On 1 Jan 1781, the ‘Mayo Legion’ had paraded at Westport for the funeral of their commander, earl of Altamont, Peter Browne. The *Connacht Journal* reported that ‘they were drawn up in the lawn before his lordship’s house amounting to upwards of five hundred men... to pay the last melancholy

⁸⁰ James Mc Parlan, *Statistical Survey of County Mayo* (Dublin, 1802), p. 97.

⁸¹ Brendan Hoban, *Turbulent diocese: The Killala troubles 1798* (Dublin, 2011), p. 66.

⁸² Brendan Hoban, ‘Dominick Bellew, 1745-1812: parish priest of Dundalk and bishop of Killala’ in *Seanchas Ardmhaca: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society*, vi, no. 2(1972), p. 356.

duties to their much beloved commander'.⁸³ On 20 March 1781 the same body of men held a general meeting at Castlebar, chaired by Edmund Jordan. On this day it was 'resolved unanimously' that the Mayo Legion be dissolved and that a new corps of volunteers be established in their place. Their first resolution was to preserve the uniform and name of the Mayo Legion in the new volunteer corps. The new earl of Altamont was appointed their commander, Lord Lucan was appointed colonel, Sir Henry Lynch Blosse was appointed lieutenant colonel, Dominick Geoffrey Browne was appointed first lieutenant colonel and James Browne was appointed lieutenant colonel of the infantry.⁸⁴ The command of the 'Mayo Legion' appears to have been drawn from the Church of Ireland land-owning elite and their nominal leadership passed through the lineage of the earl of Altamont.

The functional role of the Killala Volunteers is evidenced by an incident which took place in November 1781. A Jamaican brigantine carrying a cargo of wrought iron and raw materials estimated at £20,000 ran aground at Rathfran, around 10 kilometres from Killala town. The *Freemans Journal* reported that the 'common country people' flocked to the scene and carried off most of the ship's goods, until the Killala Volunteers arrived to disperse the plunderers. A party of the regular army later joined them to protect the ship and what little of the cargo could be saved.⁸⁵ In comparison to Ballymoney, where the Volunteer corps became a political forum which challenged the practice of state power, in Killala it appeared to consolidate it.

On the day of the French landing, William Kirkwood was the only active magistrate in Killala and commanded the local yeomanry corps, which consisted entirely of Protestants. He appears to have been a landlord who resided at 'The Lodge' in Killala, a building which occupied by the French during their stay.⁸⁶ Kirkwood was also said to have been fluent in the

⁸³ NLI, MS 40,911/5(3) Westport Papers, *CJ*, 1 Jan 1781.

⁸⁴ NLI, MS 40,911/5(3) Westport Papers, *CJ*, 20 March 1781.

⁸⁵ *FJ*, 20 Nov 1781.

⁸⁶ <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/estate-show.jsp?id=744>

Irish language.⁸⁷ There appears to have been two companies of militia in Mayo, the ‘north’ and the ‘south’, raised in Mayo following the Militia Act in 1793.⁸⁸

In terms of the lines of communication that facilitated the spread of information, postal communication in the area around Killala was improved considerably with an extension of the postal network which took place in June 1786. Westport and Ballina were established as ‘post towns’ which serviced Castlebar, Foxford, Ballina and Killala three times a week with additional weekly post to Newport.⁸⁹ The goal of printed correspondence from the West of Ireland in Dublin newspapers was often to address the inaccuracies and exaggerations which accompanied the verbal communication of information. The ability to correct the oral record ensured that newspapers became a powerful and authoritative mode of disseminating information. When a Liverpool privateer docked in Killala in February 1781, nine members of the crew were sent ashore for a supply of water. When the nine men agreed to desert once in the town they were pursued by their captain, the remainder of the crew and a company of local volunteers. All but two were eventually apprehended. A letter printed in the *Freeman’s Journal* from Co. Sligo detailed the same incident, as interpreted and transmitted by verbal communication. It confirmed that reports of a stand-off between the Killala Volunteers and a twenty gun Dutch privateer were circulating in Sligo town. According to the ‘common report’, the crew of a Dutch privateer had been captured by the Volunteers when they demanded a full supply of provisions from the town. A second Dutch privateer was said to have arrived at Killala, demanding the release of the original crew under a threat of burning the town. The report was corrected by the arrival of a gentleman to Sligo from Killala, at which point a letter correcting the oral record was sent to Dublin and reprinted in the *Freeman’s Journal*.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Joseph Stock, *A narrative of what passed at Killala* (Dublin, 1800), p. 12.

⁸⁸ Ivan F. Nelson, *The Irish militia 1793 – 1892* (Dublin, 1997), pp. 109-10.

⁸⁹ *FJ*, 27 June 1786.

⁹⁰ *FJ*, 13 Feb 1781.

In his study of Irish Jacobite poetry, Breandán Ó Buachalla has highlighted the significance of a Stuart restoration as the central identified event which would address the social order. Key to this belief was an assertion that as a Stuart and a Catholic, James II was descended from the former high-kings of Ireland and denied his right to rule by the usurpation of William of Orange in 1688. Therefore, his heirs in France were the legitimate rulers of Ireland and could re-establish the ancient order. To an extent, the Stuart monarchy was ‘Gaelicised’ in the *aisling* (vision poems) which translated James III as *Séamus Óg*, Bonny Prince Charlie as *an Prionsa Óg* or *Cormac Óg*, the latter making allusion to the story of Cormac mac Airt, *the ideal King of Irish tradition*.⁹¹ A reoccurring theme of Irish Jacobite poetry identified the ‘in’ and ‘out’ relationships of Irish society – ruler/ ruled, master/ servant, foreigner/ native, Protestant/ Catholic and foretold their reversal. Such beliefs could also be manipulated as a focus and stimulus for action. As summarised by Ó Buachalla;

Although Irish Jacobite poetry - as a reflex of Jacobite ideology - was originally a conservative rhetoric imbued with the traditional values of aristocracy, hierarchy, hereditary right and social order, it was also, potentially and eventually, a radical rhetoric in that it foretold, extolled and promoted the overthrow of the existing regime. It must accordingly be counted among the factors that contributed to the politicisation of Irish Catholics.⁹²

As Guy Beiner has identified in *Remembering the year of the French*, dramatic escapes by outlaws from the military and judiciary were often reshaped into narratives that incorporated a diversity of familiar storytelling motifs, which included traditional folk and biblical influences. Beiner also recorded the prominence of Jacobite sentiment in contemporary Mayo poetry,⁹³ citing the collections made by Connacht historian and antiquarian James Hardiman (1782 – 1855) who included an extensive collection of ‘Jacobite Relics’ in his anthology of Gaelic poetry and songs.⁹⁴ That radical political discourse and revolutionary ideals could be

⁹¹ Breandán Ó Buachalla, ‘Irish jacobite poetry’ in *The Irish Review*, xii (1992), pp 40 - 49.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁹³ Guy Beiner, *Remembering the year of the French* (Wisconsin, 2007), pp 81 – 114.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

absorbed into the oral culture of north Mayo through the Jacobite rhetorical framework should be little doubted.

James Patterson has noted that in 1793, Denis Browne wrote to Dublin Castle to express his concern that shopkeepers returning from business in Dublin had formed connections with United Irishmen during their stay in the capital. Browne felt that radical ideas were spreading amongst the 'lower classes' due to the circulation of Paine's *The Rights of Man* and seditious newspapers expressing new political doctrines. Public readings of radical newspapers in Galway were also reported.⁹⁵ Networks of commerce could provide points of contact through which information was shared. Catholic shopkeepers, mechanics and servants held meetings in 'low tipping houses' in Ballina which were frequented by northern refugees. They were said to have remained in contact with Ulster through interactions with hawkers and peddlers, who acted as their emissaries.⁹⁶ In his work on the Brownes of Westport House, Gordon Kennedy placed these concerns in some context, surmising that the winter months of 1797-1798 in particular were

marked by fear and suspicion amongst the loyalist population of County Mayo. Based on recent experience, strangers were automatically perceived as United Irish missionaries and any economic or social gathering in town or village was deemed to be a 'front' hiding a seditious undertone. The Brownes were foremost in spreading this paranoia both to government and other loyalists ... The Brownes were perceived to be shrill alarmists by many observers in Mayo but their reliable antennae for danger vindicated their collective concerns.⁹⁷

Joseph Stock noted that the first wave of Irish recruits to the French force enticed their neighbours to the common cause through a mixture of intimidation and recounting prophesies.⁹⁸ The call to communal arms was consolidated by the threat of their collective doom; the welfare of the individual was subject to that of the group. Musgrave cited the

⁹⁵ James Patterson, *In the wake of the great rebellion* (Manchester, 2009), pp 110 - 111.

⁹⁶ Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland ...*, p. 120.

⁹⁷ Gordon Kennedy, 'The Brownes of Westport House: aristocracy, politics and the exercise of power in County Mayo: 1700-1830' (PhD thesis, St Patrick's College, Dublin, 2010), p. 77.

⁹⁸ Joseph Stock, *A narrative of what passed at Killala* (Dublin, 1800), p. 28.

influence of a popular report that Orangemen were planning a massacre of local Catholics. Stories of candles composed of a black substance, that could not be extinguished once lit, were circulating amongst the ‘lower orders’. The massacre was to be carried out at night and the well-advised did not to sleep in their homes. In a state of frenzied alert, an advertisement posted in Ballina by magistrates urging the falsehood of this claim was interpreted as a sign that authorities were complicit in the plan.⁹⁹ On 22 August 1798 Denis Browne wrote to Lord Cornwallis to express his concern at

Very alarming symptoms of disturbance begin to show themselves in this hitherto peaceable county – a report circulated by some incendiaries that Orangemen were about to rise and destroy the Catholics. I would think little of this in ordinary times but I am afraid of it by knowing it to have been the engine of disturbance in Leinster and Munster. There are no associations or Orangemen in Mayo [and] consequently no ground at all for this mischief. I conceive it to be a pretext for rebellion. I cannot avoid advising an increase to the military force of Mayo and a man to direct this force and the county.¹⁰⁰

Nancy Curtin has demonstrated how manipulations of the oral record were achieved in Ulster by Orangeman and United Irishman alike, through encouraging prophecies amongst the cottier classes. The French traveller De Latocnaye credited the Orangemen for circulating a prophecy of St Columba which foretold that the faithful ‘beyond the Shannon’ would prosper while war and famine ravaged Ulster. Curtin also demonstrated how United Irishmen were attentive to the preoccupations of particular communities when selecting which prophecies to encourage.¹⁰¹

The socio-political consequences of integrating Ulster migrants into north Mayo remained an object of suspicion for Richard Musgrave after the rebellion. According to Musgrave, the Ulster men were ‘perfectly well versed in all the political subjects which were then the topics of conversation’. They subscribed to newspapers and held meetings during which they were publically read. In addition, a number of ancient prophesies were circulated

⁹⁹ Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland ...* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1801), p. 119.

¹⁰⁰ NAI, RP 620/39/195.

¹⁰¹ Nancy J. Curtin, *The United Irishmen* (New York, 1998), p. 190.

foretelling impending wars and the devastation of the Catholic population.¹⁰² Reverend Little recorded that the death of two French soldiers upon their landing at Killala was concealed. Their bodies were secretly buried in response to the prophecy of a trusted old woman who predicted that the invasion would be unsuccessful as French blood had been shed on their first arrival. The bodies were uncovered in a dunghill two months later.¹⁰³ It is also worth noting that it was not until early 1799 that the houghing of cattle and theft of sheep by armed bandits became widespread in Galway and in south Mayo. Desmond McCabe suggests that this indicates ‘the exercise of political grievance against the county establishment,... in the absence of absence of protest against tithes or cess’.¹⁰⁴

Responsibility for the administration of law and the maintenance of public order at times of crisis was assumed wholly by the local gentry. The onus for families to bear the cost of educating their children ensured that many were excluded. The reaction of Bishop Bellew to the Hibernian charity schools in 1811 must be indicative of his attitude to education in his earlier career. In the absence of substantial, free, Catholic ethos-driven education his congregations should go without education in any form. This fact could also have effect of heightening the importance of parish priests as the sole tribunes of the people.

Economic changes, such as the nature of land holding and the practice of smuggling appear to form important variables in forming local attitudes towards the state. Smuggling networks appear to have been in use throughout this period.¹⁰⁵ The significance of this economic activity could be informative of local interpretations about state presence and state power. It could also serve to illustrate that they did not participate in the conventional economy and that their daily work contained little obligation to or protection by the state. If

¹⁰² Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland ...* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1801), p.111.

¹⁰³ James Little and Nuala Costello, ‘Little’s diary of the French landing’ in *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 11(1941), p. 78.

¹⁰⁴ NLI Kilmainham Papers 1135 Cited in Desmond McCabe, . ‘A Small expense of blood’: Denis Browne and the politics of Westport House, 1782 to 1809’ in Sheila Mulloy (ed.), *Victory or glorious defeat: biographies of participants in the Mayo Rebellion of 1798* (Dublin, 2010), p. 62.

¹⁰⁵ James Patterson, *In the wake of the great rebellion* (Manchester, 2009), p. 117.

anything, their daily endeavour operated in opposition to the state and this was likely to have been reflected in their political outlook.

It is difficult to argue that the existence of the state's presence within the area considered for study provided much tangible benefit for those who made the Irish 'rank and file' of the French invasion force. The state did not provide adequate personal protection, opportunity for education, provision for illness or access to employment for those who were outside its remit, nor did it make much attempt to. Too few in this region appear to have had a vested interest in maintaining the progress of the state. The state's legitimacy to govern the 'lower orders' appears to have been based largely on the monopolisation of physical force. This outcome is similar to the case in Ballymoney, where the state's right to govern was questioned on a continual basis. In Clonsilla, the pro-active organisation of local gentry 'on the ground' had gone some way to address these concerns.

Section Three: Conflict and the locality

When considering the lack of traditional agrarian disturbance in North Mayo prior to the rebellion, the subjugated state of the local peasantry must be reminded. The land –owning elite monopolised physical force through the patronage of the local yeomanry and militia corps. Where isolated incidents of agrarian unrest took place, it was soon snuffed out by the immediate and decisive action of the local gentry. One incident from over fifty years before the mass turn-out of insurgents in 1798 typifies this. In 1743 the trial of the Kellymount gang took place at the Lent Assizes for Castlebar. From their headquarters at Kellymount, County Kilkenny, the gang had gained considerable notoriety for roaming the country to plunder the homes of wealthy Protestants and maim their cattle. When they became active in Mayo, they were eventually apprehended by the military. Although only one member of the gang was found guilty, he was instantly taken from the dock and hanged.¹⁰⁶ There is no record of substantial, organised agrarian disturbance typical of the rest of Ireland in Mayo in the decades before the 1798 rebellion. When noting that no organised body of insurgents had appeared in the locality previous to the rebellion, Rev. James Little remembered one occasion when the poor assembled to oppose the levying of a parish tithe. They were immediately dispersed by Colonel King’s Volunteer troop, an ‘act of true public spirit had doubtless a beneficial effect for the subsequent tranquillity of the Country’.¹⁰⁷

Traditional societies operated in accordance with their own hierarchical structures which were not directly controlled by the state. Villages elected their own ‘kings’ which represented the community to the outside world. An engineer, prospecting for possible railway routes to an Atlantic port, described the village ‘kings’ of north-west county Mayo in the 1830s:

¹⁰⁶ Oliver Burke, *Anecdotes of the Connaught circuit* (Dublin, 1889), p.96.

¹⁰⁷ James Little and Nuala Costello, ‘Little’s diary of the French landing’ in *Analecta Hibernica*, no.11(1941), p. 69.

There was a headman, or king, appointed in each village, who is deputed to cast lots every third year, and to arrange with the community what work is to be done during the year in fencing, or probably reclaiming a new piece, (though, for obvious reasons, this is rare,) or for setting the "bin", as it is called; that is, the number of heads of cattle of each kind, and for each man, that is to put on the farm for the ensuing year, according to its stock of grass or pasture; -the appointment of a herdsman also for the whole village cattle, if each person does not take the office on himself by rotation, -a thing not unfrequent. The king takes care generally to have the rent collected, applots the proportion of taxes with the other elders of the village; for all is done in a patriarchal way, coram populo. He is generally the adviser of consuler of the villagers, their spokesman on any matters connected with the village. He finds his way to the 'kingly station' by imperceptible degrees, and by increasing mutual assent, as the old king dies off.¹⁰⁸

A contemporary model of self-governance and regulation within an economic community is provided by the fishermen of Claddagh, a large fishing village located on the outskirts of Galway. This tightly-knit community, bound in mutual economic interest, elected their own king (*an Rí*) to regulate internal custom and represent the community to the outside world. They also exemplified the response of a traditional society of shared interest to external influences which sought to regulate, control and profit from their established customs and livelihood. Samuel Lewis (1837) described the custom attached to the Claddagh government in composition and ritual;

The fishermen elect from among themselves, annually on St. John's day, officers whom they call a mayor and sheriffs, when they march in procession through the town of Galway, preceded by men carrying bundles of reeds fastened to the ends of poles, to which at night they set fire from numerous bonfires kindled in various parts of the town. To these officers they pay implicit obedience, and in all things submit to their authority; the only official distinction used by the mayor is the white sail of his boat and a flag at the mast head. The time of fishing is indicated by the approach of sea fowl and other unfailing signs; the fleet then assemble and stand out to sea by signal from the mayor, who also regulates the time for setting the nets, which at first is done simultaneously, after which each boat is allowed to fish at pleasure. The fishermen claim and exercise an exclusive right to fish in the bay, according to their own laws, any infringement of which is punished by the destruction of the nets, or even the boats, of the offending party.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ C. Ó Danachair 'An Rí, the king: an example of traditional social organisation' in *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, cxi (1981), pp. 14-28.

¹⁰⁹ Samuel Lewis, *A topographical dictionary of Ireland* (3 vols, London, 1837), i, p. 327. Cited in C. Ó Danachair 'An Rí, the king: an example of traditional social organisation' in *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, cxi (1981), pp 14-28.

At some point around 1820, this traditional form of regulation, governance and work practice was compromised by the exertions of several gentlemen in Galway, who formed a company and invested in boats, nets and materials to establish formal control of the industry. Their actions met with predictable acts of violence and defiance from the Claddagh fishermen, who attacked the company's boats, destroying their nets and sails and injuring company employees. The gentlemen of the company brought their dilemma to the attention of government and a gun-brig was stationed in the bay for several years for their protection.¹¹⁰ Once the gun-brig was removed, however, Lewis recorded that the Claddagh fishermen regained control of the bay and continued to 'exercise an uncontrolled power of preventing others from fishing in the bay in opposition to their peculiar regulations'.¹¹¹ This community model appears to have disintegrated over the course of the nineteenth century. By 1883, the traditional custom was described to an anonymous traveller in the past tense and by 1898 the last surviving *Rí* was living in the poorhouse.¹¹²

In his study of *an Rí* as an example of traditional social organisation, Caoimhín Ó Danachair notes that

As to the qualities desired in the King we are not left in doubt. Stature, strength, comeliness of person are mentioned, as are justice, wisdom and knowledge. Literary attainment is desirable; a good talker, a good storyteller, knowledge of two languages, the ability to read and write, all of these were laudable in the King. A degree of economic well-being or independence was also thought fitting. He had very positive and definite functions. The regulation, division and apportioning of fishing and shore rights and the allotment of tillage and pasture land was left to him, and in some cases he appointed subsidiary officers such as herdsmen.

He was expected to maintain traditional laws, to adjudicate in disputes and quarrels, to receive complaints and to advise in time of trouble, and it appears that there was willing submission to his decisions and rulings, while, in some instances, we are specifically told that he punished wrongdoers. He was expected to speak for his community in their relations with

¹¹⁰ Hardiman, J. A. *The English in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*. (3 vols, London, 1872), pp. 302-6. Cited in C. Ó Danachair 'An Rí, the king: an example of traditional social organisation' in *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, cxi(1981), pp 14-28.

¹¹¹ Samuel Lewis, *A topographical dictionary of Ireland Vol. 1* (London, 1837), p. 327. Cited in C. Ó Danachair 'An Rí, the king: an example of traditional social organisation' in *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, cxi (1981), pp 14-28.

¹¹² C. Ó Danachair 'An Rí, the king: an example of traditional social organisation' in *R.S.A.I. Jn.*, cxi (1981), pp 14-28.

outside authority.

It is clear, then, that in the 18th and 19th centuries some small communities, entirely independently of the central government of the country, selected local leaders -usually known as *an Rí* who had very definite and very necessary powers and functions.¹¹³

The position of *an Rí* can be seen, therefore, as an important buffer between the traditional, largely unchanged local society of the cottier class and the modernising impetus of the state and its political structures. Often, *an Rí* would have been the head of an ancient landowning family. The patriarchal nature of the role should not be underestimated as the exemplary model of familial and social organisation. Although, E.P. Thompson's opinion on the limitations of terming a concentration of economic and cultural authority as 'paternalism' is equally applicable in this case, noting that 'it tells us little about the nature of power and of the state; about forms of property ownership; about ideology and culture; and it is even too blunt to distinguish between modes of exploitation, between slave and free labour',¹¹⁴ it can, however 'be a profoundly important component not only of ideology but of the actual institutional mediation of social relations.'¹¹⁵

The expectation that *an Rí* be literate in both English and Irish reflected their obligation to represent the local community when dealing with outside authority. Through the medium of *an Rí*, the traditional society became a functioning entity within the modern state in which contact between the officers of state and the individual was kept to a minimum. To a large extent, the legitimacy of *an Rí* to hold a position of authority within their own community became dependent on the actual functions of the state as the separate societies evolved in parallel to one another.

The patriarchal aspect of social cohesion amongst the cottier class is further evidenced by an incident which took place near Killala in July 1778. A recently remarried widow named

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp 14-28.

¹¹⁴ E.P. Thompson, *Customs in common* (New York, 1993), p.21.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.24.

Sibby Gallagher had murdered her six year old child, as her new husband had refused to admit the child to his house. The body had been left on a nearby strand in the hope that it would be taken out to sea. Daniel Fallon, a Justice of the Peace for co. Mayo, discovered the body on his land and the woman was apprehended and lodged in Castlebar Gaol. The husband had fled and was the target of an extensive search party.¹¹⁶

Conflicts of ideology and interpretation in the community were likely to be influenced by such local factors. In the isolated and self-contained world of north Mayo, it is difficult to assess the accuracy of local interpretations of contemporary political events in Ireland and Europe. As is evidenced by the patrimony of the Browne family, political power on a national level was exercised to strengthen the dominance of Westport House over local affairs. As recent converts to the established religion, the Brownes appear to have presented the acceptable face of College Green to the wider sphere of influence. As ideological debates raged in cities and large towns in Ireland, and improving literacy fuelled inflammatory pamphlets and seditious newspapers, oral cultures absorbed these influences and placed them in a framework that was consistent with the values and concerns of their societies. The extent to which this occurred in north Mayo will be considered in this section. It is also necessary to place the traditional communities in the context of the economic changes which were effecting their establish mode of life. The increasing commercialisation of agriculture carried with it increasing participation in a conventional, market based economy. Survival through subsistence farming alone was becoming an increasingly impossible task.

James Patterson's recent work, *In the wake of the Great Rebellion* suggests S.J. Connolly's view that the 1798 rebellion in Connacht represented the dying kick from 'traditional Ireland', as represented by the caste of middle-man farmers, over simplified a highly complex political and social situation. Connolly's assertion that loyalties to religion

¹¹⁶ FJ, 21 July 1778.

and dynasty, the historic French alliance and the Jacobite cause influenced rebellion to a greater extent than enlightenment ideals or the French revolution is dismissed by Patterson, who proposes a more comprehensive framework for consideration. Pointing to;

a prior politicisation by the Defenders and the United Irishmen, which was in turn shaped by pre-existing regionally specific socio-economic and cultural factors...

The existence of an underground Catholic gentry with long term connections to the continent, ... a pervasive smuggling culture... [and] traditional agrarian dissent, ... focused [an] anti state mentalité ...[which] can only then be understood when placed in the wider context of the Atlantic revolutions.¹¹⁷

Patterson is also keen to highlight the ideological influence of the northern weavers who arrived in Mayo following the wave of sectarian violence in Ulster. He notes that a ‘rapid expansion’ of Defenderism in Galway and Mayo coincided with their arrival in 1795 and that it was ‘highly probable that a large, if indeterminate percentage of the people’ who participated in the rebellion were drawn from the refugee’s colony. Such people were unlikely to have been encouraged by the same generational allegiance to dynasty and patrimony as their Mayo comrades.¹¹⁸

If different motivations can be said to have encouraged the newly arrived refugees to take part in the rebellion, the points of similarity upon which bonds were formed must also be considered. It is highly likely that the majority of the Ulster refugees were English speaking, unlike most of those who resided in their new homeland.¹¹⁹ Indeed, when insurrection did break out Richard Musgrave recorded that the northern refugees formed a separate corps to their Mayo compatriots in the rebel army.¹²⁰ The initial concerns of Lord Altamont to settle the newly arrived refugees in the locality by encouraging the linen industry suggests an economic interest through which the displaced could be given a vested interest in the local

¹¹⁷ James Patterson, *In the wake of the great rebellion* (Manchester, 2009), p. 111.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

¹¹⁹ Brendan Hoban, ‘Dominick Bellew, 1745-1812: parish priest of Dundalk and bishop of Killala’ in *Seanchas Ardmhaca: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society*, vi, no. 2(1972), p. 356.

¹²⁰ Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland ...* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1801), p.114.

economy and society. In comparison to Ulster, this was an industry that was in its infancy in Connacht and the network of markets necessary to profit from this trade was underdeveloped.¹²¹

The Armagh expulsions could also be interpreted as a form of factional economic dispute, as expressed through sectarian violence. Weaving was a shared economic activity across the religious divide in Armagh and looms and work materials were a primary target for the Peep O' Day boys when attacking the homes of their Catholic counterparts.¹²² The hysteria surrounding the rumoured arrival of the Orangemen in Mayo prior to the French landing at Killala was likely to have been influenced by this experience. The refugees would have shared a Roman Catholic faith with those who they encountered in Mayo, albeit one that may have varied in practice and local interpretation. The most likely alliance to have been formed with the newly arrived refugees was in opposition to the Orange 'threat'. As interpreted by a traditional *motif* in the local society, the threat of dispossession by force would have been quickly absorbed into the conscience of the locality and empathy towards the dispossessed would have been a natural reaction. In the days following the French landing, a newly constructed Presbyterian meeting house between Killala and Ballina was destroyed as Orangeman prophesies were circulated in the locality.¹²³

Reverend James Little of Lacken, a vicarage in the diocese of Killala, kept a diary detailing the experience of his family during the course of the French occupation. He returned to the work in the aftermath of the invasion, adding the finishing touches to the work while his half-standing house was being rebuilt around him. Evidently learned and well-read, Little struggled to apply a scholarly, philosophical logic to what had occurred in his locality. His previous illusions shattered, he remained perplexed that he could little understand the

¹²¹ James Little and Nuala Costello, 'Little's diary of the French landing' in *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 11 (1941), p. 70.

¹²² Ian McBride, *Eighteenth century Ireland* (Dublin, 2009), pp 413 - 418.

¹²³ Joseph Stock, *A narrative of what passed at Killala* (Dublin, 1800), p. 101.

motivations which encouraged so many to take up arms with the French. Nor could he appreciate how the inequity which attended his own social standing had contributed to it. He was aware of his limitations to do so, however, and by his own admission he lived a recluse life, paid little attention to ‘common reports’ and could not speak the Irish language, ‘without which’ he confessed ‘no one can know the country’.¹²⁴ The result of his social remove is a primary account which bears eye witness to the invasion yet remains noticeably detached from events.

In drawing parallels with the experience of the French Revolution, Little asserts that it was not public distress which instigated that event, as the populous had never been so little oppressed and the wealthiest districts were responsible for fostering sedition and rebellion. North Mayo had been spared much of the agrarian violence which had occurred in regions across Ireland, not because the ‘lower orders’ had been materially comfortable and well provided for but because they had never known any different. Instead, the subjugated condition of the Mayo peasantry had formed the basis of social stability; poverty, Little noted, ‘had been their birthright’. During the embargo of the American War, Little saw cattle recovered for unpaid rent and witnessed extreme poverty in the region with little disruption to his own position. When a change of economic circumstances appeared to bring tangible financial benefits to a class that he observed to have existed in a plateau of poverty, Little pondered;

yet such is the insatiable nature of man, that it is a problem beyond my ability to solve, whether a certain alleviation of that poverty which took place for some time previous to the invasion had not upon them the same effect of invigorating their patriotism, ... Whether the amelioration of their circumstances, which ought to have produced a sentiment of benignity and affection for the government and order of things whence it was derived, had not the opposite effect, for Machiavelli has too truly observed, that man is ungrateful...¹²⁵

¹²⁴ James Little and Nuala Costello, ‘Little’s diary of the French landing’ in *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 11 (1941), p. 70.

¹²⁵ James Little and Nuala Costello, ‘Little’s diary of the French landing’ in *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 11 (1941), p. 73.

Little's detachment from the society that he observed, that his scholarly and socially privileged position affords, lie at the heart of his assessments. That is not to say that they would have been deemed inaccurate or unpopular amongst his peers, or that they fail to acutely observe the appearance of a newly altered social landscape. Nor can he be said to have been without social conscience: Musgrave recorded that he had purchased basic medicines for the relief of the poor at his own expense.¹²⁶

Little observed that agricultural and economic improvements had taken hold; the exportation of grain and potatoes was creating more private wealth, an influx of people to the towns had created more demand for produce and linen manufacture was creating a new source of paid employment. Due to the change in favourable circumstances, Little estimated that the price of land had doubled before leases had expired to take this into account; thus allowing those who were *in situ* before this rapid commercialisation took place to take advantage. One ill-effect which he observed of the newly emerging commercial economy was the move to self-indulgence, typified by the growth of clandestine distilleries, 'which produced here as in every other place, money, profligacy, sedition and rebellion'.¹²⁷

Little had failed to recognise the social rupture which had taken place within the society he professed considerable ignorance of. The influx of people to the towns from the countryside represented those who were being squeezed from the land, as the commercialisation of agriculture and the 'big farmers' took hold. Lease speculators operated most ruthlessly where market prices were expected to continue rising. The need to maximise profits from acquired land was immediate, the social consequence of doing so could be little considered. The rise of the 'big farmers', which coincided with the demise of the traditional 'middle-man' caste, brought with it a sharp jump in subtenant's rents, an expansion of

¹²⁶ Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland ...* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1801), p. 125.

¹²⁷ James Little and Nuala Costello, 'Little's diary of the French landing' in *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 11 (1941), pp 69 – 75.

commercial cattle farming and the privatisation of common ground previously available to the 'lower orders' for grazing. As a result, the most vulnerable sections of local society were forced to cope with the ill-effects of full commercialisation while the 'big farmers' acquired land, money and social standing.¹²⁸

Distinctions must be recognised between the intentions, motivations and financial clout of the emerging 'big farmer' class. Contemporary reformers viewed them as a vital component in the improvement of Irish agriculture. Ireland was often accused of having no substantial middle class and the elevation of such was cited as a necessary tool in the dismantling of the 'middle-man' caste; a faux gentility whose lavish lifestyles and private debts were draining the economy of its potential. The granting of shorter leases by landlords was a key element of this strategy as it necessitated contact between those who actually lived on their lands, at the increase of a landlord's control, income and workload. Nationally, David Dickson has estimated that farmers earning between £5 and £20 per annum formed around 30 per cent of the population by the 1790s. A growing constituency, they earned more than all but 11 per cent of elite incomes enjoyed by gentlemen, middlemen, merchants, professionals and manufacturers.¹²⁹

Kevin Whelan has identified economic change as an important vehicle for the emergence of violent agrarian groups in late eighteenth century Ireland like the Whiteboys and Rightboys. Their emergence coincided with an increasing gulf between wealthy Catholics and their poorer co-religionists, which became evident in the quality and decoration of homes and properties. Whelan noted that agrarian groups sought 'a return to the days when the moral economy blunted the impact of the real one'. Increasing wealth encouraged a

¹²⁸ Kevin Whelan, 'An underground gentry? Catholic middlemen in eighteenth-century Ireland' in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, x, (1995), p. 34.

¹²⁹ David Dickson, *New foundations: Ireland 1660 - 1800* (Dublin, 2004), ch.4. Cited in Ian McBride, *Eighteenth Century Ireland* (Dublin, 2009), p. 125.

cultural disengagement with the traditional society, the Irish language and the established modes of commerce.¹³⁰

In the context of north Mayo, it must be considered how economic change may have provided a basis for politicisation where this had not traditionally taken place. The apartness of the two religions ensured that religious expression could be interpreted as political act or the basis of socio-political agitation. In the absence of traditional agrarian dissent, alternative forms of social organisation must be considered as contributory factors in the mass turn-out of rebels who joined the Franco-Irish army in August 1798.

Reverend James Little was suspicious of the activities of Catholic associations like the Carmelites and those who carried scapulars, if not for their overtly seditious nature then for the actual effect of their assembly. In his opinion ‘such a religious association among a corrupt populace is always an immoral combination, because its nature is to refer all its obligations to the sentiments and to the practice of their own community as the standard of right and wrong’. He feared the internal regulation which would underpin the values and ideologies of ‘lower order’ assemblies, so imbued with the righteousness of his own delusions he was aghast to consider any others. He had little doubt, however, that self-advancement motivated more to participate in such organisations than any zeal for religion or interest in maintaining public well-being.¹³¹ While the exact affairs of these local organisations are impossible to trace, hierarchical structures were formed according to an earned or established social order. In accordance with much social organisation at this time, a patriarchal structure can be presumed.

Musgrave provided details on a group of friars in Ballina, who formed an association similar in composition to that described by Little. A ceremonial initiation took place, during

¹³⁰ Kevin Whelan, ‘An underground gentry? Catholic middlemen in eighteenth-century Ireland’ in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, x, (1995), p.34.

¹³¹ James Little and Nuala Costello, ‘Little’s Diary of the French Landing’ in *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 11 (1941), p. 65.

which the inductee received a square piece of brown cloth inscribed with the letters IHS, which was known as a scapular. It was hung around the neck and held next to the skin on the shoulder. The price of initiation was one shilling to the poorest class, rising in accordance with the financial clout of the inductee. The scapulars were made of asbestos and did not burn when exposed to fire. This was interpreted as sign of their supernatural power to protect the wearer of earthly and spiritual danger. They were often sold at fairs and markets and a shop reportedly opened to sell scapulars to rebels after the French landing.¹³² When the French invasion fleet advanced on Killala, they were met by local cottiers wearing scapulars that fell at their feet and prayed for their success.¹³³

In terms of traditional agrarian dissent, it was not until early 1799 that the houghing of cattle and theft of sheep by armed bandits became widespread in Galway and in south Mayo. Desmond McCabe suggests that this indicates ‘the exercise of political grievance against the county establishment,... in the absence of absence of protest against tithes or cess’.¹³⁴ The fact that traditional forms of agrarian dissent did not take place until after the rebellion is worthy of note.

¹³² Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland...*, p. 116.

¹³³ Jean Jobit and Nuala Costello, ‘Journal de l’expédition d’Irlande’ in *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 11 (1941), p. 16.

¹³⁴ NLI, Kilmainham Papers 1135 Cited in Desmond McCabe, . ‘A small expense of blood’: Denis Browne and the politics of Westport House, 1782 to 1809’ in Sheila Mulloy (ed.), *Victory or glorious defeat: biographies of participants in the Mayo Rebellion of 1798* (Dublin, 2010), p. 62.

Section Four: Local experience of the 1798 Rebellion

On 4 August 1798 two frigates of 44 guns 18 pounders, and one of 38 carrying 12 pounders, a force of 1030 men and 70 officers, the whole under the command of Gen. Jean Joseph Amable Humbert, departed La Rochelle. Humbert was born in 1767 to a merchant family in Saint-Nabord in Les Hautes Vosges. An ardent supporter of the Revolution, he joined the local National Guard unit on 1 April 1792 and enrolled as a volunteer in the 13th battalion of Les Vosges.¹³⁵ He quickly rose through the ranks and was a veteran of the war in La Vendee. He was second in command in the expedition of Gen. Hoche to Bantry Bay in December 1796.¹³⁶

John Paul Bertaud, using surviving records in the French War Archives in Vincennes, estimates that 934 soldiers and sixty officers set sail for Ireland. The mean age of the expedition force was twenty six; only 1.2 per cent was under twenty years of age, 38.6 per cent was aged from twenty to twenty four and 60 per cent were under thirty. They were an experienced troop; 54 per cent had five or more year's military experience, 10 per cent had seen service with the former royal army. Only thirty soldiers had never been in battle. Of the officer class, 50 per cent had served in the royal army and over half were described as 'being of good quality and character'.¹³⁷

The French expedition reached the Mayo coast on 22 August 1798 under an English standard and was escorted to Kilcummin Bay. Large crowds of spectators gathered on the cliffs and the headland close by Kilcummin, as word quickly spread throughout the vicinity announcing the arrival of the ships.¹³⁸ One of the small craft which came alongside the supposedly 'English' ships had on board a British officer, Lieutenant John Trevor James, of

¹³⁵ John Paul Bertaud, 'Forgotten soldiers; the expedition of General Humbert to Ireland in 1798' in Hugh Gough and David Dickson (eds.), *Ireland and the French Revolution* (Dublin, 1990), p. 220.

¹³⁶ Joseph Stock, *A narrative of what passed at Killala* (Dublin, 1800), p 3.

¹³⁷ John Paul Bertaud, 'Forgotten soldiers; the expedition of General Humbert to Ireland in 1798' in Hugh Gough and David Dickson (eds.), *Ireland and the French Revolution* (Dublin, 1990), p. 220.

¹³⁸ Richard Hayes, *The last Invasion of Ireland* (Dublin, 1939), p. 12.

the Prince of Wales Fencibles. According to contemporary reports, the officer had been making his way from Sligo to Killala where he was to take command of the garrison. Discovering that he had about two hours to spare before he was expected at his destination, he decided to spend this time fishing. Assuming that the frigates were manned by his own countrymen, he had come to offer his catch of fresh fish to the naval officers. As his boat came alongside the frigates it was hailed, first in English, then French, before the surprised occupants were taken on board at musket point and the craft seized.¹³⁹

A meeting of the united dioceses of Killalla and Achonry was to be held at Killalla on Thursday 23 August. As the town did not have a suitable inn to accommodate guests, the bishop usually provided room and board for clergymen who travelled in from outlying areas. A small party of clergy had just finished dining at the castle, in company with two officers of the carabineers, quartered at Ballina, when a terrified messenger entered the room with news of the French landing. Three hundred soldiers were reported to be within a mile of the town. The cavalry officers departed immediately to convey the intelligence to Ballina.¹⁴⁰

The military presence in the town consisted of around fifty members of the Prince of Wales Fencibles and local yeomanry. Their commander, Mr Kirkwood, was taken prisoner and two of their unit were killed by the advancing French troop. They made prisoners of Captain Sills and his troop of Fencibles in the courtyard of the castle, where they called for the bishop and announced their intentions.¹⁴¹ Lieutenant Sills was obliged to surrender to General Humbert, who sent him to France. Joseph Stock, Church of Ireland bishop of Killala, believed that this distinction was made as Sills was an Englishman, and the expulsion of English influence from Ireland was central to the French ideological mission. He believed Humbert intended to discriminate English from Irish to provide a local context to interpret

¹³⁹ Stephen Dunford, *When Ireland lay broken and bleeding: The Franco-Irish campaign 1798* (Enniscrone, 2009), p. 30.

¹⁴⁰ Joseph Stock, *A narrative of what passed at Killala* (Dublin, 1800), p 6.

¹⁴¹ Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland ...* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1801), p.127.

‘the valuable gift of liberty’. Humbert was keen to alleviate any concerns Stock may have for his personal safety, the security of his property or the politeness of French conduct, as ‘all his people should be treated with respectful attention, and nothing should be taken by the French troops except what was absolutely necessary for their support’.¹⁴²

By this time, word of the French landing was spreading across the region. Richard Hayes quotes a contemporary anonymous letter writer, who told how ‘on the 22nd of August, as we were going to bed, a Yeoman of Ballina rode through Foxford shouting why are going to bed and the French at Killala? Some mocked and others cursed him, but I persuaded the men to arise, arm themselves and not doubt it’.¹⁴³

Humbert ordered the bishop to place all the horses and cattle in his possession, both in Killala and the surrounding countryside, at the disposal of the French, and to impart any information he had concerning the whereabouts and location of other available horses in the district. This order was to be acted upon with immediate effect. While the necessities of war compelled him to requisition horses, cattle, and other supplies, Humbert informed the assembled gathering that he intended to compensate all the owners for these requisitions. Those who had items or livestock commandeered were to be issued vouchers, or promissory notes, in exchange for their property, which once the Irish Directory was established in Connacht could be exchanged for cash. The French then took possession of the house.¹⁴⁴ Stock was said to have urged loyalists to accept the vouchers as proof of losses incurred.

When it became clear the next morning that Stock had not complied with these orders, Humbert flew into a rage and held a pistol to the head of the bishop’s son. He also threatened to convey Stock to France as punishment for his defiance; a threat which was almost carried

¹⁴² Joseph Stock, *A narrative of what passed at Killala* (Dublin, 1800), p 8.

¹⁴³ Richard Hayes, *The last invasion of Ireland* (Dublin, 1939), p. 25.

¹⁴⁴ Stephen Dunford, *When Ireland lay broken and bleeding: The Franco-Irish Campaign 1798* (Enniscrone, 2009), p. 41.

out. Humbert came to his senses and later apologised to Stock in the presence of his men, who informed the bishop that their commander was a hasty, but good natured man.¹⁴⁵

The proclamation issued by Humbert on that morning read;

Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, Union! Irishmen,
You have not forgot Bantry Bay. You know what efforts France has made to assist you. Her affections for you, her desire for avenging your wrongs and assuring your independence can never be impaired. After several unsuccessful attempts, behold Frenchmen arrived amongst you. They come to support your courage, to share your dangers, to join their arms and to mix their blood with yours in the sacred cause of liberty. They are the forerunners of other Frenchmen, whom you shall soon enfold in your arms.
Brave Irishmen, our cause is common. Like you we abhor the avaricious and blood-thirsty policy of an oppressive government. Like you we hold as indefeasible the right of all nations to liberty. Like you we are persuaded that the peace of the world shall ever be troubled as long as the British ministry is suffered to make with a traffic of the industry, labour and blood of the people.

But exclusive of the same interests which unite us, we have powerful motives to love and defend you.

Have we not been the pretext of the cruelty exercised against you by the Cabinet of St James? The heart-felt interest you have shown for the grand events of our revolution, has it not been imputed to you as a crime? Are not tortures and death continually hanging over such of you as are barely suspected of being our friends?

Let us unite then and march to glory.

We swear the most inviolable respect for your properties, your laws and all your religious opinions. Be free, be masters in your own country. We look for no other conquest than that of your Liberty, no other success than yours.

The moment of breaking your chains is arrived. Our triumphant troops are now flying to the extremities of the earth to tear up the roots of wealth and tyranny of our enemies. That frightful colossus is mouldering away in every part. Can there be any Irishman base enough to separate himself in such a happy conjecture from the grand interests of his country. If such there be, brave friends, let him be chased from the country who know how to fight and die. Irishmen, recollect the late defeats which your enemies have experienced from the French; recollect the plains of Honscoote, Toulon, Quiberon and Ostende; recollect America, free from the moment she wished to be so. The contest between you and your oppressors cannot be long.

Union, Liberty, The Irish Republic. Such is our shout. Let us march. Our hearts are devoted to you; our glory is in your happiness.¹⁴⁶

By now the bishop's palace had been converted to a bustling military headquarters.

Around three hundred French soldiers were billeted at the lower part of the house, including

¹⁴⁵ Joseph Stock, *A narrative of what passed at Killala* (Dublin, 1800), p 24.

¹⁴⁶ Stephen Dunford, *When Ireland lay broken and bleeding: The Franco-Irish Campaign 1798* (Enniscrone, 2009), p. 43.

the courtyard and offices. The drawing room served as a makeshift prison to the local yeomanry. The remainder of the house was occupied by the bishop's wife and their eleven children, Stock's sister-in-law, Mrs. Cope, their private tutor Rev. James Burrows, a young nephew of his, two of the four clergymen who had dined there the previous night, the dean of Killala, Rev. Thomas Thompson, his children and pregnant wife, the wounded Rev. Thomas Ellison, Rev. Marshall, the Presbyterian minister of nearby Mullaghfarry, the Rev. Robert Nixon, curate of the Parish of Killala, the Rev. James Little of Lacken and thirteen servants. An account contained in Stock's diary provides further details of this;

The attic story, containing a library and three bed-chambers, continued sacred to the bishop and his family. And so scrupulous was the delicacy of the French not to disturb the female part of the house, that not one of them was ever seen to go higher than the middle floor, except on the evening of their success at Castlebar, when two officers begged leave just to carry to the family the news of the battle, and seemed a little mortified that the intelligence was received with an air of dissatisfaction.¹⁴⁷

Stock also provided a telling account of the unusual circumstance in which loyalists within the castle found themselves. The overwhelming momentum of events led to mixture of emotions and concerns, typified by the experience of watching the new recruits, said to number up to 5,000 men,¹⁴⁸ flock to the castle to be prepared for active service;

It was impossible for a spectator of their actions not to pity them for their very simplicity. It was such, that even the serious situation in which we were placed was frequently insufficient to repress our laughter at it. The coxcombrity of the young clowns in their new dress; the mixture of good-humour and contempt in the countenances of the French, employed in making puppies of them; the haste of the undressed to be as fine as their neighbours, casting away their old clothes long before it came to their turn to receive the new; above all, the merry activity of a handsome young fellow, a marine officer, whose business it was to consummate the vanity of the recruits by decorating them with helmets, beautifully edged with spotted brown paper to look like leopard's skin, a task which he performed standing on a powder barrel, and making the helmet fit any skull, even the largest, by thumping it down with his fists, careless whether it could ever be taken off again—these were circumstances that would have made you smile, though you had been just come from seeing your house in flames.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Joseph Stock, *A narrative of what passed at Killala* (Dublin, 1800) , p 18.

¹⁴⁸ John Cooney, 'Humbert: A French general in rural Ireland' in Sheila Mulloy (ed.), *Victory or glorious defeat: biographies of participants in the Mayo Rebellion of 1798* (Dublin, 2010), p. 14.

¹⁴⁹ Joseph Stock, *A narrative of what passed at Killala* (Dublin, 1800) , p 30.

On the morning of 24 August a small detachment marched from Killala to Ballina and came under attack from a party of carabineers and yeoman infantry, commanded by Major Kerr. The reinforced loyalist troops advanced on Killala later that evening but were forced back after a skirmish with the French, during which the Rev. Fortescue, rector of Ballina and nephew of the earl of Clermont, was mortally wounded by a ball to his groin.

Following the capture of Ballina by a French detachment, a small party advanced towards the town from Killala ahead of the main force. Richard Hayes collected an oral account from an elderly local resident whose grandfather had witnessed the French invasion, noting that

The French were not sure of the road ...and it was very dark and they were stumbling and halting. Some of the people here were afraid that the foreign soldiers would kill them, but after a while they all came out and lighted straw and hay to show them the road. The women stood at the doors with the children in their arms and they gave milk and bread to the Frenchmen. And the children pulled at the shiny buttons in the soldiers coats and began crying to get them. The sogers with their bayonet's cut off the buttons and gave them to the children. And the buttons were kept in some of the houses here till a few years ago but I haven't seen one now for a long time. There was one Myles Ford living here then, and he brought the straw mattress he had for a bed and lighted it to a great blaze to show them the way. And up to the day he died, and he lived to be an old man, he was known by no other name then Mylie French.¹⁵⁰

On Sunday 26 August the French marched towards Ballina with the newly armed and clothed Irish rebels. Around two hundred privates and six officers had been left in Killala to police the area and protecting their large store of ammunition. They brought five hostages with them in exchange for the French officers who remained at Killala. These five were Edwin Stock, John Knox, Esq. of Bartrach, Thomas Kirkwood, lieutenant of Tyrawley cavalry, James Rutledge, custom-house officer, and the curate Rev. Nixon. Humbert freed the hostages once he arrived in Ballina, from where he departed for Castlebar. He left his officer

¹⁵⁰ Richard Hayes, *The last invasion of Ireland* (Dublin, 1939), p. 27.

Truc to hold Ballina, with a party of a few French and Irish rebels at his command. The hostages were kept in Ballina overnight before returning to Killala in the morning.¹⁵¹

Upon entering Ballina, the Franco-Irish army came upon the lifeless body of a man named Walsh, who had been sworn as a United Irishman the previous day. He had been hanged by the King's troop before they left Ballina, having been found recruiting for the French with a commission in his pocket. Much public ceremony had surrounded this discovery and the French officers gave his body the 'fraternal embrace', before carrying it off to the Catholic chapel where it lay in state.¹⁵²

The French force that remained in Killala was commanded by lieutenant-colonel Charost, whose key duties were to safeguard the ammunition stored at the castle and to police the area. The ammunition was said to have amounted to 280 barrels of 100 pounds of gun powder.¹⁵³ Stock described Charost as a 'man of sense and honour' and felt fortunate for his appointment as town commander, recording;

it would be an act of great injustice to the excellent discipline constantly maintained by these invaders while they remained in our town, not to remark, that with every temptation to plunder, which the time, and the number of valuable articles within their reach, presented to them' from a sideboard of plate and glasses, a hall filled with hats, whips, and great coats, as well of the guests as of the family, not a single particular of private property was found to have been carried away.¹⁵⁴

Nonetheless, the strain on the bishop's resources of hosting the French was considerable. As they sought to requisition no necessities from the poor, Stock and the wealthiest class of inhabitants bore the full brunt of providing for an army in the field;

Though the enemy took away nothing with them, when they moved, but what was necessary for their operations in the field, yet that necessity was found to comprehend the best part of what the country possessed, whether of stock or victuals. The bishop's larder and cellar both plentifully stored at that season, scarcely sufficed for three days. Everything that he had in the fields disappeared: corn, potatoes, cattle were all wanted, and taken from him, before anything was touched that belonged to the poor. Of his kitchen grate, so incessant use was made from early morning even to midnight, that the chimney was on fire more than once, and

¹⁵¹ Joseph Stock, *A narrative of what passed at Killala* (Dublin, 1800), p. 41.

¹⁵² Richard Hayes, *The last invasion of Ireland* (Dublin, 1939), pp 29-30.

¹⁵³ Joseph Stock, *A narrative of what passed at Killala* (Dublin, 1800), p. 44.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

in the middle of summer above thirty ton of coals lasted only one month. His stables yielded nine horses of his own (most of them good ones) with proper furniture; and his guests contributed about half a dozen more. The coach-house was stripped of nothing but harness,¹⁵⁵

Once the French had departed Killala, Captain Grey arrived in the town under a flag of truce to enquire after a wounded British officer, possibly Fortescue. While in the castle he took note of the size of the Franco-Irish army and urged the loyalists who were resident there that a government troop of four times their number awaited the rebels at Castlebar. The loyalists were said to have been devastated, therefore, when the complete victory of the rebels at Castlebar was reported to them by their captors. Fifty-three deserters from the Longford militia arrived in Killala and were joined by a similar number from the Kilkenny militia later that evening. In June 1799 a man named Matthew Newman was tried by court martial in Athlone for desertion from the Longford's. He was sentenced to death, which was later commuted to military service abroad for life.¹⁵⁶ Seven others were sentenced to transportation for life for the same offence.¹⁵⁷ The physical isolation of Killala ensured a vacuum of information existed during the occupation, as Stock noted;

The inhabitants of Killala, cut off from the rest of Ireland, in front by the sea, and behind by a cordon of mountains, out of which the two only passages were continually guarded by the rebels, knew scarcely anything but was going forward but what passed under his eyes.¹⁵⁸

On 27 August the Franco-Irish army scored a notable victory by taking the town of Castlebar, around fifty kilometres from Killala. The government troops, commanded by General Lake, were ill-prepared for the attack and the speed at which they retreated after their defeat ensured that the battle became known as 'the races of Castlebar'.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁵⁶ NAI, RP 620/6/71/3

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Joseph Stock, *A narrative of what passed at Killala* (Dublin, 1800), p. 45.

¹⁵⁹ James Quinn, 'General Lake (1774-1808): the English general' in Sheila Mulloy (ed.), *Victory or glorious defeat: biographies of participants in the Mayo Rebellion of 1798* (Dublin, 2010), pp 219 - 222.

On 1 September Charost received orders to send all French troops to Castlebar and that he should remain in Killala with a French officer named Ponson. When the Protestant inhabitants became anxious that they might be left at the mercy of the Irish rebels, Charost suggested that they be armed to defend their own properties on the condition that weapons would be returned as required. The plan was met with dismay from the Irish rebels, who demanded that it be stopped through two of their officers named Mulheeran and Maguire. A proclamation was issued stating that ‘no person should appear in arms, except recruits for the French service’.¹⁶⁰ A rebel leader, Thomas Rigney, was put on trial in Killala on 29 October 1800 and accused of taking arms from Protestants which Charost had given them for their protection. Rigney had been disarmed of a pistol by Charost when he threatened to shoot any Protestant who took the weapons.¹⁶¹

To maintain law and order, a proclamation dividing the county into departments was issued, appointing a civil magistrate and allotted a certain number of rebel soldiers to each. In Castlebar, a committee had been established to ensure public safety and the protection of property following the French victory. A municipal council was nominated, composed of a mayor and nine citizens including local parish priest Fr Egan and prominent local merchants. Hayes recorded that the majority of these were Protestant and that the mayor was active in pursuing insurgents after the rebellion.¹⁶²

At Killala, the neighbourhood was divided into districts, each with its own municipal officer who commanded an armed guard for the public defence. Similarly, James Devitt was appointed as the civil magistrate for the town and district of Killala. He was unanimously chosen by popular ballot, because he was a substantial tradesman, a Roman Catholic, and was described as ‘a man of sense and moderation’. In terms of achieving the support of a cross-

¹⁶⁰ Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland ...* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1801), p. 136.

¹⁶¹ NAI, RP 620/17/27

¹⁶² Richard Hayes, *The last Invasion of Ireland* (Dublin, 1939), p. 59.

section of the people of Killala, his religion made him amenable to the masses while his wealth and property ensured that he had an interest in maintaining public order. Two Roman Catholics served as his assistants in carrying out his duties. The protection of the town was entrusted to three bodies of fifty men; newly armed local Catholics were now policing the district and maintaining public order according to a new hierarchical structure which placed them in the ascendancy. Stock noted that ‘the benefits of this regulation were felt immediately in the establishment of tolerable order and quiet, at least in and about the town’. Killala Castle, which was declared to be the head quarters of the allied army, was defended by a guard of sixteen to twenty men who were relieved every twenty-four hours.¹⁶³

Positions of command and field rank were said to have been conferred on the Irish rebels somewhat haphazardly by Humbert, depending on how many followers a local leader brought with him. It was claimed that the first and largest contingent from any parish to join the French came from the parish of Kilfian and Rathreagh, they numbered one hundred and fifty, and were commanded by a man named Kerrigan.¹⁶⁴ Hayes recorded that the French commander in chief interviewed various local leaders at Castlebar, several of whom were appointed to positions of responsibility. John Moore was declared President of the Republic of Connaught, while Father Gannon and Dr Crump, a well known physician from Ury, were delegated as commissaries for the victualling of the army. Many of the others, generally accompanied by a French officer, were sent back to their respective districts to maintain law and order and protect property.¹⁶⁵

Musgrave recorded that the first act of a newly commissioned captain, whom he described as ‘any miscreant who could influence forty or fifty ruffians’, was to attack an

¹⁶³ Joseph Stock, *A narrative of what passed at Killala* (Dublin, 1800), p 55.

¹⁶⁴ Stephen Dunford, *When Ireland lay broken and bleeding: The Franco-Irish Campaign 1798* (Enniscrone, 2009), p. 33.

¹⁶⁵ Richard Hayes, *The last invasion of Ireland* (Dublin, 1939), p. 67.

‘Orangeman’. By this was meant the plundering of a Protestant house.¹⁶⁶ The diary of Rev. James Little of Lacken provides numerous descriptions of the difficulties in policing the rural districts surrounding Killala. While the threat of violence was a key feature of these attacks, and the unnecessary destruction of property did take place, there was remarkably little bloodshed. The right to confiscate property and appropriate the goods of the wealthiest classes is assumed by the rebels; but this does not appear to be accompanied by a desire to cause significant personal harm or injury. When observing their convictions of appropriate conduct, Little noted that rebels sought to protect Protestant women from violence while plundering their houses.¹⁶⁷

Following the rebellion, Private Robert Rogers of the Tyrawley Yeomanry was brought tried by court martial for having beaten a local woman, Biddy Welsh, ‘in a most unsoldierlike manner’. Welsh had called to Rogers’ house to demand the return of a sheepskin he had looted after the retaking of Killala. It was alleged that Rogers pushed and kicked Welsh, and struck her on the head with a bayonet. He was sentenced to 500 lashes and appears to have lost his position in the Custom House service as a result, being employed as a labourer by the time of the trial.¹⁶⁸

Killala remained largely unaffected by the movements of the Franco-Irish army in the field, or by the rally of the government troops who regained the ascendancy under Cornwallis’ command. Following the French surrender at Ballinamuck, as the government troop pushed westwards, some Loyalists in Killala feared a repetition of the slaughter in county Wexford. This did not occur, however, and the town remained under rebel command until the arrival of the government troop on 23 September. Having arrived in Ballina to find it deserted of the rebel command, and occupied by Lord Portarlington who had arrived there

¹⁶⁶ Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland ...* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1801), p. 148.

¹⁶⁷ James Little and Nuala Costello, ‘Little’s diary of the French landing’ in *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 11 (July 1941), pp. 93-113.

¹⁶⁸ NAI, RP 620/3/21/1

from Sligo, General Trench decided to push on and decisively crush the western insurrection.¹⁶⁹ Castlebar was soon in government hands once again.

Stock suggested that two ambassadors - the Protestant dean as the loyalist and a young insurgent named Roger MacGuire, - should go under a flag of truce to Castlebar. They were to carry a letter from the bishop to the commanding officer of the government troop describing the situation of the loyalists in Killala. He expressed the hope that nothing would be done to prisoners that might provoke reprisals. The two deputies returned the following day, the dean carrying a letter from General Trench, which promised that the prisoners would be treated 'with all possible tenderness and humanity'. Hayes claimed that Trench and Denis Browne had made an attempt to hang MacGuire as a rebel officer, until he reminded them of the heavy price that would be paid in Killala if the threat was carried out.¹⁷⁰

As news of the approach of the government troop commanded by General Trench reached Killala on Saturday afternoon, Captain Ferdinand O'Donnell and Roger MacGuire marched towards Crossmolina with three hundred men to attack them. O'Donnell fell ill when they halted at Rappa Castle and his cousin Roger MacGuire assumed his responsibilities. A skirmish took place between a party of rebel horsemen and a picket of government dragoons who had been sent out on reconnoitring duty. Perceiving the strength in numbers of the government troop, the insurgent force withdrew from the field and arrived back at Killala in early the next morning.¹⁷¹

A graphic description of the retaking of Killala by government forces on 23 September is provided in Stock's narrative;

... A troop of fugitives from Ballina, women and children tumbling over one another to get into the castle, or into any house in the town where they might hope for a momentary shelter, continued, for a painful length of time, to give notice of the approach of an army. The rebels quitted their camp to occupy the rising ground close by the town, on the road to Ballina, posting themselves under the low stone walls on each side in such a manner as enabled them,

¹⁶⁹ Richard Hayes, *The last invasion of Ireland* (Dublin, 1939), p. 167.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

with great advantage, to take aim at the king's troops. The two divisions of the royal army were supposed to make up about 1,200 men, (2,500) and they had five pieces of cannon. The number of the rebels could not be ascertained. Many ran away before the engagement, while a very considerable number flocked into the town in the very heat of it, passing under the castle windows, in view of the French officers on horseback, and running upon death with as little appearance of reflection or concern as if they were hastening to a show. About four hundred of these misguided men fell in the battle and immediately after it; whence it may be conjectured that their entire number scarcely exceeded 800 or 900.

We kept our eyes on the rebels. They levelled their pieces, fired very deliberately from each side on the advancing enemy; yet (strange to tell) were able only to kill one man, a corporal, and wound one common soldier. Their shot, in general, went over the heads of their opponents. A regiment of Highlanders (Fraser's Fencibles) filed off to the right and left to flank the fusileers behind the hedges and walls; they had marshy ground on the left to surmount before they could come upon their object, which occasioned some delay, but at length they reached them and made sad havoc among them. Then followed the Queen's County militia and the Devonshire, which last regiment had a great share in the honor of the day.

After a resistance of about twenty minutes, the rebels began to fly in all directions, and were pursued by the Roxburgh Cavalry into the town in full cry. This was not agreeable to military practice, according to which it is usual to commit the assault of a town to the infantry; but here the general wisely reversed the mode, in order to prevent the rebels, by a rapid pursuit, from taking shelter in the houses of townfolk, a circumstance which was likely to provoke indiscriminate slaughter and pillage. It happened that the measure was attended with the desired success. A great number were cut down in the streets, and of the remainder but a few were able to escape into the houses, being either pushed through the town till they fell in with the Kerry militia from Crossmolina, or obliged to take to the shore, where it winds round a promontory forming one of the horns of the Bay of Killala. And here, too, the fugitives were swept away by scores, a cannon being placed on the opposite side of the bay which did great execution.

In spite of the exertions of the general and his officers, the town exhibited almost all the marks of a place taken by storm. Some houses were perforated like a riddle; most of them had their doors and windows destroyed, the trembling inhabitants scarcely escaping with life by lying prostrate on the floor. Nor was it till the close of the next day that our ears were relieved from the horrid sound of muskets discharged every minute at flying and powerless rebels. The plague of war so often visits the world that we are apt to listen to any description of it with the indifference of satiety; it is actual inspection only that shows the monster in its proper deformity.

What heart can forget the impression it has received from the glance of a fellow - creature pleading for his life, with a crowd of bayonets at his breast? The eye of Demosthenes never emitted so penetrating a beam in his most enraptured flight of oratory. Such a man was dragged before the bishop on the day after the battle, while the hand of slaughter was still in pursuit of the unresisting peasants through the town. In the agonies of terror the prisoner thought to save his life by crying out 'that he was known to the bishop. 'Alas! the bishop knew him not; neither did he look like a good man. But the arms and the whole body of the person to whom he flew for protection were over him immediately. Memory suggested rapidly:

What a piece of workmanship is man! the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals ! And are you going to deface this admirable work ?

As indeed they did. For, though the soldiers promised to let the unfortunate man remain in custody till he should have a trial, yet, when they found he was not known, they pulled him out of the court -yard as soon as the bishop's back was turned, and shot him at the gate.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Joseph Stock, *A narrative of what passed at Killala* (Dublin, 1800), p. 146.

In reality, the French expedition force which landed at Kilcummin Bay in August 1798 was far too small to ever pose a serious threat to government authority on a national level. To a large extent, the reversal of social order envisaged by French propaganda was achieved at a local level and on a short-term basis. Within the area around Killala, rebels effectively acted as a police force and kept wealthier neighbours on their guard, under surveillance from the French command. The ease with which Killala was retaken is testament to the relative strength of government forces in comparison to this rebel force. Equally, it provides evidence of the extremely local nature of contemporary society around Killala. Heads were easily turned when the French fleet landed as the scale of that expedition had never been seen in the locality. The size of government forces could have been little imagined by those who became the rebel rank and file in the area.

Conclusion

The last speech and dying words of Martin McLoughlin was the supposed testimony of a condemned participant in the battle of Ballinamuck, taken hours before his death by hanging and published in 1798. In the account, McLoughlin informs the reader that he was taught to read and write by his father, a schoolmaster, and that he had served as an apprentice carpenter to his uncle. He was recently married to a shoemaker's daughter and had two children. An image of simple rural contentment is presented to the reader; a modest inheritance ensuring the family could afford four cows, two fields and an income supplemented by dairy produce and manufacturing. Upon the French landing, McLoughlin was confused by a conversation between two companions and unknowingly declares that he is a sworn United Irishman. He is coerced into joining the insurgency by the opportunity to 'plunder' his landlord's cow for his wife; an action for which she is eventually lodged in Castlebar Gaol. As the insurgency progresses, the Irish recruits are harnessed to the French cannon and forced to draw them at point of bayonet. This event is also recorded in the diary of French officer Jean Louis Jobit.¹⁷³ Of McLoughlin's two companions, one is shot by a French officer for insubordination and the other has his teeth knocked out while attempting to prevent the rape of his wife and sister. What little political discourse appears in the account is confused and contradictory.¹⁷⁴

The western insurgent is presented as a misguided victim of the French, enticed to the rebellion by his own ignorance, greed and poor judgement. Details in the account cannot be substantiated and it is likely to have been highly embellished, if not entirely a work of fiction. Nonetheless, the narrative of McLoughlin's experience conforms to public expectation of the social and personal attributes of the western rebels and their misguided motivations for joining the French fleet at Killala. The reassuring presentation of McLoughlin's personal

¹⁷³ Jean Jobit and Nuala Costello, 'Journal de l'expédition d'Irlande' in *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 11 (1941), p. 25.

¹⁷⁴ Martin McLoughlin, *The last speech and dying words of Martin McLoughlin* (Cork, 1798).

situation absolves the contemporary reader of any concern for the underlying triggers for the violence.

In the opinion of R.F. Foster 'the strange episode of the Republic of Connaught is a footnote to Irish history'.¹⁷⁵ While the events which took place after the French landing at Kilmuckin Bay have made little impact on the national historical narrative, the local traditional society recorded a deep rooted memory of a changing social landscape which was preserved through oral culture and the retelling of historical events. A complexity of social phenomenon can be measured by the French invasion. On the grander scale, the preservation of the traditional society of those who became the 'rank and file' of the Irish rebels force was under pressure from a range of external influences. Economic realities ensured that a communal manner of living and working was becoming increasingly difficult. The emergence of a conventional, market-based economy posed a range of difficulties to the culture of smuggling and its vested interest; the participation of the cottier class in conventional market activity ensured that individual ambition need not remain subjugated to the interest of the group. The economic tools necessary to dismantle a traditional, communal mode working and living were provided by the expansion of markets, the increase of manufacturing, the cash economy and changing patterns of land holding.

In the absence of traditional modes of agrarian violence prior to the rebellion, alternative forms of expressing grievances must be considered. The separateness of the two religions ensured that religious congregation in itself could often be considered as a political act. The influence of priests on the outlook of their congregations is frequently observed. When new congregations began to be formed and confirmed by the ownership of scapulars amongst the cottier class, hierarchical structures were formed according to rank and wealth; thus providing an agreed outward recognition of distinctions of social class. The influx of a

¹⁷⁵ R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600 - 1972* (London, 1988), p. 280.

highly politicised body of refugees from Armagh added fuel to an already volatile cocktail of competing interests and grievances.

The monopolisation of physical force by the land owning, Church of Ireland gentry ensured that the trauma of economic change did not lead to substantial outbreaks of violence. Through the patrimony of the local volunteer corps and militia regiments, local gentry kept a lid on the process by which traditional structures were being slowly absorbed into the nexus of state. When this physical force dissipated following the landing of the French, the resultant clamour for arms can be more readily understood. Given the variety of motivations evident for joining the rebel army, however, it is difficult to attach any singular, cohesive ideological impetus for this action.

Chapter 4

Bantry, County Cork

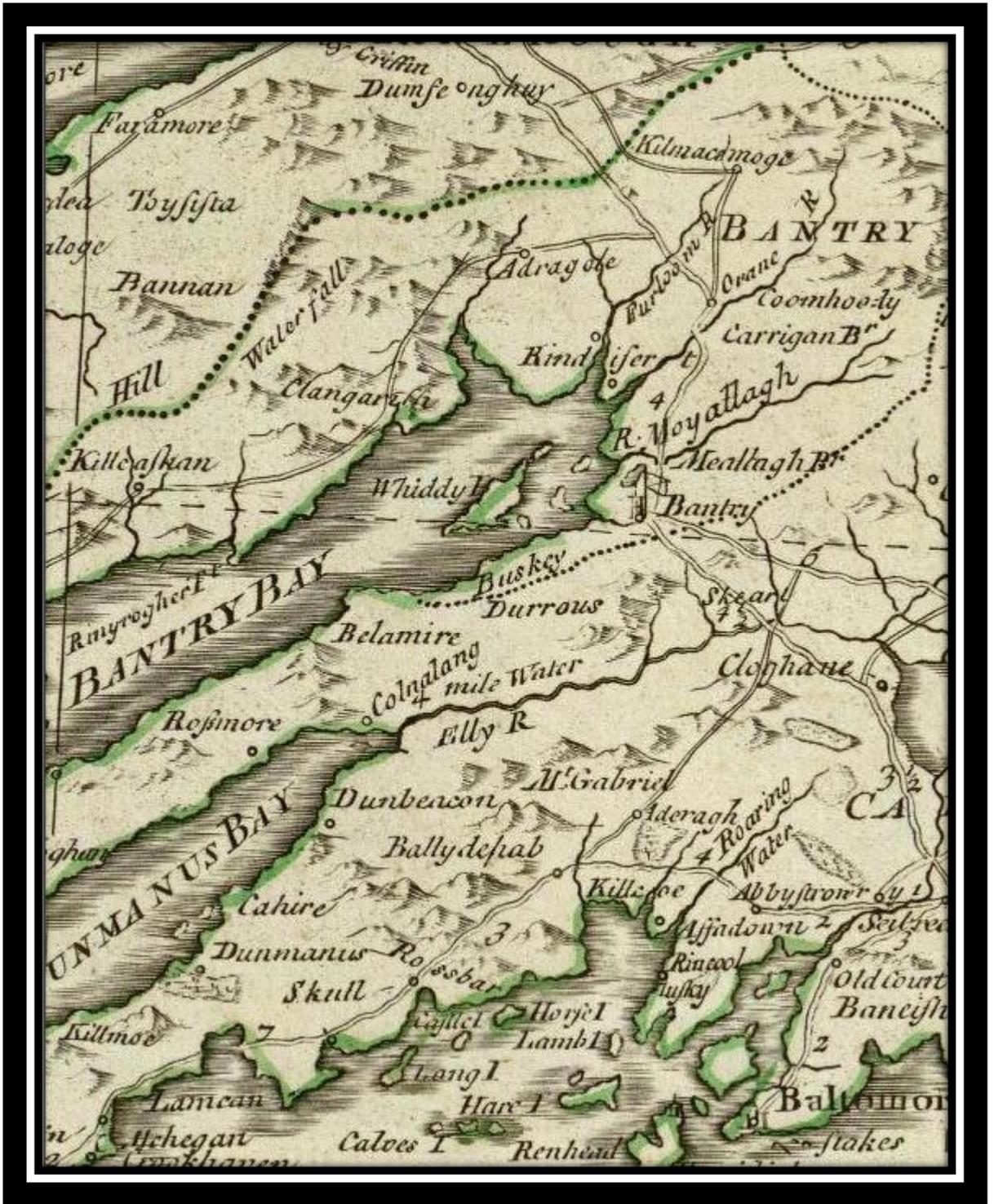
We beg leave to congratulate you and the country at large on the convincing proof we now have that the first appearance of an enemy on our coast, is the signal for every description of Irishmen to cement in one impenetrable mass of loyalty and true patriotism wisely and affectionately attached to the best of kings and the happiest of countries.¹
(General William Trench, 7 January 1797)

The tranquillity of south Munster during the 1798 Rebellion has long been the object of intrigue and speculation amongst historians. Why when social conditions appear to have been primed for rebellion did the region remain so peaceful? The experience of Bantry during December 1796 and the subsequent government reaction may go some way to explaining this phenomenon. This chapter will account for the reaction around Bantry by local people to the arrival of a French invasion fleet on their coast. In contrast with Killala, the French were unsuccessful in their attempts and departed without landing; thus the volume of sources created was lessened, as was their variety. Nonetheless, a measured analysis of local attitudes to the crisis can be gauged by studying the reaction of local inhabitants and seditious activity in its aftermath.

As the French fleet never landed and could not employ their strategy of conciliation and appeasing the locals, it can only be speculated as to what the likely outcome would have been. There are no reports in the rebellion papers which detail significant insurgent activity prior to or after the French crisis for the area around Bantry. There are some transcripts which covered the swearing of oaths in the period after the French scare but these seem relatively isolated in comparison with the rest of the country. The area around Bantry remained noticeably quiet throughout the disturbances of 1798. In relation to the crisis of 1796, this chapter will attempt to account for the reaction of the cottier class to events and to discuss their motivations by exploring the socio-economic context in which the crisis was played out.

¹ UCC, BL/EP/B/2252.

Sources would suggest that Jacobite principles had become intertwined with contemporary grievances and political action in this region as in Killala. In Bantry, despite the existence of this rhetorical framework and the presentation of a similar opportunity for dissent to manifest, a different set of socio-economic circumstances dictated that this did not occur. Verses foretelling the reversal of the social order do appear to have been prevalent amongst the Irish speaking population around Bantry. However, this theoretical framework in itself did not act as a catalyst for radical political violence at the appearance of the French fleet at Bantry. The example and loyal countenance of Richard White during the crisis cannot be underestimated. All indications suggest that the local population was largely content with White's pragmatic patronage of the area and while some grievances undoubtedly existed, they were not sufficient to inspire violent retribution.



Source: John Rocque's map of Ireland, 1790

Section One - The locality in context

According to Reverend Horatio Townsend's statistical survey of 1815, the population of County Cork was 620,578 of which 9,872 resided in the barony of Bantry. The population was evenly divided between the sexes, 4,864 males and 5,008 females were recorded. 1,768 houses were located in the area.² Townsend recorded that 'the bay of Bantry ... exhibits one of the noblest prospects on a scale of romantic magnitude that imagination can well conceive. The extent of this great body of water from the eastern extremity to the ocean is about twenty five miles, the breadth, including the islands, from six to eight. It contains, besides some small, two very large islands, differing extremely from each other in quality and appearance'.³

Sections of Townsend's statistical survey of County Cork covering Bantry noted that the remote situation of Bantry, notwithstanding its proximity to such a bay, seems to preclude it from emerging above the obscurity of a little country town.⁴ The high quality of soil on Whiddy Island was also recorded, noting that 'all the good soil of the district, however, is not confined to Whiddy Island, the lands adjoining the head of the bay being also distinguished for verdure and fertility'.⁵ In 1837, Samuel Lewis described Bantry town as a 'sea-port, market and post-town in the parish of Kilmacomogue, barony of Bantry, county of Cork, and province of Munster, forty seven and a half miles from Cork, and 173 miles [278 kilometres] from Dublin; containing 4275 inhabitants'.⁶

According to the census of 1821, the total population of Bantry town was 3,659, with a slightly higher proportion of females.⁷ Bantry town was located in Bantry barony. The total population for the county of Cork was recorded as 629,786. It is worth reminding

² Horatio Townsend, *A general and statistical survey of County Cork* (Cork, 1815), p.93.

³ *Ibid.* p. 384.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 392.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 387.

⁶ Samuel Lewis, *A topographical dictionary of Ireland* (3 vols, London, 1837) i, p. 376.

⁷ *An act to provide for taking an account of the population of Ireland, and for ascertaining the increase or diminution thereof ... 1824*, p.148, H.C. 1823 (577) xxii, 411.

at this point that the city and county of Cork were defined as two separate administrative units. There were twenty-two baronial divisions within the county, of which Bantry was the fourth smallest with a population of 12,659. Within the barony of Bantry there were three subdivisions of town and parish of which Bantry town, with a population of 3,659, represented approximately twenty-eight per cent of the overall population of the barony.⁸

Occupations were recorded in the 1821 census under three broad categories, 'agriculture', 'trades, manufactures or handicrafts' and 'not comprised in the preceding classes'. What we are not told is whether these statistics included women.⁹ In the county of Cork, those listed as employed chiefly in agriculture represented 56 per cent of the total persons occupied. The returns for trades, manufactures or handicrafts were 19 per cent whereas those not comprised in the preceding classes were at twenty five per cent. Returns for Bantry barony indicated that 44 per cent of those working were doing so in agriculture. Twenty per cent were employed in trades, manufactures or handicrafts, leaving a considerable thirty per cent being listed as otherwise occupied.¹⁰

In Bantry town, 57 per cent of the population was employed in agriculture and thirty-three per cent was recorded as being otherwise occupied. The remaining 10 per cent was employed in trades, manufactures or handicraft. This figure is the lowest in the four communities and contrasts sharply with Ballymoney, where sixty three per cent were employed in the same category. The fifty-seven per cent employed in agriculture represents the highest proportion in this category between the four communities. This is significant when the relative strength and ability of Richard White to quell any seditious activity at an early juncture is taken into consideration. White had no autonomous, wealthy or powerful political rivals like the Ballymoney linen drapers to contend with.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Margaret E. Crawford, *Counting the people* (Dublin, 2003), p. 51.

¹⁰ *An act to provide for taking an account of the population of Ireland, and for ascertaining the increase or diminution thereof ... 1824*, p. 148, H.C. 1823 (577) xxii, 411.

Notably, nine per cent of the population were attending school, sixty-eight per cent of whom were male. This figure compares favourably with Ballymoney, Clonsilla and Killlala where five, two and eight per cent of the entire population were attending school. A note is included in the observations for Bantry barony detailing two charity schools of eighty girls and 120 boys and a mixed school supported by the Dublin Association. When these figures are adjusted to account for the ages of persons they show a higher proportion attending schools. These figures must also be altered to account for the barony as a whole, as this is the only source data that exists for ages of persons. Therefore, it can be stated that twenty-two per cent of the population of the barony of Bantry who were under the age of ten attended school according to the 1821 census. This is the second highest percentage of the four communities selected for study.¹¹

David Dickson has illustrated that the south Munster region had been ‘powerfully affected’ by seventeenth-century English immigration. In his opinion ‘thus eighteenth century Protestant social engineering on the part of gentry, clergy and lead to a state apparatus that remained profoundly anti-Catholic’.¹² James Patterson has reaffirmed this view, noting that religion was a ‘salient feature’ of life in south Munster during much of the eighteenth century and Protestant gentry and clergy were thick on the ground. In his opinion, therefore, influential elements of the planter elite exhibited a profound anti-Catholic bias.¹³ Horatio Townsend in 1815 recorded that ‘though the Protestants of this county are very numerous, the great body of the people, particularly the peasantry, are Roman Catholics’.¹⁴ There is anecdotal evidence of anti-Catholic allusion in Townsend’s account, noting that amongst that community ‘... marriage is delayed by no want, except sometimes the want of money enough

¹¹ *An act to provide for taking an account of the population of Ireland, and for ascertaining the increase or diminution thereof ... 1824*, p. 240, H.C. 1823 (577)

¹² David Dickson, ‘The South Munster region in the 1790s’ in John A. Murphy (Ed.), *The French are in the bay - the expedition to Bantry Bay 1796* (Cork, 1997), p. 86.

¹³ James Patterson, *In the wake of the great rebellion* (Manchester, 2009), p. 83.

¹⁴ Horatio Townsend, *A general and statistical survey of County Cork* (Cork, 1815), p. 97.

to purchase a license – to Providence and their potato garden they commit the rest'.¹⁵ Bantry would appear to conform to this general situation of a Protestant gentry and wider Catholic population base.

A suspicion that religious expression had become a vehicle for political designs was articulated by Edward Morgan in his diary of the French attempt at Bantry. While the Presbyterians of the north were his most likely target, he is nonetheless vague in his criticism of this practice and his comments could be equally applied to secretive Catholic sects

The truth is, that on the present occasion religion is but the cloak of ambitious designs; it is a convenient pretext for the subtlety of treason, which while it called itself by any other name but its own, might in the confusion it occasioned, hide the hand which held the dagger, and conceal its cloven foot beneath the pretended zeal of religion.¹⁶

In 1861 C.B. Gibson commented on aspects of religion surrounding the French attempt at Bantry, noting that

Wolfe Tone very honestly informed General Hoche, when he asked whether he thought the Catholic clergy would join them, 'I certainly do not calculate on their assistance, but neither do I think they will be able to give us any effectual opposition. But here he was mistaken. Doctor Francis Moylan, Catholic bishop of Cork from 1787 to 1803, gave all the illegal associations of these days the most strenuous and effectual opposition. Sir Richard Musgrave says, 'the members of the union in Cork were so desperate and sanguinary, that a proposition was made, and it was for some time discussed in committee, to murder the amiable Doctor Moylan, the titular Bishop of Cork, partly from motives of revenge, on account of his loyalty'.¹⁷

When these factors are considered in terms of the local economy, a more definite explanation for the tranquility of the region begins to emerge. According to David Dickson 'Bantry Bay lay within a region that had witnessed remarkable economic and social changes in the lifetime of its oldest inhabitants ... It was part of an integrated commercial zone which we may label south Munster... Land prices and farming patterns, diet and drink, clothing and housing had all been profoundly affected by the intensity of commercialisation within the

¹⁵ Ibid., p .95.

¹⁶ Edward Morgan, *A journal of the movements of the French fleet (Cork, 1797)*, p. 7.

¹⁷ C.B. Gibson, *The history of the county and city of Cork* (2 vols, London, 1861), ii, p.245.

force-field of Cork'.¹⁸ Dickson has further stated that 'strong albeit unstable overseas demand for salted beef and butter, hides, pork, tallow and barley had continued to grow for more than a century, and the monetisation of social relations continued as a slow but inexorable process, an evolution mediated through a variety of local players - city merchants and local shippers, entrepreneurial landlords and master dairymen who leased out cows in small herds to those too poor to possess their own'.¹⁹ The region stood out for two further reasons; it was well populated by Irish standards 'abundant cheap labour was the vital under-pinning of a vibrant capitalistic agrarian system'. In addition, it had been 'powerfully affected' by seventeenth century English immigration.²⁰

An important result of commercialisation particularly in the highly fertile tillage districts of north and east Cork, was the tripartite division of rural society into a predominantly Protestant upper class gentry of landowners, a largely Catholic middling order of farmers and cattlemen, and an overwhelmingly Catholic lower stratum of cottiers and labourers. The rapid expansion of market capitalism during the second half of the eighteenth century, combined with demographic pressure in the form of rapid population growth, dramatically increased the cost of living in south Munster for those who could least afford it.²¹ The staple diet of the cottier class consisted of potatoes and 'a small quantity' of meat, fish or milk.²² Townsend described in less than flattering terms 'the common vice of the savage, who never rejects an opportunity of intoxication' although he does concede 'that in this respect something of the savage is still discernible among us'. It is noted that substituting malt liquor for 'ardent spirits' would be favourable among the 'lower orders'.²³

¹⁸ David Dickson, 'The South Munster region in the 1790s' in John A. Murphy (Ed.), *The French are in the bay - the expedition to Bantry Bay 1796* (Cork, 1997), p. 85.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

²¹ James Patterson, *In the wake of the great rebellion* (Manchester, 2009), p. 83.

²² Horatio Townsend, *A general and statistical survey of County Cork* (Cork, 1815), p. 94.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

The experience of the cottier class in Killala may provide an example of what was characteristic in previous generations in the area around Bantry, as identified by Dickson. The trauma of economic change ensured that the poorest inhabitants of north Mayo felt that they had little to lose in joining the French invasion fleet in an attempt to overthrow violently the existing social order. In Bantry, this class had been largely incorporated into this altered economic landscape. Household economic activity, still in its infancy in Killala, featured more prominently in the area around Bantry as families adjusted their outlook to keep apace. In short, the market had done its work.

The general situation of the labouring and cottier classes was described as ‘certainly very wretched’ in 1815. Townsend noted that they were ‘seldom treated by their employers with that humanity and attention their useful labours so justly merit’. A cabin and an acre of ground for planting potatoes cost around forty to fifty shillings per annum and employment at around six pence per day was provided by the farmer as the ‘chief means of subsistence’. Female members of the family often supplemented this income by spinning flax or knitting.²⁴ Economic activity was also influenced by regional factors, as barley and oats were cultivated near the sea coast around Bantry. In addition to this, a small industry in breeding donkeys on the range of mountains which separate the district from Kerry was said to have been vibrant.²⁵

Similar to other settler families, the Whites decided to build ore smelters which would use charcoal made from the discarded wood, resulting from the clearing of local forests. These smelters were set up at Dunboy, Atrgole, Glengarriff, Coomhola and Bantry. Ore was imported from Spain and England and taken to the charcoal furnaces, where it was melted into manageable bars. What was not used on the home markets was re-exported to Wales and England. There was sufficient timber in the region to keep these smelters in action until the

²⁴ Ibid., p. 209.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 394.

1790s, amounting to almost a hundred years of intense burning. The Boyles, Pettys and the Whites were said to have grown rich by this process.²⁶

The iron foundries supported considerable colonies of people, most of these being English or European immigrants brought to Ireland to provide a labour force. An example of the practice was Sir William Petty, who founded a colony of over eight hundred English in Kenmare to work his iron foundries. In the Bantry-Beara region, small communities of settler ironworkers sprang up near Dunboy, Adrigole, Coomhola and Bantry.²⁷

The Munster 'middle-man' was under considerable pressure throughout this period, as the customs and practices in land leasing were transformed to favour a more active role in estate management and improvement for the actual proprietors of the land. Horatio Townsend commented extensively on this in 1815, noting

The system of middle landlordship, which some years ago was almost universally present, presented an insurmountable barrier to the exertions of humble industry. ... though discountenanced at present by the more liberal spirit of the landed proprietors, the practise is by no means abolished... The value of land, which has been found to increase in a very rapid proportion for some years back, continues to hold out great temptation to this kind of land jobbing...

The general practice of these adventurers (some of whom give no leases) is to let seven years at a rent, little and at times not exceeding that, which they pay themselves, their own term is usually three lives, or thirty one years. Judging of the future by the past, they presume that the remaining part of their tenures will afford a handsome profit, and, as the speculation has hitherto been attended with success, it is by no means wonderful to find so many candidates for a prize, which requires no advance of money and which appears to be attended with so little hazard

Besides the payment of his rent, the cottager was also frequently burdened with many heavy obligations of supplying his task master with men and horses to perform his work, as well as eggs and poultry to supply his kitchen. The amount of rent, we may justly suppose, was so regulated as to leave the tenant no more than a bare subsistence. Under such a system it was impossible that agriculture could flourish.

Even now that the pernicious nature of this system is fully understood, and that a more liberal conduct begins to prevail, some of the evils introduced by it are found to remain. The price that farmers are obliged to pay for their lands is commonly too high, and though the land-jobber is removed, the rack-rent continues.²⁸

²⁶ Michael J. Carroll, *A bay of destiny* (Cork, 1996), p. 204.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

²⁸ Horatio Townsend, *A general and statistical survey of County Cork* (Cork, 1815), pp 190 – 193.

David Dickson cited the example of Richard White as indicating that there was a genuine reluctance on the part of some landowners to make redundant chief tenants whose ancestors had a long association with the estate. In a survey of his estate c. 1806, White noted on several occasions for future family reference: ‘I would strongly recommend not to set except to persons who reside on their farms’, yet contradicting himself, he wrote of a family who held at least seven farms on the estate:

All the Warner family are fair honest men, and have been under my grandfather, father and myself, they are improving tenants, have always got their several farms reasonable and have got considerable incomes under our family, they should certainly get a preference whenever their lives [i.e. lease terms] expire.

The Warners were presumably a Protestant family, but White also dwelt on the case of the O’Sullivans of Dromgarvan (presumably Catholic), who had taken a large lease in 1789 in not dissimilar terms.²⁹ This practical approach to estate management did not interfere with White’s reputation as an agricultural reformer. This may also provide an example of the pragmatism which ensured that he maintained positive social relations in the area which encompassed his estate.

²⁹ David Dickson, *Old world colony* (Cork, 2005), p. 334.

Section Two – The locality and the state

A local tradition of the first Richard White's coming to Bantry at some time around the 1650s relates that one day he met a demobilised soldier riding through Dunmanway. In conversation, White found out that the soldier was going to Bantry to occupy a holding he had been granted there in payment for service. The soldier being a stranger to West Cork, White told him the land got worse as one went west, and so convinced him of the bareness of the Bantry area that the soldier exchanged his grant to White for a white horse and went back to wherever he came from. Whether this story be true or exaggerated, it is indicative of the combination of cunning, endeavour and opportunism would become a salient theme of the family's ascent.³⁰

Much of the lands around Bantry and Whiddy Island were yielded to Annesley, Viscount Valentia and the earl of Anglesey at the time of the Act of Settlement in the 1660s. They were rented back over a period of ninety nine years to the Hutchinson, Depard and White families. According to Michael J. Carroll, the Hutchinson family held extensive plots of land in and around Bantry. These included the land south of the town, Reenrou on the north side of the town and parts of Ardnagashel. Depard also held some land on the mainland, principally the section east of the town. The White family resided on Whiddy Island, where they amassed sufficient funds to buy out Depard's leases by developing the pilchard fisheries and through improvements on the land. This left the White and Hutchinson families in possession of most of the land around Bantry.

In April 1679 the earl of Anglesey was granted 94,000 acres in and around Bantry. Some settler families such as the Walters had already pre-empted this event by handing their lands over to the earl, who promptly leased them back. However, the lands leased by the Walters family soon came under the control of the Whites, whether by rent, purchase or

³⁰ Seamus Crowley, 'The Whites of Bantry – family origins' in *Bantry Historical and Archaeological Journal*, ii (1994), p. 51.

claim. Before 1712, the Whites added the Hutchinson estate around the town of Bantry to their holdings through a series of complicated and strategic land transactions. This included the Hutchinson family demesne at Blackrock House, which was demolished and replaced with a new residence named Seafield House.

To consolidate their position in Bantry, Richard White's eldest son Richard married the daughter of a Revd Davies, who by 1712 had been appointed by the earl of Anglesey to look after his interests in the region. Between 1720 and 1730, the town of Bantry began to grow and prosper and the Whites continued to amass their fortune in the fisheries, timber and bark exports, in land returns and as smelters. By 1751, they purchased outright all the lands that were leased to them by the earl of Anglesey and were left in full control of the region around Bantry Bay.³¹

When Richard White's conduct during the 1796 crisis ensured that it became politically expedient to elevate his family's position, his ascent to the peerage took place at blistering pace. It can be presumed that the White family was already in possession of appropriate resources and wealth to justify this decision. He was given a baronetcy in March 1797. He became a viscount in 1800 and earl of Bantry in 1816.³² The *Irish House of Lords Journal* recorded the introduction of White as Lord Bantry in Cork as follows

Richd White, esq. being by letters patent dated 24th day of March ... created Baron Bantry of Bantry on the County of Cork, was this day [22nd Jan 1799] in his robes, introduced between Lord Tyrawley, and the Lord Mock also in their robes; the Yeoman Usher of the Black Rod and Ulster King of Arms, in his coat of arms, carrying the said letters patent preceding: his lordship presented the same to the Lord Chancellor.³³

The granting of titles to White led to the public recording of his pedigree and the issue of a coat of arms from the Herald's College. The family origin outlined in White's pedigree is as follows:

³¹ Michael J. Carroll, *A bay of destiny* (Cork, 1996), pp 162 - 165.

³² Seamus Crowley, 'The Whites of Bantry – family origins' in *Bantry Historical and Archaeological Journal*, ii, (1994), p. 48.

³³ 'The Introduction of Lord Bantry' in *The Irish House of Lords Journal* (12 vols, Dublin 1798-1800) viii, 190.

The Viscount derives his descent from Sir Thomas White, of Rickmansworth in Hertfordshire, the founder of St John's College in Oxford and brother of John White Lord Bishop of Winchester in 1557. The ancestor of this noble family came to Ireland during the civil wars which commenced in 1641. His descendents in the fourth degree, Richard White, Esq., of Bantry (who was maternally descended from the Hamiltons of Armagh), married Martha, daughter of Revd Dean Davies of Dawston in Cork.³⁴

The claim that Sir Thomas White was the family's founder is now deemed to be untrue, and the Whites are reputed to have their roots in a respectable Norman-Irish family in Limerick. The family's connection to Sir Ignatius White, who remained loyal to the Stuart cause during the Williamite wars, was discounted in favour of a lineage more becoming of a newly established family of the ascendancy.³⁵

At the time of the French crisis, there were numerous occasions for the local population to be disappointed by the Dublin government and its officers. The anger and disillusion which occurred when the military plan to abandon Bantry became widely known is indicative of this. Bantry native Edward Morgan recorded distress at all levels of society in his diary when this intention became common knowledge. On 9 January 1797, as the crisis subsided, Lord Longueville wrote to Mr Kippax in Dublin Castle to inform him that

the people of the country have acted with great zeal and loyalty. In this part of the world I am sure they would have turned out fairly and fought by my side. In Bantry, the yeomen cavalry took the duty night and day in their own cloaks and their own arms and accoutrements... Government is sadly abused and that by all descriptions. I do not imagine they are as much to blame as some employed under them, but those men throw their transgressions on the Ld Lt and Mr Pelham who are not present to defend themselves.³⁶

According to David Dickson, the hand of the state was still weak by nineteenth century standards in much of co. Cork, 'but it was becoming perceptibly stronger; where thirty years previously a smuggling based black economy had flourished along the south-west peninsulas and in Iveragh, the effectiveness of the revenue service was now being felt,

³⁴ John Debrett, *The pedigree of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland*, (2 vols, London, 1809), ii, p. 866.

³⁵ Seamus Crowley, 'The Whites of Bantry – family origins' in *Bantry Historical and Archaeological Journal*, ii, (1994), p. 48.

³⁶ NLI, IR 94107 b.10 Private letters collected by Lady Ardilaun.

sometimes violently so in the 1780s and 1790s. An improved postal service had helped the magistrary ...provide the beginnings of a real intelligence system for Dublin castle by 1798.³⁷

The elevation of the White family to the peerage must be considered in the context of the increase of state power in the region. Once he had demonstrated his loyalty, character and ability to organise effectively the region in favour of government, it became politically expedient to elevate an establishment friendly power base into the nexus of state as a consolidation of state presence in the area. The Whites were of sufficient material means to support this promotion and once the genealogists had suitably ‘corrected’ the family’s pedigree, they displayed the adequate trappings and traditions to belong to the ascendancy class.

Having established the White family as the dominant local power figures, it is necessary also to investigate the nature of state presence within the community, its functional role, civic functions and community structures. Focus first on the latter, David Dickson has identified three types of rural community that evolved across the region;

First, there were the districts of social complexity where rural society below the landowners had several distinct tiers of status and wealth, notably a cattle owning and comfortable farming stratum, and one or two rungs below, a near-landless class primarily dependent on local farmers giving their men folk casual employment; tillage production was highly important in such districts, which tended to be in the north and east of the region. Second were the districts of social homogeneity but occupational complexity – where farming, fishing and rural industry were interlocked; this was the pattern in much of south-west Cork and on the Dingle peninsula. Then there were the many districts which had very few gentry and both social and occupational homogeneity; these were the parishes where pastoral farming remained the principal livelihood – upland and inaccessible areas out of which seasonal migration was often necessary to make the rent, the tithe, the hearth tax and the spending money for the fair.³⁸

Of these three categories of rural community, Bantry lies firmly in the second; where the farming, fishing and rural industries were interlocked. In such a co-dependent landscape, Richard White’s strong arm of patronage was a necessity for smooth conduct of business.

³⁷ David Dickson, ‘The South Munster region in the 1790s’ in John A. Murphy (Ed.), *The French are in the bay- the expedition to Bantry Bay 1796* (Cork, 1997), p. 89.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

The White family appear to have had some involvement in each of these industries and also held the charter for public fairs and markets in Bantry.

In 1815, Horatio Townsend commented on the state of education and use of the English language in County Cork. He noted ‘except in towns, they seldom use any language but Irish, and even in some of the best cultivated districts most of the people can speak no other. They are however willing enough to send their children to school, when an opportunity offers, though the little they learn there is frequently forgot soon after their return to their parents’.³⁹ A radical newspaper, *The Cork Gazette*, contained numerous advertisements for schools in the city of Cork and some for the wider county. In the 1790s, the subjects most commonly taught at schools appear to have been English and Arithmetic, with some schools specialising in Greek and Latin. An example of the terms of these schools is provided by an advertisement posted by a Mr. O’Keefe for his school at Doneraile, about 55 kilometres northeast of Bantry and 50 kilometres west of Cork city. For a fee of 20 guineas per annum, O’Keefe provided ‘tuition, boarding washing &c’, including tuition in Latin and Greek. He also provided a course ‘for such as are preparing for the counting house’ at a fee of 18 Guineas per annum.⁴⁰

While no comprehensive account of the condition of education provision in Bantry for the late eighteenth century appears to be in existence, a brief outline of the progress of education over the proceeding fifty years is informative of its general situation. In addition to the information outlined in the 1821 census, the 1825 report into the state of education in Bantry recorded twenty four Roman Catholic schools in the parish, of which three were free schools and the rest were pay schools. Thirteen of these schools were in the town, the largest being a free school of eighty four boys at Blackrock Road. Lessons were conducted in a large slated house, built with a bequest of £200 from Rev. Daniel O’Crowley, parish priest at

³⁹ Horatio Townsend, *A general and statistical survey of County Cork* (Cork, 1815), p. 80.

⁴⁰ *CG*, 11 Jan. 1794, 1 March 1794, 26 March 1794, 17 Dec. 1796.

Bantry, who was also responsible for a school house at Barrack Road, where sixty girls were taught. Side by side with the large free school at Blackrock Road was a typically small pay school, which catered for twenty four children of mixed religion and both sexes. Similar schools, which typically catered for between thirty five to fifty pupils were located at Church Road, Main Street, Scart Road, Custom Gap and Fair Field. The Association for Discountenancing Vice and the Lord Lieutenant's Fund supported two Protestant schools of thirty three and sixty pupils in the town. A Protestant pay school for fourteen children was held at Parade Field. The only Classical School for older pupils was located in Main Street, where seventeen boys received instruction in the Classics and Mathematics.⁴¹

Outside the town there were a further eleven Roman Catholic schools, all of which were conducted in thatched houses or wretched cabins. All were pay schools, except one in Droumsullivan, which was both a pay school and a free school. Schools catering for between twenty to ninety pupils were located at Cappanaloohy Cross, Scart, Bawnageragh, Coomleigh, Breeny Beg, Kealkil, Maalavanig, Carriganeacerin, Tranaogha and Kilmore.

Each school appears to have been supported by a single schoolmaster and incomes ranged from £20 per annum for Pat Meagher in the town school, which was supported by the Roman Catholic Church, to 20 shillings for Jeremiah Sullivan at Cappanaloohy Cross, to no recorded income for Daniel Day in Orchard Lane. Mr Kearney in the Classical Pay School earned £50 per annum. By 1827 almost 700 boys, and approximately half that number of girls, were being educated in the locality. Most of the teachers were male and the subjects taught were reading, writing, arithmetic and Christian doctrine.

Following the establishment of the system of national schools in Ireland in 1831, the number of pay schools in the locality was diminished considerably. An 1835 report cites a total of sixteen schools in the area, the largest being the female and male schools, now in

⁴¹ Jennie McCarthy, 'The educational scene in nineteenth century Bantry' in *Bantry Historical and Archaeological Journal*, i, (1991), p. 75.

connection with the National Board of Education and receiving grants. Of the remainder, five were day schools and six were hedge schools, with one infant and one Sunday school supported by the rector. The curriculum in some schools had broadened to include Geography, Geometry, English Grammar, Drawing and Book-keeping. Despite these advances in education, census figures for 1841 show West Cork as having one of the highest rates of illiteracy in Ireland, sixty per cent of males and seventy-five per cent of females being illiterate. Only twenty-three per cent of children between the ages of five and fifteen attended school and in Bantry, 52.1% of the population could neither read nor write by 1841.⁴²

The Bantry Volunteers were enrolled in 1779 and consisted of one company, their uniform of scarlet faced with white. In 1782 their officers were Colonel Hamilton White; Captain Richard Blair; Lieutenant David Melefont; Ensigns Henry Galway and John Young; Adjutant Henry Galway and Secretary Francis Hoskins.⁴³ C.B. Gibson recorded an incident which took place in June 1779 when a French invasion was believed to be underway. He noted

On the 4th of June 1779, an express came to Cork ordering the 81st highland regiment to march, at the shortest notice, to Bantry. A fleet of several ships of the line were seen in Bantry. A second express arrived, ordering the highland regiment to march to Bandon. The armed companies were also called out, when ‘a great number of Roman Catholic gentlemen immediately offered themselves as volunteers to join their Protestant fellow citizens’, and were well received. The French fleet turned out to be English. It raised the alarm by firing salutes for the king’s birthday...⁴⁴

Newspapers provided a potential line of communication that facilitated the spread of information and should also be considered in this regard. In 1790, Denis Driscoll began publication of the increasingly radical *Cork Gazette* [which ran until 1797]. The *Gazette* was the only newspaper in Ireland to support openly Paine’s deistical religious opinions, and

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ C.B. Gibson, *The history of the county and city of Cork* (2 vols, London, 1861), ii, p. 229.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 246.

between 1794 and 1795 Driscoll printed several editions of the age of reason in the city. This publication was widely disseminated around the city. Cork native and government informer Leonard Mc Nally reported in 1795 that ‘Paine’s works are in everyone’s hands and everyone’s mouth. Large editions have been printed of by Driscoll ... and sent over the country; they have got into the schools and are the constant subjects of conversations with the youth’.⁴⁵

The advertisements placed in the *Cork Gazette* would not suggest that the newspaper had a large regional circulation outside of Cork city. There appears to be one reoccurring advertisement from Bantry of a deal yard for sale, although this could have been placed to catch the eye of a city entrepreneur.⁴⁶ The newspaper is often a haven for radical political discourse and socio-religious commentary, as the following excerpt typifies

The mind shudders at the dreadful consequences that result from the measures of a tyrannical and blood thirsty government – by their oppressions, extortions monopolies of power and revenue; by their partiality to one party, and their opposition to others they provoke dissensions among the people – they vex them to sedition and goad them to high treason; when matters come to this pitch, their only remedies lie in proscription and extermination! But behold, this Herculean government armed with the club of destruction and clothed with the lion’s skin, by every head it knocks off, causes ten fresh ones to spring up, to avenge the blood of their brother!! It is clear that upon this principle such a government of blood and terror, must sink at last under its own efforts, and be destroyed by popular Hydra! Ancient history furnishes us with many proofs of this, and modern story is not quite destitute of examples to the same purpose ...

... It is a clear fact, that nothing has hitherto prevented the people of Europe so much from becoming really civilised as their eternal wars! This is the cause of all those enmities between nations, those jealousies between countries and antipathies among brothers and fellow citizens! The frequent taste of human blood has made the European ferocious and given him a want for more slaughter and carnage! This dreadful amusement of princes and tyrants it is, that stifles the principles of reason, retards the progress of philosophy and prevents the moral doctrine of Christ from effectually obtaining its ends!⁴⁷

In a discussion on the role of schoolmasters in the dissemination of radical ideology during the 1790s Kevin Whelan cites the examples of Cork teacher John Hurley who was involved in anti-tithe activities during 1794 ‘ he had several of the country people subscribed

⁴⁵ James Patterson, *In the wake of the great rebellion* (Manchester, 2009), p. 84.

⁴⁶ *CG*, 9 Jan. 1797.

⁴⁷ *CG*, 5 Mar. 1796.

for a newspaper. He used to read the French debates and other seditious publications to the multitude. Hence the parishioners became politicians, talked of liberty and equality and appointed a day to plant the tree of liberty'.⁴⁸ While it is difficult to ascertain the state of education amongst the cottier class around Bantry in the late eighteenth century, it can be presumed that elements of this description were similar in practice. An outwardly radical newspaper that was published in the closest adjacent city is likely to have been a key element of any plan to disseminate radical politics to the local population.

In 1802, Richard Musgrave wrote the following account of a network of communication which could have been employed to indoctrinate the cottier and labouring class around Bantry. It is taken from the evidence of a member of the Irish directory of United Irishmen and is an attempt to explain why Munster did not rise at the time of the French saga

He [a United Irishman] declared upon oath that in the month of October or November 1796, the French republic announced, by a special messenger to the Irish union that the hostile armament was in a state of preparation; but in a few days after the departure of the messenger from Paris with this intelligence, the Irish directory received a letter from France which was considered by them as authentic, stating that the projected descent was postponed till spring, when England and Ireland would be invaded at the same time. This threw the Irish directory off their guard; in consequence of which no measures were taken to prepare the people of Munster for the reception of the French. It is however, to be feared that the popish multitude would have risen in many parts of Munster, if the French had made the projected descent; for a strong spirit of disaffection appeared in different parts of the counties of Cork and Kerry, early in the years 1793 and 1794, particularly in the counties adjacent to Kinsale, Dunmanway, Bandon and Dingle, in which the people committed such shocking enormities, even in the day, that, on the 11th March 1794, the lord lieutenant issued a proclamation against them, and offered reward for the discovery and prosecution of them...⁴⁹

In theory, a network of information could have resulted in a decision made in Paris by a French executive having a direct consequence among the labouring class of Bantry, had the plan been correctly implemented. A committee of United Irishmen was in existence in Cork and in keeping with United Irish structures throughout the country, a baronial cell should

⁴⁸ James Patterson, *In the wake of the great rebellion* (Manchester, 2009), p. 84.

⁴⁹ Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland ...* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1801), p. 198.

have been formed around Bantry once there was sufficient interest to do so. There is no evidence of this taking place, however, and whatever disaffection existed in Bantry prior to the French crisis, it certainly took place under the government radar.

When commenting on the ‘contagion of democracy’ in 1815, Townsend noted that it was ‘so widely diffused, that the steadiest friends of establishment began almost to despair of its security. The peasantry ... their organisation was generally slow, and frequently reluctant, and though they did fall into the snare, they were the last to be corrupted’.⁵⁰

In his account of the folklore record of the French attempt at Bantry Bay, Gearóid Ó Cruaíoch noted that by the eighteenth century, in the aftermath of the overthrow of the royal house of Stuart and its replacement by the house of Orange, ‘the literati of Gaelic Ireland and particularly of Munster had developed a variety of vision or Aisling poetry in which a forlorn female figure appears to the poet and, on questioning, identifies herself as Ireland mourning the loss of her rightful royal spouse and seeking deliverance from the thralldom in which she finds herself’. The continuing availability in popular ideology of just such an expectation of overseas deliverance in Munster Jacobite popular verse towards the end of the eighteenth century is evident in poems translated from Irish by Ó Cruaíoch.⁵¹

Rosc Catha na Mumhan, [Munster Jacobite song prophesying the return of the Stuart prince]
Measaim gur subhach don Mhumhain na fhuaim
Is dá maireann go dubhach de chrú na mbuadh
Torann na dtonn le sleasaibh na long
Ag tarraingt go teann ‘nár gceann ar cuaird

I adjudge it a joyful sound for Munster
And for those yet surviving in sorrow of the bloodlines of nobility
The beating of the waves on the sides of the ships
That are drawing strongly on to visit us.⁵²

⁵⁰ Horatio Townsend, *A general and statistical survey of County Cork* (Cork, 1815), p.98.

⁵¹ Gearóid Ó Cruaíoch, ‘The French are on the say’ in John A. Murphy (ed.), *The French are in the Bay-The Expedition to Bantry Bay 1796* (Cork, 1997), pp 124 - 27.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 127.

Another expression of the prominence in oral tradition and folklore of the hope of assistance from France is the well known late eighteenth century Whiteboy song of south Tipperary

Sliabh na mBan.

Tá an Frannach faobrach lena loingear gléasta
Agus crannaibh géara acu ar muir le seal
Isé scéal gach éinne go bhfuil a dtriall ar Éirinn
Is go gcuirfid Gaeil bhocht arís ina gceart

the keen French with their fleet under sail,
Are standing to sea this while with their elegant masts
It is everyone's story that they are to journey to Ireland
And that they will set to rights again the plight of the poor Gael⁵³

These verses indicate that Jacobite principles had become intertwined with contemporary grievances and political action in this region as in Killala. In Bantry, despite the existence of this rhetorical framework and the presentation of a similar opportunity for dissent to manifest, a different set of socio-economic circumstances dictated that this did not occur. In short, while Jacobite poetry might provide a rationale to rebel, it alone did not provide sufficient incentive to do so.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 127.

Section Three: Conflict and the locality

The enclosure of commonage and the exertions of tithe farmers had marked the emergence of the Whiteboys near the Knockmeal Mountains in County Tipperary in late 1761. Like County Waterford, Cork first took its Whiteboyism from Tipperary, almost certainly by means of the road leading from Clogheen through Ballyporeen into Mitchelstown. After penetrating Cork at its north-eastern tip, the movement spread south towards Fermoy and Rathcormack as well as southeast towards Mallow. But it remained almost exclusively confined to the two north-eastern baronies of Fermoy and Condons and Clangibbon.⁵⁴

The largest single muster reported in County Cork took place near Fermoy in late March 1762. It involved two Whiteboy bodies having a combined strength of only 500 or 600 men. At this gathering, a bay gelding, as if a substitute for its hated owner, was tried, found guilty, tortured, and shot; the horse belonged to the zealous magistrate James Grove of Ballyhimock near Fermoy and had been seized from one of Grove's servants, who was accosted while conducting a leveller to gaol. For their roles in these proceedings, which again assumed an air of festivity, two men were later executed. Enclosures were the principal grievance, and again ditches were levelled, walls knocked down, and some cattle killed. Tithes were apparently not much of an issue with the Whiteboys of Cork, though this complaint may have motivated an attack by Levellers on Rev. John Oliver's seat near Mallow, which was robbed of money and other articles in May 1762.⁵⁵

Among the features which differentiated the Whiteboy movement from earlier combinations was the almost universal use of oaths to bind its adherents together. The Levellers, John Wesley was told in June 1762, 'compelled everyone they met to take an oath to be true to Queen Sive and the Whiteboys. Those who refused to swear, they threatened to bury alive. But even if oath-bound popular organisations did exist on at least a local scale

⁵⁴ James S. Donnelly, 'The Whiteboy Movement, 1761-65' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxi, no. 8, (1978), p. 23.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

before the early 1760s, the Whiteboys should still be considered innovators because they invested oaths with great practical and symbolic importance in fusing local activists into the wider network of a regional movement.⁵⁶ Besides seeking to regain their lost rights by destroying the physical obstacles, the Whiteboys also attacked the stewards placed on the ground by landlords or the new tenants whom the landlords had introduced.⁵⁷ In the opinion of James Donnelly,

The Whiteboy movement may be considered a kind of halfway house between the localised combinations characteristic of rural protest in the south prior to 1760 and such later regional rebellions as those of the Rightboys in the mid 1780's or the Rockites in the early 1820's. Compared with earlier combinations, the Whiteboys represented something new, if only in degree. Never before in the south had agrarian rebels been so numerous, operated over such a broad area, or displayed, though for a limited time, such a high degree of organisation and coordination. On the other hand, the Whiteboys of the early 1760s were less widespread, addressed a narrower range of issues, and included fewer farmers than their successors in the 1770s. And they lacked the coherence in aims, methods, and organisation that was to distinguish the Rightboy agitation.⁵⁸

In order to sift the stack of evidence and to determine whether the Whiteboys really intended, as many Protestants believed, to raise a rebellion under the exiled pretender's standard with French aid during the 1760s, the government dispatched Godfrey Lill, a king's counsel, and John Morrison, a respected crown solicitor, to examine those who had been taken into custody. The *London Gazette*, the official government organ in England, declared as early as 4 May [1762]: 'It appeared that the authors of those disturbances have consisted indiscriminately of persons of different [religious] persuasions, and that no marks of disaffection to his majesty's person or government have been discovered upon this occasion in any class of people'. This was precisely the conclusion of the Englishman Richard Aston, chief justice of the Court of Common Pleas in Ireland, after he had presided over the trials of scores of Levellers during the special commission in the following month. Aston firmly

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

maintained that all the outrages, regardless of their specific nature, were ' the result of some local dissatisfaction ' .⁵⁹

In the opinion of Maurice J. Bric, during the 1780s the Rightboy's protest against tithes, dues, rents and labourer's wages 'attracted attention not only because of their specific complaints, but also because of the more general issues which these highlighted, such as the establishment and maintenance of the Church of Ireland, the loyalty and integrity of the Catholics, and the circumstances of the poor at a time of social and economic change' .⁶⁰ Parallels were drawn between the motto of the Cork Farmers Club, founded in the Blarney area in 1775, that tithes inhibited the industry of the farmer as well as all improvements to agriculture and the campaign of the Rightboys. Indeed, the shadow of the "Gentleman Rightboy" was said to have hung over County Cork during the first half of the 1780s. Unlike the anti-tithe and anti-enclosure movements of the 1760s, Rightboyism was methodical and highly sophisticated and the influence of the 'Gentleman Rightboy' was both seen and believed.⁶¹ Increasingly, Church of Ireland ministers met with difficulty when attempting to draw tithes and many were forced to sell the parish tithes to a tithe farmer. James Patterson has noted that Protestant ministers were often 'hesitant to raise the rates directly themselves, they were far more willing to sell collection rights to middlemen – 'tithe farmers' – who then ruthlessly squeezed the people in order to make the greatest possible return on their investment' .⁶² Often, a tithe farmer was a substantial farmer in his own right, with the hold of landlord or patronage over many of the occupiers and was in a stronger position to collect tithes than many ministers. Bric has noted that 'the mode in which tithes were levied and collected stands as a powerful trigger to the Rightboy disturbances' of the 1780s. Notably, the Rightboy campaign was not the leveller it was often represented to be; concerned primarily

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 45.

⁶⁰ Maurice J. Bric, 'Priests, parsons and politics: The rightboy protest in County Cork 1785 – 1788' in *Past and Present*, no. 100, (1983), pp 100-123.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 104.

⁶² Patterson, *In the wake of the great rebellion*, p. 84.

with the objection that rates had increased not only in intrinsic value but also in percentage demand. Therefore, the Rightboys sought rates which would be proportionate to their property and considerate of their fixed incomes. Such a contention ensured that common cause was found with Rightboy rank and file and a section of the Cork gentry whose disaffection had already been expressed through the 1783 elections and the Cork Farmer's Club.⁶³ Equally, the obligation of Catholics to maintain their clergy attracted Rightboy attention. Bric's opinion that 'the Rightboy protest showed a certain order and discrimination not often associated with pre-industrial movements in Ireland' may further hint at the participation of the 'Gentleman Rightboy' in their campaigns.⁶⁴ This phenomenon and the influence of exemplary behaviour of the patron should not be underestimated when considering events in Bantry during the French crisis.

In Bantry, there does not appear to have been a significant Whiteboy presence or incident in the area until as late as January 1822. On that occasion, around five to six hundred mounted men were reported to have attacked five houses in Bantry with arms. According to his own account, Richard White, Lord Bantry, pursued the invaders on horseback with five other men. He hoped to cut them off and confront the invading party by taking the glen road for Macroom. White's party was spotted by the Whiteboys on a road below them, near the chapel at Ballingearry and a skirmish ensued, described by White as follows:

[this] gave them an opportunity of perceiving my small party and they made an attempt to get round us, and commenced an attack with fore arms seeing it impossible to contend with such numbers, they having quitted their horses and shouts from every hill, we retreated on the road back to the glen and by returning their fire slowly made them more desperate, we still continued to retreat and they attempted to surround us in the glen and kept a fire on us, but what was much worse throwing stones from the top of the glen. I had a good escape and my brother shot the man who had thrown at me and I believe we sore wounded two more and though they kept firing on us we maintained our ground so as to prevent their following, but I

⁶³ Bric, 'Priests, parsons and politics: The rightboy protest in County Cork 1785 – 1788', p. 107.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

could not avoid letting them take off their wounded, one said to have been killed and more badly wounded.⁶⁵

White maintained that the invaders were all ‘strangers’ to the area and had come from ‘a great distance’ to carry out the attacks. From his perspective, he reiterated of Bantry that he had ‘resided in it thirty years and I have ever received the greatest co-operation from everyone in the country, at the same time without some additional military force it would be out of Ld B’s power to do anything more than to act on the defensive’.⁶⁶ Writing to Dublin Castle around one week after the initial Whiteboy incident, Richard White provided a striking account of community cooperation in facing an outside threat. It reads

... in consequence of the information taken before me and Mr O’Sullivan against persons concerned in the late illegal assembly, I made application to Major Carthew for a party to aid the civil power. The Major was so obliging as to accompany me with fourteen men. I had two magistrates, constable and tenantry including the military 55 men. We went on horseback at 5 o’ clock yesterday morning. The major took a position to defend a pass in the glen and we proceeded through it. We had scarcely passed when shouts, horns and bugle horns were sounded, and men in every direction appearing on the road. We were fired on, but judging the distance too far we did not return the fire. A man came from the party who fired, with a pike in his hand, and asked if we were not Capt. Rock’s men. This man we made a prisoner, and on our return, not finding the persons we went to apprehend at home, the Whiteboys firing, still advanced, and were received in the very best manner by Major Carthew. I detached Mr O’Sullivan and ten to his support on foot, the nature of the ground not permitting the cavalry to act. A great force was there collected who kept a regular fire on the army, and it is with feelings of great regret I am obliged to state that one soldier in advance was killed by strokes of spades, sticks etc. Two of the persons who killed him were instantly shot dead and from the fire of Major Carthew’s detachment and Mr O’Sullivan I believe many more have been killed and wounded. I was obliged to dislodge another party who were attempting to cut off our pass though the glen, which was effected in the most spirited manner.⁶⁷

Gearóid Ó Crualaoich has noted that the folklore record in respect of the events at Bantry Bay of December 1796 is unsubstantial. However, oral traditions of eyewitness evidence of the French presence do exist in the Irish Folklore Commission. In the opinion of Ó Crualaoich, these accounts serve to emphasise ‘a continuing ecclesiastical authority in the popular domain and a patriarchal repulsing by that ecclesiastical authority of outside, and

⁶⁵ UCC, BL/EP/B/2277.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

possibly female challenge', within a traditional paradigm.⁶⁸ One such account, translated from Irish by Ó Crualaoich reads as follows

When the French were coming into Bantry Bay, there was a certain man in the town who had knowledge of their coming. He told several people that they were coming and the priest got to hear of it. The next Sunday while the priest was saying Mass he turned around and he spoke: 'Where is the man who said that the French are coming,' he said. 'I'm here' said the man, standing up in his seat in the chapel. 'Is it you who said that the French were coming?' said the priest. 'I am the very man,' said he. 'How do you know,' said the priest, 'that they are coming?' 'That's all the one to you,' said the other. 'I know that much,' he said, 'and its all the one to anyone, how I know it or where I got it.' 'When are the French to come?' said the priest. 'T'would be as well for you to finish off Mass,' said the other one, 'they'll be here before you're finished,' said he. The priest turned back to the altar and he finished Mass and just as he was saying the last words the rumour spread that the French were on their way in. The priest opened a certain book (I don't rightly know if it was the Mass-Book or not but he opened up some book). He read some part of the book and while he was doing that there came a great storm and the French fleet was scattered about the ocean. They were scattered hither and thither and some of them were drowned. Some more of them turned back and they did not stop until they reached their own country'.⁶⁹

While Ó Crualaoich's assertion that the increase of ecclesiastical authority during the nineteenth century manipulated the oral record must carry some weight, it is crucial not to underestimate the influence of Catholic clergy at the time of the French attempt. During the crisis, the Roman Catholic bishop of Cork, Dr Moylan, admonished his flock to be conscious of its gratitude to 'our gracious sovereign' and to 'reverence the magistrate entrusted with the execution of the laws, and display our readiness to give him every assistance in your power'.⁷⁰ An example of contemporary ecclesiastical influence in regulating local society can be detected by a story printed in the *Cork Gazzete* in March 1794, when 'those people whom they call Whiteboys' were 'making their rounds from parish church to parish church ... to perform a heavy penance imposed upon them by the clergy'.⁷¹ In 1861, C.B. Gibson recorded

⁶⁸ Gearóid Ó Crualaoich, 'The French are on the say' in John A. Murphy (ed.), *The French are in the bay-the expedition to Bantry Bay 1796* (Cork, 1997), p. 120.

⁶⁹ Irish Folklore Commission, MS vol. 536, pp. 100/2. Cited in John A. Murphy (ed.), *The French are in the bay-the expedition to Bantry Bay 1796* (Cork, 1997), p. 134.

⁷⁰ Sean Fitzgerald, 'Wolfe Tone and Bantry Bay' in *Bantry Historical and Archaeological Journal*, i, (1991), p. 62.

⁷¹ CG, 5 March. 1794.

the experiences of the Rev. Mr. Barry, parish priest of Mallow and the Rev Mr. Barry, parish priest of Charleville, who were 'active opponents of all kinds of United Irishmen and democratic associations'. Barry gave information to government of a plan to siege the town of Mallow, for which he was granted a pension of two hundred pounds a year and earned the name 'the Protestant priest'.⁷²

Documents from the Irish Folklore Commission record the unease felt by the local population at the prospect of a French invasion and seem to reinforce Richard White's assertions that the 'lower orders' were largely acting with him in protecting the area. One short account notes

When the people saw the [French] Fleet, they started boiling pots of spuds to take them away to the mountain with urn - running away from the war. That was in 1796.⁷³

There is apparent contradiction of this sentiment in a French account of the expedition, detailing the experience of eight French soldiers who had escaped from prison at Kinsale following their arrest when their vessel was captured. This account reads;

Les secours et les soins qu'ils reçurent des paysans irlandais ne peuvent être imaginés qu'en songeant à la haine dont ces populations étaient animées contre la Grande-Bretagne. Partout ils étaient accueillis comme des amis et comme des frères ; non-seulement on leur prodiguait, sous ces toits de chaume, tout ce dont pouvaient disposer ces braves campagnards, des légumes, du fromage et du wiski, mais les hôtes voulaient même éclairer et guider leur marche ; Ils savaient tour à tour observer les mouvements des troupes dans les villages voisins, et écarter, par de fausses indications, les soldats envoyés à la poursuite des prisonniers. Les sympathies qui rapprochent les malheureux semblaient les unir par les liens d'une persécution commune à ces prisonniers français comme eux-mêmes victimes de l'Angleterre.⁷⁴

[The assistance and care they received from the Irish peasants cannot be imagined without thinking of the hate that these people felt against Great Britain. Everywhere they were greeted as friends and as brothers, not only were lavished under the thatched roofs, and had everything that they could have wanted from these brave countrymen, vegetables, cheese and whiskey, but the hosts even wanted to inform and guide their work, and in turn observe the movements of troops in the neighbouring villages, and spread by misrepresentation, soldiers sent in pursuit of the

⁷² C.B. Gibson, *The History of the County and City of Cork* (2 vols, London, 1861), ii, p. 246.

⁷³ Irish Folklore Commission, vol. 995, p. 680. Cited in John A. Murphy (ed.), *The French are in the bay-the expedition to Bantry Bay 1796* (Cork, 1997), p. 134.

⁷⁴ NLI, IR. 94107 b.10 Private letters collected by Lady Ardilaun.

prisoners. Bonds of a common persecution united their sympathies with these French prisoners, themselves as victims of England.]

This account details how the French soldiers were welcomed by the Irish peasantry as ‘friends and brothers’, in a manner that can only be understood in the context of locals hatred of Great Britain. They received protection, advice and subsistence from the Irish who guided them on their march and sent out false information to government forces sent in pursuit of the French prisoners. In many respects, the account is consistent with the experience of government forces who received food and good cheer from locals as they marched towards Bantry to repel the French invasion. It is more likely that local values of human decency and helping those who appear in trouble were the primary influence of either behaviour rather than any overt political motivation. The French account is consistent in ideology to the proclamation of General Hoche, which was on board each ship, read to each soldier and formed the crux of the French ‘hearts and minds’ mission. It read;

Jaloux de rendre à la liberté un peuple digne d’elle, et mûr pour une révolution, le Directoire nous envoie en Irlande, à l’effet d’y faciliter la révolution que d’excellents républicains viennent d’y entreprendre. Il fera beau pour nous qui avons vaincu les fatalités des Rois armés contre le République, de briser les fers d’une nation amie, de lui aider à recouvrer des droits usurpés par l’odieux Gouvernement Anglais ...

En arrivant en Irlande, vous trouverez l’hospitalité, la fraternité ; bientôt des milliers de ses habitants viendront grossir nos phalanges. Gardons nous donc bien de jamais traiter aucuns d’eux en ennemis ...

Je punirai sévèrement quiconque s’écartera de ce qu’il doit à son pays. Les lauriers et la gloire feront la partage de soldat républicain, la mort fera le prix du viol et du pillage.⁷⁵

[Jealous of the freedom to make a people worthy of her, and ripe for a revolution, *le Directoire* sent us to Ireland, to facilitate the revolution. It will be fine for us who have defeated the Kings armed against the Republic, to break the shackles of a friendly nation, to help him to recover rights usurped by the odious British Government ...

Arriving in Ireland, you will find hospitality, brotherhood, and soon thousands of its inhabitants will swell our ranks. Let us therefore never treat some of them as enemies ...

I will punish severely anyone who deviates from what is his country. Laurels and glory will be shared with the republican soldier, death will be the price of the rape and pillage]

The key points of the proclamation indicate that the French forces were in Ireland to assist the local population in their own republican revolution against Great Britain, a common enemy.

⁷⁵ Edward Morgan, *A journal of the movements of the French Fleet (Cork, 1797)*, p. 33.

The French could expect to be treated with ‘hospitality’, ‘fraternity’ and were not to treat locals as enemies or to pillage; this was punishable by death.

According to James Patterson, the republicans of Cork had never intended to rise in the absence of a French landing. In his opinion, the authorities identified Cork harbour as a logical target of a French invasion and as a result ‘the entire south Munster region became flooded with troops’. In addition to this a severe economic downturn from the autumn of 1797 added the fear of agrarian rebellion to an already traumatised local magistracy. As a result, loyalists demanded and received reinforcements. Therefore, the region failed to rise in May 1798, not because of an absence of popular enthusiasm, but because of the success of the government’s pre-emptive, disarming campaign that spring, a heavy regional military presence and the loss of vital leaders on the eve of the rebellion.⁷⁶ However, this does little to explain the tranquillity of the region around Bantry during 1796.

Edward Morgan, in the introduction to his diary of the Bantry episode, articulated the view that external factors alone would have influenced political dissent amongst the wider community around Bantry, noting

And here it may not be improper to remark, that there is too much reason to fear, the encouragement which they [the French] received from some misguided people in the Northern parts of this Kingdom, and the support which they promised on landing, confirmed them in the resolution to make a descent on our coasts.⁷⁷

While it can be presumed that Morgan enjoyed a social position of at least some privilege, his diary reveals something of his character and a desire to keep his ‘ear to the ground’. As such, he is likely to have been aware of any incidents of violence and conflict within the close-knit community around Bantry. However, his account is idealised somewhat and presents a picture of a functioning, hierarchical community which galvanises once in comes under attack. This intention is evident in the following passage

⁷⁶ James Patterson, *In the wake of the great rebellion* (Manchester, 2009), pp 86-87.

⁷⁷ Edward Morgan, *A journal of the movements of the French Fleet* (Cork, 1797), p. 6.

It is true that if they saw no reason for supposing us prepared to meet them at landing with adequate force, circumstances were also wanting to induce them to suppose that the peasantry, as they believed, or at least affected to believe, would rise in favour of their designs. Not a man shewed the smallest disposition to their fraternity, nor did any boats venture (one excepted) through the hope of gain, to furnish them with provision. This might lead them to doubt the authenticity of their treasonable encouragers, though it by no means amounted to an absolute proof of misrepresentation.⁷⁸

Morgan was not blind to the fact that had the French been successful in their landing, the tenants of Richard White would have likely submitted to their new masters with some deference. Concerned primarily with his own locality, he is critical of the military plan to abandon Bantry and those who designed it.

The people (and here it is not meant the lower description only) deserted by their proper guardians, and incapable of resistance, must not only have submitted to the enemy, but must also, in their own defence, have courted his favour, and supplied him with all necessaries, and even accommodations in his power...Most people therefore heard with astonishment, not unmixed with regret, the pusillanimous scheme of abandoning the county.⁷⁹

While minimal agrarian violence has been observed, it is necessary nonetheless to identify the socio-economic grievances that encouraged secret societies or agrarian groups to identify with revolutionaries. The formal presence of the United Irishmen in south Munster dates from 1793, the society's first club founded in Cork city by Kinsale attorney William Webb. Patterson has asserted that the Cork society focused its efforts on politicising the rural poor by distributing propaganda that fed on pre-existing socio-economic grievances to a far greater extent than its Leinster counterpart and particular effort was made to organise on the ground ahead of the Bantry Bay expedition. Thus, in his opinion, 'from an early date the United Irishmen of the region successfully merged pre-existing agrarian concerns, such as tithes with new radical concepts like natural rights and universal manhood suffrage'.⁸⁰ By autumn 1797, Cork United Irishmen were sufficiently organised to engage in an economic boycott against members of the local yeomanry. Therefore, it is evident that 'by the end of

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 20.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 33.

⁸⁰ James Patterson, *In the wake of the great rebellion* (Manchester, 2009), p. 85.

1797, south Munster had a sizeable, well -organised and highly motivated cellular United Irish structure in place'.⁸¹

Despite the tranquillity of the south Munster region during 1798 and the apparently loyal countenance of the local population in Bantry during the French crisis, it would be untrue to state that no radical politicisation took place in the area at this time. The *Freeman's Journal* of 21 February 1797 reported that General Coote at Bantry had arrested a 'Mr. R. O'C', having 'had his attention brought from all sides to [his] treasonable practices'. He was granted mercy in return for agreeing to obey the law.⁸² On 3 July 1798 the court martial assembled at Cork to conduct the trial of Bryan O'Connor, Florence McCarthy and Denis McCarthy for tendering illegal oaths. O'Connor and Florence McCarthy were sentenced to seven years banishment in Botany Bay and Denis McCarthy received twelve months close confinement.⁸³ In September 1798, Richard White wrote to Dublin Castle to advise against granting clemency to these prisoners. White described Bryan O'Connor and Florence McCarthy as 'the chief and active agents of sedition from Bandon to Bantry on the one side and Clonakilty on the other'. He advised that their return to Bantry 'would completely do away with the good that has arisen since their apprehension'.⁸⁴

What is not evident from the court martial transcripts is the exact nature of the seditious activity which took place before oaths were tendered. Presumably, United Irish agents acted in tandem with some campaign of politicisation and relevant propaganda, as outlined by Patterson. Aspects of this politicisation are evident in an 1803 deposition provided by a John White, a weaver and sub constable, concerning Bantry. It provides some example of the nature of political action in the area, it reads

[deponent] saith that this day in company with John Collins of Bantry in said county, the said Collins declared that [the] French would be in Ireland before two months to help them,

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² *FJ*, 21 Feb. 1799.

⁸³ NAI, RP 620/4/29/55.

⁸⁴ NAI, RP 620/4/29/34.

meaning the rebels, as deponent verily believes and that he then said Collins would join the French with a pike against deponent.

Deponent further saith that the said Collins told him that there was a courier going through the country to the different parishes warning the people to be ready at three minutes notice when called upon and that the said courier is Timothy Driscoll, ... from the neighbourhood of Skibbereen in said county.⁸⁵

From reading this report, it would appear that the threat of foreign invasion was being exploited for local and personal grievances in at least one incident. The threatened invasion did not take place, of course, and perhaps the scare in 1796 had made supporters of the establishment sensitive to even the most trivial of information. Similar to Killala, evidence would suggest that the majority of the local population was far removed from the radical political discourse which underpinned much seditious activity.

⁸⁵ NAI, RP 620/12/141/9.

Section Four - Local experience of the 1798 Rebellion

On 15 December 1796 a French invasion fleet set sail from Brest harbour with nearly 14,000 men on board and sufficient arms for a further 45,000. In total, 43 ships set sail. Theobald Wolfe Tone was on board the *Indomptable* commanded by Jacques Bedout, General Lazare Hoche and General de Galles, the military and naval commanders of the expedition, were on board the *Fraternité*, and seconds in command Grouchy and Bouvet were on board the *Immortalité*.⁸⁶ Departing Brest on 15 December, Tone wrote in his diary ‘we are all in high spirits and the troops are as gay as if they were going to a ball. With our 15,000 (more correctly 13,975) I would not have the least doubt of our beating 30,000 of such as will be opposed to us; that is to say, if we reach our destination’.⁸⁷ Returns for troop numbers, assessing the combined military strength of government forces when the French fleet arrived at Bantry on 21 December, show Tone’s estimates to have been relatively accurate; a total of 33,025 men including 4,240 cavalry were recorded from the returns of commanding officers.⁸⁸

Tone recorded his preferred plan of campaign in his diaries at Brest on 4 December 1796. Attentive to the political geography of Ireland, Tone proposed that three or at four of the fastest ships should set off with as many troops as they can carry, sail around the coast of Ireland and land in the north, as near to Belfast as possible. He predicted that if 2,000 men were landed in this manner, with sufficient weaponry to arm those who joined them, they would have possession of the entire north of Ireland within one week.⁸⁹ The plan was rejected by Hoche on strategic military grounds: Tone recorded his observations that ‘if our little squad fell in with the enemy we must to a moral certainty be taken; next, if we got even clear,

⁸⁶ Sean Fitzgerald, ‘Wolfe Tone and Bantry Bay’ in *Bantry Historical and Archaeological Journal*, i, (1991), p. 57.

⁸⁷ T.W. Moody, R.B. McDowell and C.J. Woods (eds.), *The writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone, 1763 – 98*, (3 vols, Oxford, 2001), ii, p. 415.

⁸⁸ NLI, MS 809 Volume relating to the proposed French invasion of Ireland.

⁸⁹ T.W. Moody, R.B. McDowell and C.J. Woods (eds.), *The writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone, 1763 – 98* (3 vols, Oxford, 2001), ii, p. 410.

and that the remainder of the squadron fell in with the enemy and was beaten, which would most probably be the case, the whole fault would be laid on him, as having weakened the main force by the detachment'. In addition, owing to the advanced stage of their preparations and their being furnished with limited provisions, they were to speedily sail.⁹⁰ Disaster struck the invasion fleet on the first night of their mission. The *Fraternité*, with the two chiefs on board, was separated from the rest of the fleet by stormy weather and was not seen again until the return to France. In their passage from the harbour at Brest, one ship *Séduisant*, a 74-gunner, struck a rock and of the 550 men aboard only thirty were saved.⁹¹

The fleet was spotted off Cape Clear, Ireland's most southerly island, by an English brig, the *Kangaroo*, commanded by Courtenay Boyle. He immediately proceeded to Crookhaven with the information, where it was passed to Richard White in Bantry. On 21 December 1796 Richard White of Seafield (later Bantry) House received a letter from Samuel Bagley stating that he had seen twenty three large ships, three or four brigs and two luggars to the south of Durseys. At eleven o'clock the following morning, Bagley wrote to confirm that 'the French fleet consisting of twenty eight ships of the line and some small vessels are this moment of this harbour all beating up for Bantry', adding 'what we are to do, or what is to become of us, God only knows'.⁹² News of the French arrival was brought to General Dalrymple in Cork, commanding officer for the region, by one of Mr White's workmen who was said to have ridden there on horseback in four hours, despite the near impassibility of the snow-covered roads.⁹³ The uncertainty on board the French vessels is described in Tone's diary entry for 21 December.

This morning at daybreak we were under Cape Clear, distant about 4 leagues, so I have at all events once more seen my country; but the pleasure I should otherwise feel at this event is totally destroyed by the absence of the general, who has not joined us and of whom we know nothing. The sails we saw last night have disappeared, and we are all in uncertainty. It is most

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

⁹¹ Sean Fitzgerald, 'Wolfe Tone and Bantry Bay' in *Bantry Historical and Archaeological Journal*, i, (1991), p. 58.

⁹² UCC, BL/EP/B/2244.

⁹³ Sean Fitzgerald, 'Wolfe Tone and Bantry Bay' in *Bantry Historical and Archaeological Journal*, i, (1991), p. 59.

delicious weather, with a favourable wind, and everything in short that we can desire, except our absent comrades. At the moment I write this we are under easy sail, within three leagues at most of the coast, so that I can discover here and there patches of snow on the mountains. What if the General should not join us? If we cruise here five days, according to our instructions, the English will be upon us, and then all is over.⁹⁴

On 22 December Richard White received two affidavits made before John Beamish of Berehaven and Daniel O'Sullivan of Coulagh by some fishermen who passed before the French fleet. A similar information from the surveyor of Berehaven was sent to White, who, according Edward Morgan, 'directly called together the corps of Yeomanry under his command, and made the necessary arrangements for establishing a chain of outposts along the mountains to Sheephead, the south west extremity of Bantry Bay, distant from his house twenty two miles'.⁹⁵ Morgan was a native of Bantry who kept a journal of events surrounding the French invasion attempt which was published in 1797. At half past eleven that night, General Eyre Coote wrote to Richard White to inform him that his intelligence had been forwarded to Chief Secretary Thomas Pelham at Dublin Castle. This correspondence was conveyed by Captain Cotter, who had been dispatched by the generals to Dunmanway and Bantry to assist White in organising against the French fleet.⁹⁶

Tone's diary entry of 22 December 1796 recorded: 'this morning at eight we have neared Bantry Bay, but the fleet is terribly scattered, no news of the *Fraternité*. I believe it is the first instance of an admiral in a clean frigate, with moderate weather and moonlight nights parting company with his fleet.' Some sixty years later, Crofton Croker, who worked for the English Admiralty, claimed that the captain of the missing vessel had accepted a bribe from the English government to take Hoche and his naval colleague for a cruise in the Atlantic for a few weeks.⁹⁷ Tone's frustration at their predicament was heightened by the ambivalence of

⁹⁴ T.W. Moody, R.B. McDowell and C.J. Woods (eds.), *The writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone, 1763 – 98* (3 vols, Oxford, 2001), ii, p. 419.

⁹⁵ Edward Morgan, *A Journal of the movements of the French fleet* (Cork, 1797), p. 37.

⁹⁶ UCC, BL/EP/B/2243.

⁹⁷ Sean Fitzgerald, 'Wolfe Tone and Bantry Bay' in *Bantry Historical and Archaeological Journal*, i (1991), p. 58.

his comrades in arms, recording: 'I do not at all like the countenance of the *État-Major* in this crisis. When they speak of the expedition, it is in a style of despondence, and when they are not speaking of it, they are playing cards and laughing; they are, every one of them, brave of their persons, but I see nothing of that spirit of enterprise, combined with a steady resolution, which our present situation demands'.⁹⁸

By 23 December, the French fleet were described by Morgan as being 'in plain view riding at anchor across the bay, reckoned to consist of eighteen large vessels'. Although it had not yet been confirmed that the fleet was that of an invading French army, Morgan described how 'the alarm in the country was great, and such females as could get conveyance this day left Bantry, some found asylum in Bandon or Cork; the greater number took refuge in the mountains of Kerry... on this day all troops in Cork were under marching orders, and the roads leading to the west covered with the military equipage'.⁹⁹

By the evening of 23 December, government supporters were yet to confirm beyond doubt that the vessels arriving at Bantry were those of an invading French army. There had been no correspondence with the fleet and they flew no flags.¹⁰⁰ On that day, Bantry native Jim Coghlan wrote to Richard White to inform him that he had viewed the fleet from Brow Head and they 'did not appear to be English ships', adding 'I have no more to say but hope they are not enemies'.¹⁰¹ The extent of the rumour and general confusion created in the region by their arrival is evidenced by a letter written on 24 December to Lord Shannon from Cobh, over 100 kilometres from Bantry. The correspondent appeared sceptical of the reports circulating of 'the French fleet with 50,000 at Berehaven', informing Shannon that it was 'nothing more than the hind frigate with the Quebec convoy, happy to take shelter there from the strong easterly wind' and assuring him that 'should the alarm be well grounded, of which

⁹⁸ T.W. Moody, R.B. McDowell and C.J. Woods (eds.), *The writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone, 1763 – 98* (3 vols, Oxford, 2001), ii, p. 423.

⁹⁹ Edward Morgan, *A Journal of the movements of the French fleet* (Cork, 1797), p. 39.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.40.

¹⁰¹ UCC, BL/EP/B/2244.

at present I have every doubt, I will the moment the information arrives here, forward it for you.¹⁰²

Unknown to the misinformed correspondent, Richard White had organised a small party of ten men to sail out to the fleet earlier that day. White had provided the party with a letter requesting that a commanding officer come ashore to declare their intentions. When they did not return, it was taken as confirmation that the vessels were that of an invading army.¹⁰³ At some point during that day, White wrote to General Coote to confirm that he had ‘now no doubt in declaring them the French fleet. I have been hitherto cautious, by no means wishing to alarm, they consist of 60 sail, 13 to 17 of the line.’¹⁰⁴

At four o’clock in the morning on 24 December, Richard White wrote to an unnamed correspondent in Cork to inform him

I am highly obliged by your communications, all of which I have transmitted as I am ordered to General Coote, I am nobly supported by all ranks here and I have every support from government, I have a confidential officer now with me and I have all the Munster troops now here and on their march, the English fleet will yet outride them, God grant it. Keep a boat if possible at sea, to watch them and to give us every signal. I will have others off here, to convey intelligence. I have no fear of a rising of the people and let us act with confidence; I shall be the last man to leave this town. Whatever I write to you, you are to consider as from General Coote for whom I act.¹⁰⁵

In his journal entry for that day, Edward Morgan wrote: ‘Mr White ... was the person to whom every species of information was directed; the country people assembled in small parties and kept constant watch on the hills and eminences for several miles round, and to his house every circumstance, however trivial, was conveyed by them’.¹⁰⁶ Evidence of a quickly organised chain of information between local inhabitants and government forces is clear from the flurry of letter writing which took place following the appearance of the French fleet at Bantry. Information was gathered locally by White and transmitted to the army in Cork,

¹⁰² NLI, MS 13,303/222 Shannon Papers.

¹⁰³ Edward Morgan, *A journal of the movements of the French fleet* (Cork, 1797), p. 40.

¹⁰⁴ NLI, P. 5389 Copies of letters of Richard White of Bantry.

¹⁰⁵ UCC, BL/EP/B/2245.

¹⁰⁶ Edward Morgan, *A journal of the movements of the French fleet* (Cork, 1797), p. 40.

which made the necessary communication with Dublin Castle. White was also included in the chain of correspondence between Captain Cotter and his superiors at Cork. By 26 December, White wrote to his brother Hamilton in Cork and boasted that he had ‘a chain of information along the coast that has astonished all the officers’.¹⁰⁷ On the evening of 24 December White wrote to Viscount Longueville, his uncle by marriage, to inform him that ‘the French are in my view ...all the country have all joined to support me, and General Coote has given me every support... My women I sent to Bandon yesterday. I have been up two nights on duty ... all the lower orders acting peaceably’.¹⁰⁸

On 26 December, Commander-in-chief General Dalrymple, along with Brigadier General Coote, arrived in Bantry from Cork and appointed Seafield House as their headquarters. Several field officers were also stationed there and a troop of light Dragoons were quartered in the stables. The houses of White’s brothers were also occupied by troops; the homes of Hamilton and Simon White were converted into barracks for the infantry and the cavalry.¹⁰⁹ White had written to Dalrymple and offered him use of Seafield as military headquarters, requesting only that he have permission to reserve one room for himself.¹¹⁰ Writing to Hamilton, who was then in Cork, Richard informed his brother, ‘you may judge my house well, we live most elegantly and I never saw so fair a set of gentlemen. Only for my female friends I would wish the alarm to continue, as I was never in a more pleasant society. The kind manner they all act by me and the compliments I have been paid for what was in fact only my common duty as a good subject, has made me feel every satisfaction’.¹¹¹

Unknown to Tone and the remainder of the French party near Bantry, the *Redoubtable* and *Résolue* had been involved in a collision south-west of Berehaven, in which the *Résolue* was badly damaged. Admiral Joseph Neilly dispatched a boat from the damaged vessel to

¹⁰⁷ UCC, BL/EP/B/2248.

¹⁰⁸ NLI, P. 5389 Copies of letters of Richard White of Bantry.

¹⁰⁹ Edward Morgan, *A journal of the movements of the French fleet* (Cork, 1797), p. 43.

¹¹⁰ UCC, BL/EP/B/2246.

¹¹¹ NLI, P. 5389 Copies of letters of Richard White of Bantry.

find Admiral de Richey to request a tow. With a crew of six or seven under the command of marine Lieutenant Gillaume Proteau, the party set out in a fierce storm on a twenty two mile journey, only to be driven ashore on Bere Island during the night of 26 December. Here Proteau and his crew were captured by Daniel O' Sullivan of Coulagh, a first cousin of Daniel O'Connell.¹¹² The *New Cork Evening Post* later reported the incident, and possibly exaggerated the account somewhat.

Daniel O'Sullivan, a Justice of the Peace, organised upwards of 2,000 of the peasantry to repel any invasion by the French, he was a captain of the Berehaven Loyal Infantry and succeeded in capturing a French officer but lost his yacht worth 300 guineas in the process. In recognition of his efforts he was awarded the freedom of the corporation of Cork and the government gave him command of a yeomanry corps. O'Sullivan also transmitted a sum of twenty guineas reward to the boat men involved in the capture. They were William Morgan, Richard Walsh, John and Thomas Blake, Patrick O'Sullivan, Garret Stack and Edmund Power.¹¹³

That night at nine o'clock, O'Sullivan arrived at Richard White's house with the French naval officer as a prisoner. Edward Morgan recorded in his journal that on his examination before the generals, he appeared perfectly composed; he spoke with caution, and gave little information. He declared that Bantry Bay was the original destination of the fleet, that the expedition was 'remarkably well planned and conducted by officers of the first abilities' and he was in little doubt that the country would be theirs in the course of a week. In an ideological sense, he stated that their descent on Ireland was not intended to conquer the people but to set them free. Lieutenant Proteau was escorted by Captain Gordon to Cork, from where he was later conveyed to Dublin.¹¹⁴

At half past six on the evening of 27 December, Richard White wrote a letter to his brother, Hamilton, in Cork, in a tone of which was very different from the optimism which had marked his correspondence up to that point. Reacting angrily to a possible request from his family that he vacate Bantry, White questioned 'would you have me desert a cause to

¹¹² Sean Fitzgerald, 'Wolfe Tone and Bantry Bay' in *Bantry Historical and Archaeological Journal*, i, (1991), p.61.

¹¹³ *NCEP*, 23 Feb. 1797.

¹¹⁴ Edward Morgan, *A journal of the movements of the French fleet* (Cork, 1797), p. 43.

which I am so attached, where I am receiving every compliment and credit, where I am so interested and where to a certainty I cannot receive the least injury'. Whether through fatigue, new information received, or events on the ground, White began to entertain doubts over the intentions of the 'lower orders' for the first time, noting 'my own people would on my leaving this probably get to the cellar, and I assure you I would much rather have a share myself and my present friends than either the people here or General Hoche should get a taste'. White may have been rattled by the hour long conversation he had conducted with Lieutenant Proteau, in which the French strategy for Ireland was discussed. He reported with unease: 'I am sorry to say all their thoughts are to conciliate, the more to be dreaded as the country people may join them. At present every appearance to the contrary...I am still concerned to add the French are determined to act in the most friendly manner, to pay for everything, to punish the smallest injury on their part. This conduct alone I dread. The latter part of this you will soon perceive has struck me from my conversation with the officer'.¹¹⁵

The plan of defence designed by the military commanders at Seafield appears to have favoured abandoning Bantry to the French, should they have attempted to land there. Owing to the limited number of government troops in the region, strategic military logic determined that it was unwise to oppose so large an invading army with limited artillery and little chance of success. Morgan estimated that there could not have been more than 400 troops in the town of Bantry, 150 in Drimoleague and about 1,200 in the town of Dunmanway. The majority of generals appear to have been in agreement that the town of Bantry should be destroyed and that a retreat be made to the bridge of Drimoleague, where a stand could have been made. The plan to vacate Bantry would have left the French army with undisputed access to three roads of good quality which were equidistant to Cork City, all capable of transporting artillery. Government forces possessed only two six-pounders with which to

¹¹⁵ UCC, BL/EP/B/2248.

defend the pass at Drimoleague. If the government forces waited to engage the French at this location, they were likely to have been outflanked on both sides by the French, who would have occupied the roads to Macroom and Skibbereen. Morgan further commented on the strategy of the generals by speculating, ‘whatever the motives were, which inclined the Commander in Chief, and the Generals, to allow the enemy to land, had they attempted it, are I fancy at present but little known; but I understand it is pretty well ascertained, that it was ultimately determined Cork and the county should be abandoned for the present, and the *coup de main* was to have been attempted somewhere about Blackwater.’¹¹⁶ In anticipation of the French landing, General Dalrymple issued a declaration on 27 December ordering that all horses from Bantry to Drimoleague be commandeered and that they should be destroyed, if they were about to fall into the hands of the French. Appropriate compensation would be paid to any dispossessed owners.¹¹⁷

Writing to Chief Secretary Thomas Pelham on 1 February 1797 over a year after the Bantry debacle, General Dalrymple explained his decision to abandon Bantry in pragmatic military terms. Expecting another French invasion attempt in the near future, he summarised the desperation of the situation he perceived the government forces to be in by predicting the likely chain of events following a successful landing, stating

In four days, the enemy’s light troops will be in possession of Bandon; our numbers to oppose them at that time must be under four thousand; artillery, they will want little, us having almost none; seven thousand grenadiers and twelve thousand old infantry inured to war with light troops, of which we have not one, moving by two or three roads will find us a very small impediment. Cork would capitulate immediately; the harbour and forts would be theirs in two or three days after.

In order to engage successfully the projected invasion force, Dalrymple surmised that an army of at least 14,000 troops, ‘completely and perfectly appointed with horses, carriages and field equipage’ should be assembled and remain together. In this context, he perceived the loss of Cork city and county as a military inevitability and saw little merit in sacrificing what

¹¹⁶ Edward Morgan, *A journal of the movements of the French fleet* (Cork, 1797), pp 22-26.

¹¹⁷ UCC, BL/EP/B/2247.

few troops he commanded in a futile resistance. These sentiments were echoed in his letter of 8 February 1797 to Lord Carhampton, further stating that ‘nothing but an army in a state to engage that of the invaders, with a probability of success, founded on its numbers, composition and discipline can effectually stop the movements of the enemy; all supposed natural advantages being insufficient when not supported by an adequate force’.¹¹⁸

It is likely that the General’s plan to abandon Bantry was the cause of much consternation in the locality. Writing to Chief Secretary Thomas Pelham on 31 December 1796 Viscount Longueville fumed:

We had a miraculous escape, but no part of it owing to the intervention of either government... Gen Hoche and 25,000 men hot and reeking with the murders, rapes and robberies of Vendée were to have landed at Berehaven. We had in all seven regiments of militia and two regiments of fencible cavalry. Gen Dalrymple intended to have made his first stand at Drimoleague. He would have given up Bantry, and all my deeds, leases and valuables would have been destroyed, for he never wrote a line to me. I called on him at Cork, but I fancy he was ill fitted for his situation as the primate would have been. General Coote is a schoolboy in his profession. I have had a great escape’.¹¹⁹

In his own correspondence with Pelham on 30 December, Richard White was more deferential in his opinions, reporting that his yeomanry corps consisted of 59 men, who ‘immediately on the present alarm have placed ourselves under the orders of Gen Dalrymple to act as he thinks proper. The loyalty of all ranks in this neighbourhood I cannot mention to you without the highest praise. I shall confine myself to the purport of your letter, and leave all other communications to the General’.¹²⁰

Justifying his strategic stance to Pelham, Dalrymple wrote ‘I trust I have given as little offence to individuals acting with me as anyone could have done and am as much inclined to give them credit for their virtues; but at the same time, I must not be blind to their radical defects and entrust them with what in the end might produce public ruin – this is not only my own judgement, but it is that of the few whose judgement and talents I pay high

¹¹⁸ NLI, MS 809 Volume relating to the proposed French invasion of Ireland.

¹¹⁹ NLI, IR 94107 b.10 Private letters collected by Lady Ardilaun.

¹²⁰ NLI, P. 5389 Copies of letters of Richard White of Bantry.

deference to'.¹²¹ The lingering criticism of Dalrymple's strategy was acknowledged in his letter to Pelham on 5 April 1797 when he noted 'as much has been said on the impropriety of not attempting a resolute defence of the hilly part of this county on a former occasion with a very inconsiderable force; I conceive it now proper to suggest the best ideas that present themselves either from information obtained from those on whom I can best rely, or the surveys taken'. Enough political pressure was evidently exerted to ensure that a similar strategy would not be adopted should the French attempt another landing. Dalrymple stubbornly reasserted the military requirements of such a decision by stating:

I do humbly conceive that if it is thought proper to adopt the proposition of defending the mountainous parts of the S.W. part of this district, the force destined for that service ought to be stationed or encamped as near the point of defence as is possible. For to render the position formidable much labour is required and without that labour it would be impossible for the troops to act advantageously on the offensive or with any degree of safety on the defensive'.¹²²

The *Freeman's Journal* of 19 September 1797 reported that the lord lieutenant had arrived in Bantry to inspect the ongoing fortification of Bantry and surrounding coasts.¹²³ Viscount Longueville appeared to have little sympathy for the predicament of the military command, writing to Dublin Castle on 7 January 1797, 'a shipload of your generals here are not worth a rap halfpenny. Dalrymple had a fit at Dunmanway and fell off his chair, the people under his command were sorry he recovered'.¹²⁴

The disruption of the command structure had caused considerable confusion and disorganisation amongst the French fleet at anchor off Bantry Bay. Despite this, Tone wrote in his diary on 24 December that the invasion fleet were readying to disembark and were attempting to near the coast. A strong easterly wind ensured that their progress was slow and they gained less than 100 yards in four hours. On the night of 25 December, Tone was

¹²¹ NLI, MS 809 Volume relating to the proposed French invasion of Ireland.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *FJ*, 19 Sep. 1797.

¹²⁴ NLI, IR 94107 b.10 Private letters collected by Lady Ardilaun.

awakened by the strong wind which continued to work against their progress. Fearing that an English fleet was being carried by the same wind at their rear and that the delay was enabling government troops to organise on the ground, he became despondent and his thoughts became fixed on his own demise, stating:

if we are taken, my fate will not be a mild one; the best I can expect is to be shot as an *émigré rentré*, unless I have the good fortune to be killed in the action, for most assuredly if the enemy will have us, he must fight for us. Perhaps I will be reserved for trial, in which case I shall be hanged as a traitor and embowelled &c &c. As to the embowelling, *je m'en fiche!*¹²⁵

By 26 December, Tone entertained little hope of a successful landing at Bantry, noting 'now that all is lost, I am as eager to get back to France as I was to come to Ireland'. Summarising their decline in fortunes, he wrote:

we have lost two commanders in chief; of four admirals not one remains; we have lost a ship of the line that we know of, and probably many other vessels of which we know nothing, we have been now six days in Bantry Bay, within five hundred yards of the shore, without being able to effectuate a landing; we have been dispersed four times in four days, and at this moment of 43 sail of which the expedition consisted we can muster, of all sizes, but 14... All our hopes are now reduced to get back in safety to Brest.¹²⁶

On 27 December, the French command decided to leave Bantry Bay and proceed to the mouth of the Shannon, a move which was favoured by Tone as he noted 'that this province [Munster] is the only one of the four which has testified no disposition to revolt'. This plan was abandoned by 29 December when the decision was made to return to France.¹²⁷

When local inhabitants awoke on 28 December to find that the French had vacated the bay, Edward Morgan recorded the congratulatory mood which prevailed in Bantry. He stressed, however, that 'no duty, either by the military, or the peasantry was remitted, between whom, from the first alarm, the most cordial friendship and co-operation existed'. The following day, the 'country people' gathered on the surrounding hills to anxiously await

¹²⁵ T.W. Moody, R.B. McDowell and C.J. Woods (eds.), *The writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone, 1763 – 98*, (3 vols, Oxford, 2001), ii, pp. 427-429.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 431.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 434.

the arrival of the English fleet to confirm that the crisis was over.¹²⁸ On 30 December a general alarm was recorded about the town of Bantry when a French lugger arrived in the bay after receiving cannon fire which appeared to have come from Berehaven. It proceeded to cast anchor at the north side of Whiddy Island. At around two o'clock, two merchant ships, one an American, the *Beaver*, out of Charlestown and the other the *Sisters* out of Liverpool appeared in the bay. The firing which had been heard in the morning was at these two vessels from some French ships of war, four of which now appeared in pursuit of them. The American ship dropped anchor near the town of Bantry. The generals sent for the master and questioned him on shore. He informed them that he had met bad weather at sea and was seeking shelter in the bay. On his entrance, two seventy fours fired at him and his companion, the *Sisters*, to bring them in, but they had kept on their course for the bay.¹²⁹

Edward Morgan recorded that two seventy-fours and two frigates had come to anchor opposite the middle of Whiddy island and that their movements on board were discernable to the naked eye from Seafield Park. Reports were received that five or six ships of the line and some smaller vessels were at Berehaven. As moderate weather prevailed, a landing of the French was looked on by Morgan as inevitable.¹³⁰ Colonel Simon White wrote to his brother Richard on 30 December to inform him that eight of his tenants had ventured on board the seventy-four with provisions to sell and had been detained. In anticipation of the expected invasion, he wrote 'the country people are prepared with pikes, spades &c and will do their best'.¹³¹

On 31 December, two boats with at least fifty men on board left one of the seventy-fours and proceeded towards the town. Although their intention was to plunder the *Sisters*, it was interpreted by locals and the military that the invasion was underway. The infantry which

¹²⁸ Edward Morgan, *A journal of the movements of the French fleet* (Cork, 1797), p.45.

¹²⁹ Sean Fitzgerald, 'Wolfe Tone and Bantry Bay' in *Bantry Historical and Archaeological Journal*, i, (1991), p.63.

¹³⁰ Edward Morgan, *A journal of the movements of the French fleet* (Cork, 1797), p. 47.

¹³¹ NLI, IR 94107 b.10 Private letters collected by Lady Ardilaun.

were stationed at Bantry immediately took up their arms and the cavalry galloped off to their barracks at Beach, under the command of General Trench of the Galway militia. Generals Dalrymple and Coote withdrew themselves from Bantry to Dunmanway.¹³² Although the French did not attempt to come ashore, Morgan recorded that news spread across the adjacent countryside that the French had actually landed and a state of general panic ensued. Despite this, he claimed that ‘the country shewed no signs of tumult, nor the smallest disposition to riot’.¹³³

On the day of his departure from Bantry, General Dalrymple wrote to Richard White to thank him for his hospitality and express his gratitude to ‘the yeomanry cavalry, the gentlemen and the inhabitants of the country [to whom] equal praise is to be given, as everyone in his situation has pursued to the utmost power and ability the splendid example set by you’.¹³⁴ In response, White returned Dalrymple’s praise and wrote ‘the approbation of my conduct which you have in such flattering terms been kind enough to convey to me is, I assure you, the highest gratification I can receive. The loyalty of the country gentlemen, the yeomanry and the inhabitants of this district are fully entitled to your praise and I shall not fail to communicate to them your favourable opinion’.¹³⁵ According to the *London Gazette* of 3 January 1797

the yeomanry and volunteer corps displayed the utmost zeal and alacrity in guarding these places whence the regular troops were withdrawn – the universal readiness shown by all descriptions of people – left no doubt of the event in case the enemy had ventured to make a descent. In particular the spirit, activity and exertions of Richard White, esq. deserves the most honourable mention.¹³⁶

On 6 January Morgan recorded in his journal that ‘not a single French vessel was to be seen from any land in the neighbourhood of the bay’. The English fleet appeared off the

¹³² Edward Morgan, *A journal of the movements of the French fleet* (Cork, 1797), p. 49.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹³⁴ UCC, BL/EP/B/2249.

¹³⁵ NLI, P. 5389 Copies of letters of Richard White of Bantry.

¹³⁶ *TLG*, 3 Jan. 1797.

coast of Bantry on 9 January.¹³⁷ On that day, General William Trench wrote to Richard White to express his gratitude at White's personal conduct, that of his brothers and the loyalty of his tenants during the crisis, noting:

we beg leave to congratulate you and the country at large on the convincing proof we now have that the first appearance of an enemy on our coast, is the signal for every description of Irishmen to cement in one impenetrable mass of loyalty and true patriotism wisely and affectionately attached to the best of kings and the happiest of countries.¹³⁸

White was presented with a medal for his actions by the City of Cork Committee on 2 February 1797 on which occasion the loyalty and diligence of the wider population was again singled out for praise, their report noting:

the conduct of the peasantry deserves the highest approbation. Their abhorrence strongly manifested against the common enemy – their hearty and hospitable aid afforded to the troops on their march furnish unequivocal proofs of their loyalty, and give them additional claims to the favour and protection of the opulent and powerful.¹³⁹

This quotation indicated the establishment view which congratulated White for the conduct of the people who lived in the locality. As the French never landed and could not employ their strategy of conciliation and appeasing the locals, it can only be speculated as to what the likely outcome would have been. There are no reports in the rebellion papers which detail significant insurgent activity prior to or after the French crisis for the area around Bantry. There are some transcripts which covered the swearing of oaths in the period after the French scare but these seem relatively isolated in comparison with the rest of the country. The area around Bantry remained noticeably quiet throughout the disturbances of 1798.

¹³⁷ Edward Morgan, *A journal of the movements of the French fleet* (Cork, 1797), p. 57.

¹³⁸ UCC, BL/EP/B/2252.

¹³⁹ UCC, BL/EP/B/2257.

Conclusion

The cooperative and apparently loyal reaction of the local population of Bantry during the French crisis was a source of contemporary wonder and intrigue. At least two competing ‘comic operas’ were written at that time on this subject matter; *What News from Bantry Bay*¹⁴⁰ and *The Loyal Peasants* were both performed at Covent Garden, London¹⁴¹ In the first act of the latter, a character named O’Laughlin rebuffs a ‘northern peddler’ for addressing him as ‘citizen’ by stating ‘I’m no citizen, sure I live in the country’. O’Laughlin’s confused loyal zeal is further attested when he states ‘I’m Dominic O’Laughlin of Dunmanus, a gentleman every inch of me, if I had money enough; and if there is another gentleman here let him follow me; now that his country is in danger’. Later in the act, O’Laughlin encounters a French soldier and sings an air outlining the Irish peasant’s politics in full.

You’re sadly mistaken, my dear Sans Culottes,
To think that we’d join you to cut our own throats,
No poisonous reptiles can live here you know,
Ogh’s gudeshin, gunthestan noch monin shen doe.

If they never get back, they’ll remember the day,
That they went to the bottom in sweet Bantry Bay,
In the land of potatoes no French cock shall crow,
Ogh’s gudeshin, gunthestan noch monin shen doe.

To be sure now and then with a drop of a dram,
We’re tempted to give the tythe proctor a damn,
But the faith of St.Patrick we’ll never forgoe
Ogh’s gudeshin, gunthestan noch monin shen doe.

Here’s my hand to John Bull, let him take of his glove,
Tho’ sometimes we quarrel, ‘tis only for love,
We’ll ever unite when attacked by the foe
Ogh’s gudeshin, gunthestan noch monin shen doe.¹⁴²

While a London audience could take comfort and amusement in the evasion of a more serious crisis at Bantry, allusions of the loyalty of the Irish ‘peasantry’ were shattered in the following years; not least by the rebels who flocked to the French standard at Killala. In

¹⁴⁰ Archibald McLaren, *What news from Bantry Bay* (Dublin, 1798).

¹⁴¹ G.N. Reynolds, *The loyal peasants* (London, 1797).

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

reality, such forthright political persuasion is likely to have had limited influence on the conduct and ‘loyal’ reaction of the population around Bantry.

David Dickson has comprehensively outlined how drastic economic change had taken place during the lifetime of the region’s oldest inhabitants. The monetisation of everyday life had taken place in previous generations and was now, largely, the accepted mode of commerce. This appears to have been the case in Bantry, where the interlocked industries of farming, fishing and rural industry were dependent on local fairs and markets to sell their produce. Despite the subjugated condition of the cottier class, it is likely that most had found a precarious level of subsistence within this altered economic landscape and were sensitive to the detrimental effect that any sudden change might entail.

Jacobite poetry foretelling the reversal of the social order does appear to have been prevalent amongst the Irish speaking population around Bantry. However, this theoretical framework in itself did not act as a catalyst for radical political violence at the appearance of the French fleet at Bantry. The example and loyal countenance of Richard White during the crisis cannot be underestimated. As the patron of the local, interlocked economy he held generational interests in various aspects of its commercial machinations and his rapid ascent to the peerage is testament to the relative power he held at that time. His position as head of the strongest family in Bantry meant that his influence was considerable. This is perhaps even more telling in south Munster; a region where the phenomenon of the ‘gentleman Whiteboy’ was common. All indications suggest that the local population was largely content with White’s pragmatic patronage of the area and while some grievances undoubtedly existed, they were not sufficient to inspire violent retribution. In this context, however, it is important to remember White’s troubled reaction to the French intention to conciliate and appease the local population should they land. He was unsure whether their loyalty would withstand an equally fair benefactor.

The reaction of the Catholic clergy to the crisis is difficult to gauge. In the upper echelons of power, Bishop Moylan of Cork was strenuous in his loyal assertions to the 'gracious sovereign' and some anecdotal evidence of loyal priests persisted. The record of the Irish Folklore Commission records ecclesiastical hostility to the French invasion. Systems of education appear to have been in their infancy around Bantry and general literacy may not have been to a high standard. Dissemination of radical newspapers and ideals does not appear to have been a hugely significant issue for White, who dealt swiftly to ensure that prisoners convicted of tendering illegal oaths were not returned to their homes. It is likely that political or radical issues were moulded to suit the local context, as intensioned by United Irish propaganda, and 'watered down' to the extent that they made little actual impact on the mindset of the local population who seemed largely concerned with their own subsistence and well-being.

Conclusion

In order to understand the significance of the rebellion in each of the four communities, it was necessary to compare them in relation to one another. A key objective of the research framework is to achieve some consensus of what was meant by the term 'rebellion' in each locality. By choosing four disparate communities at great distance from one another it is aimed to provide some recognition of the vastly different worlds which cohabited in late eighteenth century Ireland. In establishing the demographic context for each locality, in terms of population, economy and religious persuasion, it is intended to display the distinctions that could be made between key terms of reference and the lack of precision which some terms provided. A Catholic in north Mayo may have expressed a vastly different belief structure to a Catholic in Ballymoney, both politically and spiritually.

Contrasting economic circumstances formed a key component of much contemporary grievances. The reversal of the social order which was evident in Irish language Jacobite poetry was more often translated to mean the redistribution of material wealth during the French occupation of Killala. Perhaps the most bitter dispute outlined in this research is that between Edmund McNaghten and the Caldwell family; a deeply personal conflict between individuals who were similar with reference to 'terms' of demographic distinction but held vastly differing interpretations of those terms. It could be speculated that the shared history and background of the two families was a catalyst for McNaghten's campaign, an expression of historical grievances in a contemporary power vacuum.

In order to assess contemporary attitudes towards the state, it is necessary to establish the individuals and organisations which came to represent the state in each community. Each community existed as a unit of state to varying degrees. In Bantry, Richard White remained loyal to government throughout the French affair, and was granted a peerage after the crisis.

It is difficult to assess the relevance of College Green to the inhabitants of eighteenth-century Killala. Although it is perhaps inevitable that while the commercialisation of their society gathered pace, some politicisation would follow. The induction of Richard White into the House of Lords would indicate that areas of advanced commercialisation became more politically relevant over time.

In Ballymoney, the ideological debate took place within the same broad religious demographic. The main protagonists were all of the Presbyterian faith, albeit from different interpretations. Crucially, the key figures in the dispute were members of different Masonic lodges and political clubs. In many respects, it was the varying interpretation of their shared demographic background which marked the pronounced bitterness and personal nature of the dispute.

In Clonsilla, the activity of the local established church could be viewed as a form of local government. It was the church vestry which addressed the Militia Act, the church wardens assumed command of the yeomanry corps and members of the congregation held positions of responsibility in the Farmers' Society and the Association for the Protection of Private Property; effectively governing security and economic activity in the area. The religious persuasion of an individual was a key factor in expressing state power at a local level. A distinct sectarianism is evident in the violence which occurred locally during the rebellion, although, crucially, there was no plan of retribution designed against members of the local associations.

The Catholicism of the cottier class of Killala was entrenched deeply in the customs and beliefs of the traditional society. This religious outlook determined an ideological framework which explained the arrival of the French invasion fleet through the paradigm of Jacobite rhetoric and foretold a reversal of the religious order in society. Historical grievances were categorised religiously, which in turn, offered a context in which the broad base of the

population believed that material wealth would be redistributed. The influence of priests as the tribunes of the people was a key component of the French command's 'hearts and minds' campaign and Franco-Irish priest Henry O'Kane became the public face of the invasion.

As in Clonsilla and Killala, the wealthier, governing class around Bantry were largely members of the Church of Ireland. There is some anecdotal evidence of prominent Catholics acting as 'middle-men' on the White family estate and that their continuation was supported by Lord Bantry. Contemporary diarist Edward Morgan commented on the misuse of religious argument as a pretext of political debate, although his accusations appear to be directed towards the Presbyterians of the north rather than local Catholics.

It is no coincidence in Ballymoney that the opposing sides of the political debate appear to have belonged largely to different economic units. As typified by Edmund McNaghten and James Leslie, those who were primarily engaged in agriculture and legally owned the land were more likely to hold conservative, pro-government views and seek to represent the establishment. This was also the case in Clonsilla, Killala and Bantry. John Caldwell was a wealthy linen merchant who used his position of influence amongst his economic community to challenge the established order. Within this trade, the obligation of personal conduct was clearly aligned to the benefit of the collective group. The competitive nature of the trade, defined by the product of labour and sold at markets in direct competition with other drapers, may have allowed for a certain social mobility within the trade. While a social hierarchy did operate in this network, the entrepreneurial opportunity presented by this enterprise may have allowed for a more autonomous trend of action and discourse. Caldwell achieved a political coup when Daniel Maxwell, a Catholic, was enrolled in the volunteers and with this victory appears to have gained control of the whole corps.

This acrimonious political extension of economic activity was not a significant factor in Clonsilla. Agriculture alone was the significant economic activity in the area and

responsibility and control of this trade lay firmly in the hands of the gentry. They did not have a wealthy political opposition to contend with. Through their patronage of agriculture, they consolidated their control of economic activity in the area. As an example, consumer goods desirable to the local population were provided by a village shop which was opened by the Farmers Society under their patronage. The shop sold herrings, soaps, candles, tobacco, snuff, starch, bread, butter, tea, sugar, thread, pins, pepper, salt, liquorice and pipes.

At this point, it would be perhaps be advantageous to examine another local study of 1798 for comparative purposes. In analysing the professions of United Irishmen in Clonegal, county Carlow, Kevin Whelan has noted the society's popular appeal there, in that slaters, carmen, tailors, masons, blacksmiths and maltsers featured prominently. By May 1798, this activity was mirrored by the spread of orange lodges along the Wicklow-Carlow-Wexford border, where the United Irishmen had a strong footing. Whelan has noted that their spread generated 'great anxiety, as they seemed linked to a much more repressive and sectarian security policy'.¹⁴³ In Carlow, Robert Cornwall implemented this policy and soon became, along with like-minded magistrates, the target of United Irish propaganda. Along with the new clerical magistrates, these men soon became the visible embodiment of the Protestant ascendancy in church and state. In addition, they were active in the yeomanry, commanding, as Whelan states, 'the most sectarian, ill-disciplined corps in the country'.¹⁴⁴

While the exact circumstances of the Clonegal scenario were not mirrored in any of the four localities selected for study in this thesis, it is interesting to note that regional political factors were also at play. Of Cornwall's peers in Wexford, many of them were middlemen, not landed gentry, and these figures were despised as upstarts by the richer, more established gentry in the county, whose profile remained liberal. It is notable that their yeomanry corps were heavily Catholic in composition, even at officer level, and remained an

¹⁴³ Whelan, *Reinterpreting the 1798 rebellion in County Wexford*, p. 18.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.18.

object of suspicion for Dublin Castle and hardline magistrates throughout the period.¹⁴⁵ This scenario contrasted sharply with Killala, where membership of the yeomanry was rooted firmly in the Church of Ireland community.

As a means of understanding the events which took place in Killala after the French landing, it is necessary to investigate in particular detail the nature of local society at the time of the invasion. A complicated balance of social, political and economic circumstances influenced the events as they took place, and ensured that a local context for the French invasion was preserved. A central question which remains to be answered is why so many Irish rebels joined the rebellion in deference to a political ideology and socio-religious motivation which was little understood or respected by their French allies. Economic circumstances must also be considered as an agent for social change. The 'backward' condition of the local economy ensured it was underdeveloped commercially, in comparison with contemporary examples. As these influences pressured the traditional society and way of life, political opinion converged with local religious expression to create an ideology and belief structure which placed historical grievances in a modern context and offered a rational through which they could be addressed. Inward migration of disaffected refugees from Armagh heightened the political aspect of this volatile cocktail.

While the ongoing process of economic change acted as vehicle for politicisation in Killala, the advanced nature of commercialisation around Bantry appears to have had the opposite effect. The traditional society had undergone this trauma in previous generations and local inhabitants appear to have found a precarious level of subsistence within the altered economic landscape. Perhaps this trauma was fresh in the collective memory and they were justifiably reticent to interfere too much with a delicate socio-economic balance. White's patronage of the local economy appears to have been largely successful; both in consolidating

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.18.

his own position and assisting the population to provide for themselves. It is telling that White questioned his tenants loyalty for the first time during the 1796 crisis following his conversation with the captured French officer, who divulged his General's intention to appease the local population at every juncture.

Identifying key figures of power in each locality is a key objective of this research. In the absence of the earl of Antrim, events took place in a power vacuum around Ballymoney. For a limited period of time, individuals of influence could appropriate levels of power above their normal station. In this instance, Edmund McNaghten filled the void and yielded military, political and judicial power with little supervision locally. McNaghten was returned as sheriff for county Antrim in 1793, MP in 1797 and commanded the Dunluce cavalry corps. Thus he can be said to have been an important representative of the state in the locality.

In Clonsilla, Lord Carhampton was the single most powerful individual in the area. A member of the House of Lords, his influence can be detected in the establishment of local associations, particularly the Association for the Protection of Private Property, although he was not a regular attendee of meetings. The local gentry appear to have overseen day to day operations in the area, with due deference to Carhampton who appeared at moments of crisis or to resolve thorny issues. It is necessary also to mention the influence of Robert Wynne on events, as he was an MP for county Sligo while residing in Clonsilla.

The marquess of Sligo, Lord Altamont and the wider Browne family of Westport House represented the embodiment of state power in the region surrounding Killala. Denis Browne was returned as MP for county Mayo in 1782 upon the death of his uncle. They were known to keep a close eye on events throughout the region, through a network of paid priests, and placed advancing the power of Westport House at the centre of their political agenda. They promoted the linen industry as a means of creating revenue and also for settling refugees from Armagh in the area, an arrangement which Altamont believed would be

mutually beneficial. Their influence over the region was considerable; as recent converts to the established religion they were the acceptable face of College Green to a politically emasculated Catholic gentry. Gordon Kennedy assessed the position of the Browne family after the rebellion by stating

The 1798 Rebellion also irrevocably changed the reputation of the Brownes in the eyes of the Mayo peasantry, which was subjected to the worst of the terror that followed the French collapse. The acceptance of the family as liberal and humane landlords yielded to a popular perception of the brothers as sanguinary rebel hunters, a perception that took decades to reverse. In the immediate aftermath, however, as leading gentry figures who had warned government about conspiracy in the county, the Brownes were acknowledged by government and peasantry alike as the foremost enforcers of law and order as Mayo entered the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁶

Richard White became earl of Bantry in 1816, having been given a baronetcy in 1797 and been made a viscount in 1800. He was responsible for strategic family interests in Bantry's commercially advanced, interlocked economy. The White family owned most of the land around Bantry, were active in the fisheries, ore smelting, forest clearance and held the patent for the town's fairs. There was very little economic activity which took place in the area which did not yield to at least some of their influence. This placed the White family in an influential position and social harmony was dictated in some part by their conduct. Under their pragmatic patronage, the majority of local inhabitants appear to have been able to provide for themselves.

Each of these individuals from disparate communities across Ireland can be said, broadly speaking, to have personified the power of the state in each of their localities. In this context, they are worthy subjects of cross comparison in terms of their conduct and outcomes. Only Carhampton had an advanced plan of assassination designed against him and he alone vacated the area for which he was responsible following the rebellion. His approach to seditious activity was to apply a strong-armed version of judiciary and state power, often

¹⁴⁶ Gordon Kennedy, 'The Brownes of Westport House: aristocracy, politics and the exercise of power in County Mayo: 1700-1830' (PhD thesis, St Patrick's College, Dublin, 2010), p. 60.

bending the rules to achieve favourable results; as exemplified by his much maligned campaign in Connacht. That campaign may also have resulted in the plan to assassinate him.

Implementing the power of the judiciary in severe terms is a common theme amongst each of these individuals; although White's efforts to ensure that prisoners convicted of tendering oaths were transported for life pale in comparison to McNaghten's repeated attempts to sever the head of Richard Caldwell. McNaghten used the rebellion to wage a bitter personal campaign against the Caldwell family, one that did not relent even after he had burned their home and overseen their emigration *en masse* to America. It may only be speculated at, but as the two families shared an acrimonious history dating back at least to the siege of Derry, McNaghten may have been seizing an opportunity to settle generational grievances. Denis Browne tied the noose over Johnny Gibbons' neck before he was put to death for his part in the rebellion. Gibbons was Browne's own godson.

It is difficult to gauge the extent to which the conduct of these individuals influenced the nature of seditious activity in the regions where they lived. If United Irish propaganda was known to build on pre-existing social grievances, it could have targeted a notorious figure of power. Most likely, Carhampton was disliked among the poorer inhabitants of Clonsilla. Each man was certainly imbued with a desire to advance their own position and to display exemplary conduct in the face of adversity in order to do so; the rebellion presenting a unique opportunity to do so. They shared a belief that maintaining the state was the appropriate means of achieving this aim.

Having established individuals who represented the state in each locality, it was necessary to investigate examples of local bodies and organisations to demonstrate how they operated within the community. The points of comparison selected were broadly similar; investigating the volunteer and yeomanry corps, the political manoeuvring's of the

individuals and reporting on the provision for education to the wider population, where possible.

In Clonsilla, Robert Wynne displayed his capabilities as an administrator through his capable management of the church vestry accounts and a scheme of improvements to the church grounds. This project also served to sideline Walter Troy; a man with whom Wynne also appeared to be in dispute over the arming of locals of Clonsilla in the yeomanry corps in 1796. In contrast to Ballymoney, it was the establishment man who wished to arm the local population, the majority of whom were presumably Catholic. A decade earlier, the enrolment of Daniel Maxwell in the Ballymoney Volunteers at the behest of John Caldwell had been the origin of an apparent spilt and acrimonious falling out in that body. The nature of that dispute was a reoccurring theme in the public life of Ballymoney during the 1790s. The Killala volunteers, enrolled in 1781, were descended from the Mayo Legion; a corps whose command passed through the line of the Lord Altamont. This body, and the local yeomanry corps, consisted entirely of men from the Church of Ireland. They appear to have acted as the armed enforcement of the state in the locality and provided police duties.

In terms of education, by 1827 there was a vast array of schools of differing cost providing education around Bantry. It is not possible to state how many of these were in operation in the late eighteenth century but it can be presumed that relative levels of provision were enjoyed at that time. In early nineteenth-century Killala, Bishop Bellew strenuously opposed free education for his congregation through the Hibernian schools due to their distinctively Protestant ethos. This system was aiming to fill a contemporary void in education provision. Bellew attempted to provide for a Catholic system of education by adding a levy to marriage fees. It is not known how many schools were supported in Clonsilla, although the Farmers' Society did endeavour to incentivise good behaviour and hard work in local schools. In Ballymoney, private individuals were noted as having provided

funding for schools for the poor at their own expense. Wealthy families such as the Caldwells and McNaghtens both sent their children to be educated in England. Notably, Lord Altamont remained sceptical of the intentions of local school masters and accused them of ‘forming the minds of those around [them] for revolution’.¹⁴⁷ The *Cork Gazette*, an openly radical newspaper, contained continuous advertisements for local schools. In each locality, there was no widespread provision of education by the state, or representatives of the state. In many respects, this oversight left the state vulnerable to be undermined by those who were willing to provide this service.

The networks of communication which facilitated the spread of information varied greatly in different communities. While oral communication was important in understanding each community, among illiterate populations it was paramount. Prophecies based on some factual precedent whipped populations into a frenzy. Much of the printed correspondence from the west of Ireland in contemporary newspapers serves to correct the oral record. Irish language Jacobite poetry was a key agent of politicisation amongst the cottier class of Killala. In Bantry, despite the existence of this rhetorical framework and the presentation of a similar opportunity for dissent to manifest, a different set of socio-economic circumstances dictated that this did not occur. This was so despite a similar merging of *Aisling* vision poetry foretelling French assistance and local Whiteboy songs. In short, while Jacobite poetry might provide a rationale to rebel, it alone did not provide sufficient incentive to do so.

The postal service provided an invaluable means of government communication. Even Killala, by far the most remote community selected for study, had a regular postal service from at least 1786. Much of the correspondence which formed the source material of this research was transmitted by this means. Its importance as an organ of government, both actually and symbolically, is testified by the United Irish plan to hijack the mail coaches to

¹⁴⁷ Stephen Dunford, *When Ireland lay broken and bleeding: The Franco-Irish campaign, 1798* (Enniscrone, 2009), p. 27.

indicate that the rebellion in Dublin was underway. The opportunities for information to be shared amongst local associations over a significant distance through the postal service was exemplified in Clonsilla, when the Farmers' Society received a series of essays from its parent society in Dublin which it, in turn, had received from London.

At the core of agrarian disturbance in each region was an underlying belief that systems of tenure and payment were unfairly advantaged towards the establishment or against the actual occupiers. When Defender activity became an issue in Clonsilla, the gentry responded with a two pronged approach. The Association for the protection of private property offered rewards for the capture of any assailants and the Farmers' Society made efforts to address the underlying cause of any dissent by rewarding 'sober and industrious' workers through work incentives. Controlled access to consumer goods was also provided by a village shop sponsored by the gentry. The practices of middlemen were highlighted as a cause of much of the Steelboy disturbances around Ballymoney; where the under tenant call for direct leases fell on deaf ears amongst public opinion in the town. Horatio Townsend was scathing in his remarks against them in co. Cork, however, Richard White appears to have maintained some middlemen on his estate on a case by case basis.

In Killala and Bantry there was no significant history of agrarian disturbance in either locality. Indeed, having emerged from the 1790s largely unscathed, it was not until the 1820's that serious disturbance appeared to manifest in Bantry, albeit from an outside source. A hypothesis of this research suggests that the subjugated state of the cottier class in Mayo ensured that when agrarian dissent did raise its head, it was quickly snuffed out by establishment forces. Perhaps much of this dissent was internalised in the self-contained and self-regulated world of village kings and this regulation process was accepted by the subject population. Regardless, when the opportunity arose to appropriate physical force at a greater quantity to the local forces of government, the local population soon became rebels and

sought to overturn the establishment. While not presented with an identical opportunity in Bantry, the local population showed little indication that they were as receptive to foreign invasion. While a considerably larger French fleet sat at anchor in the bay with every intention of invasion, the community around Bantry remained remarkably unified behind the establishment. Indeed, their resolve appeared to strengthen when the military plan to abandon Bantry became common knowledge.

The ideological precursor to the violence of 1798 around Ballymoney ensured that many historical grievances came to be expressed under both the premise of rebellion and its judicial aftermath. Where local Whig clubs had questioned the legitimacy of the king to govern, dinners were held to celebrate the French Revolution and the Volunteer corps came to act out of tandem with government intentions, much conflict arose in the deeply divided community. The clearest evidence of this divide manifested when a town meeting on the Catholic Relief Bill descended into chaos. A petition calling for full equality was refused before it was even heard, thus prompting a mass walk-out. Following this, the majority of those present returned to the same venue to agree the opposite view to that which the initial meeting approved. In essence, public opinion in the town was irreparably divided and normal social relations had broken down.

In Clonsilla, comparable disagreement appears to have taken place on a similar issue. While documentary evidence recording the details of the dispute is scant, it is known that Walter Troy strenuously opposed the arming of the Clonsilla cavalry corps upon his enlistment. Troy was brother to the Catholic archbishop of Dublin and was presumably sceptical of the merits of arming his poorer coreligionists; a stance which was ultimately justified when George Cummins attacked Blair's iron mill in Lucan. The Clonsilla Cavalry eventually met in the aftermath of the French attempt at Bantry, an event which may have broken Troy's resolve to oppose Wynne and Kirkpatrick.

No such issues appear to have caused conflict in Killala or Bantry, where members of the volunteer and yeomanry corps were members of the Church of Ireland. In Killala, the influx of a highly aggrieved and politically aware cohort of refugees fleeing sectarian violence in Armagh added a new ideological dynamic to potential disturbances. If different motivations can be said to have encouraged the newly arrived refugees to take part in the rebellion, the points of similarity upon which bonds were formed must also be considered. It is highly likely that the majority of the Ulster refugees were English speaking, unlike most of those who resided in their new homeland. Indeed, when insurrection did break out Richard Musgrave recorded that the northern refugees formed a separate corps to their Mayo compatriots in the rebel army. It is also worthy of note that little or no houghing of cattle in Mayo took place until after the rebellion.

The anti-French stance of the Catholic Church around Bantry is a notable feature of sources from the Irish Folklore Commission. While this fact alone cannot explain the cooperation of locals with government forces, it does form an opposing parallel with Killala. Despite the insistence of Bishop Bellew to the contrary, it is numerously observed that several local priests played crucial roles in directing the local population towards the rebel army. The phenomenon of the 'rebel priest' was by no means confined to north Mayo; however, this religious dynamic was a salient feature of the disturbances there. In the absence of traditional modes of agrarian descent prior to the rebellion, alternative forms of expressing factional grievances must be considered. The apartness of the two religions ensured that religious congregation in itself could be considered as a political act. When superfluous congregations began to be formed and confirmed by the ownership of scapulars amongst the 'lower orders', hierarchical structures were formed according to rank and wealth; thus providing an agreed outward recognition of distinctions of social class.

In Clonsilla, much of the revolutionary and seditious activity appears to have taken place unknown to the gentry. Their perspective is largely preserved through many of the minute books of their local associations. The region was prone to spectacular moments of preplanned violence, such as the McCormick murders, the plan of assassination against Carhampton, and Cummins' attack on Blair's mill. Disdain of government forces' capabilities was a notable feature of these attacks. This contrasts with the situation in Ballymoney, where a series of letters outlining pike making and seditious activity are preserved in the Rebellion Papers, most of which were written by Edmund McNaghten and his associates. From these sources, it is clear that disaffection had spread across the wider region in north Antrim. Richard White was aware of the swearing of oaths around Bantry following the French attempt there. If such activities took place there before the 1796 crisis, they did so unbeknown to him.

In conclusion, it is clear that a locality's perception of the officers of state and their interpretation of the political and ideological crises of the late eighteenth century determined their experience of the 1798 Rebellion in a decidedly local world. The conduct of the representatives of state or their constitute bodies played a vital role in forming attitudes towards government in each of the communities selected for study. The perceived abuse of power was a common cause for concern among local populations.

Where economic conditions were often intertwined by religious persuasion, a range of factors could provide triggers for political opinion and insurgent action. The varying nature of state power, when expressed in the self contained world of a traditional society, ensured that communities in Ireland experienced the 1798 Rebellion in their own unique context. While it is difficult to present a uniform account of how the radical ideology, which swept aside the institutions of *ancien regime* France, was received in Ireland, social inequality provided a basis through which the legitimacy of the state to govern could be questioned.

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