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Politics and rebellion in County Kildare 1790-1803

by

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## Abbreviations

The abbreviations used in the text are those laid down in *Irish Historical Studies* (supplement I, 1968) p. 81-124 and T.W. Moody and W.E. Vaughan (eds.), *A new history of Ireland vol iv Eighteenth century Ireland 1691-1800* (Oxford, 1986) p. xxvii-xxxvii, with the following additions:

<i>D.E.P.</i>	<i>Dublin Evening Post</i>
N.A.I.	National Archives, Ireland
O.P.	Official Papers (second series)
Reb. Papers	Rebellion Papers
S.O.C.	State of the country Papers (first and second series)

## **Acknowledgements**

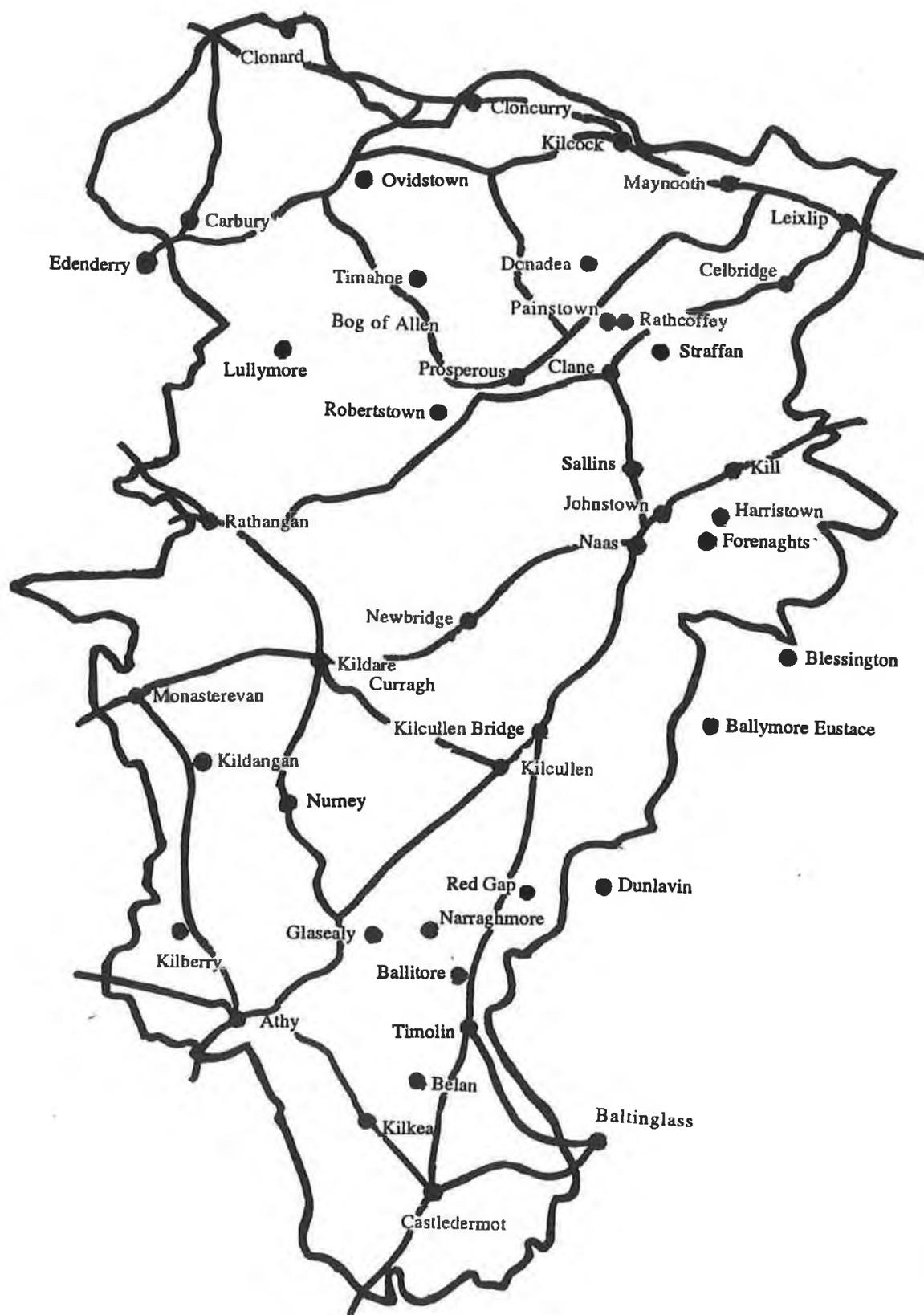
Historical research of this extent would be impossible without the assistance of others. My supervisor Prof. Comerford provided expert advice and guidance. His patience and insight were a constant source of encouragement. The other members of the Department of Modern History at Maynooth College, particularly Dr. C.J. Woods, also deserve my gratitude. Dr. Richard Aylmer shared an interest in Kildare in the 1790s and was generous in his comments and information. Seamus Cullen, Des O'Leary and Kevin Lynch of the Donadea Local History Group shared their vast knowledge of local history with me on a number of occasions.

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My greatest debt of gratitude is to my family and friends. To my Mum and Dad, my brother Paul and Niamh for their unfailing support, patience and love.

Map 1: County Kildare



**Map 2: The Baronies of County Kildare**



## Introduction

This study aims to provide a comprehensive examination of political developments and rebellion in County Kildare during the turbulent period from 1790 to 1803. Kildare is of interest not only because it produced a large-scale rebellion in 1798 but because of its dominant liberal establishment. The most powerful figure in the county, William Robert Fitzgerald, second duke of Leinster, was the most senior peer in Ireland. His presence encouraged a liberal minded gentry. As political divisions became more polarised during the 1790s the liberal position became increasingly difficult to maintain. Maynooth College, founded in 1795, was viewed suspiciously by loyalists in 1798 and 1803 despite government patronage. In the years before the 1798 rebellion loyalist, liberal and radical divisions surfaced at a local level. They continued to a lesser extent in the post rebellion years. The disaffection created by and institutionalised in the Defenders and United Irishmen and its interplay with local politics provides the context to politicisation and the rebellions of 1798 and 1803.

The most significant manuscript source for a study of politics and radicalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are the Rebellion Papers and State of the Country Papers. Louis Cullen has recently made a convincing case for viewing these collections as 'an archive in their own right'.<sup>1</sup> The correspondence which comprises these collections came from military officers, government informers, local property owners and magistrates to Dublin Castle. In the case of Kildare they are particularly rich for the crisis period from 1795. Government relied on individuals for its information. John Wolfe of Forenaughts emerges as the central loyalist figure of County Kildare. The other prominent correspondents included: Richard Nevill of Rathmore, Thomas James Rawson of

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<sup>1</sup>L.M. Cullen, 'Politics and rebellion: Wicklow in the 1790s' in Hannigan and Nolan (ed.), *Wicklow: history and society* (Dublin, 1994) p. 414-418.

Glasealy (both closely linked to Wolfe), John Walsh, vicar of Kilcock and Sir Fenton Aylmer of Donadea, a rare liberal contributor. The source does not provide a comprehensive account of developments. The fact that few liberals wrote to Dublin Castle, at least until after 1798, further limits its value. However the extant correspondence to Dublin Castle was considered by government as critical especially given the suspect nature of Kildare's liberal establishment.

The papers of the Leinster family in the National Library and Public Record Office of Northern Ireland contain surprisingly little concerning political developments. It is evident from later collections edited by Thomas Moore, Gerard Campbell and Charles William Fitzgerald that some letters have not survived.<sup>2</sup> The dearth of post 1794 material, particularly in the National Library collection, has led Stella Tillyard to comment that politically (and morally) compromising material was possibly removed.<sup>3</sup> Much of the private correspondence of John Wolfe survives in an unsorted collection in the National Library. As a key loyalist figure, they provide an insight into his thinking during the period particularly on law and order issues.<sup>4</sup>

Works concerning Lord Edward Fitzgerald, Valentine Lawless (later second Lord Cloncurry) and Thomas Reynolds are all informative about the years before the rebellion. Thomas Moore's *The life and death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* helped establish the romantic aristocrat in the pantheon of national heroes. However Fitzgerald's letters became increasingly mundane and apolitical as his radical activities increased. Valentine Lawless' *Personal recollections* downplay his overt role in radical politics in the late eighteenth century. He blames his two terms of

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas Moore, *The life and death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* (Dublin, 1831); Charles William Fitzgerald, *The earls of Kildare and their ancestors: from 1056 to 1804* (3 vols., Dublin, 1858-72); Gerard Campbell, *Edward and Pamela Fitzgerald* (London, 1904).

<sup>3</sup>Stella Tillyard, *Aristocrats: Caroline, Emily, Louisa and Sarah Lennox 1740-1832* (London, 1994) p. 441-2.

<sup>4</sup>Some of the papers in this collection have been copied and catalogued, P.R.O.N.I. T. 3474 Wolfe Papers.

imprisonment on government oppression for his open liberal and anti-union stance rather than his undoubted United Irish involvement in both Ireland and England. In many ways Thomas Reynolds Junior's biography of his father is the most revealing near contemporary publication concerning the pre-rebellion Kildare United Irishmen. Reynolds was appointed Colonel in the rebel army in early 1798 but turned informer in February-March. Reynolds Junior's purpose was to clear his father's tarnished reputation. In this context he reveals the workings of the Kildare United Irishmen in the six months before the rebellion. The threatening existence of the United Irishmen proved the necessity of Thomas Reynolds' betrayal. Therefore his son had no need to distance his subject from or downplay the level of radical politics.<sup>5</sup>

All three publications concerned the reputation of individuals and were not contributions to a post-rebellion debate in County Kildare. No such debate occurred. In Wexford the outpouring of literature reflected pre-rebellion divisions and the post-rebellion situation as much as the scale of the conflict itself.<sup>6</sup> For the liberal establishment of Kildare which was implicated (to varying degrees) in United Irish plans the rebellion was best forgotten. Neither was there any wish to capitalise on the apparently sectarian nature of the rising as was the case in Wexford. The two most significant accounts of the origins and progress of the rebellion of 1798 in Kildare are those of Richard Musgrave and Patrick O'Kelly.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Thomas Moore, *The life and death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* (Dublin, 1831); Thomas Reynolds jnr., *The life of Thomas Reynolds esq., formerly of Kilkea Castle in the County of Kildare* (2 vols., Dublin, 1839); Valentine Lord Cloncurry, *Personal recollections of the life and times with extracts from the correspondence of Valentine Lord Cloncurry* (Dublin, 1849).

<sup>6</sup>see Kevin Whelan, '98 after '98: the politics of memory' in *The tree of liberty: radicalism, Catholicism and the construction of Irish identity 1760-1830* (Cork, 1996) p. 133-175.

<sup>7</sup>Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland* (2nd edn., Dublin, 1801); Patrick O'Kelly, *General history of the rebellion of 1798 with many interesting occurrences of the two preceding years also a brief account of the insurrection of 1803 will be subjoined* (Dublin, 1842).

Musgrave's is the most detailed account of the rebellion in Kildare. While he was bigotedly loyalist, his narrative is in most respects factually informative and correct. He was greatly influenced in his writing by the possibility that the act of union would be accompanied by Catholic emancipation. In this context he portrayed the rebellion as a popish revolt in the tradition of Sir John Temple.<sup>8</sup> Kildare afforded him no Scullabogue or Wexford Bridge but he gathered enough instances of individual religious assaults to construct a sectarian reading of the rebellion in Kildare. Rathangan, where nineteen Protestants were killed by the rebel army, provided concrete evidence of the religious nature of the rising. Concerning the rebels in that town he wrote:

The following expressions were related to me by some ladies of undoubted veracity who heard them uttered by these cannibals: 'We have got rid of our friends and sent their souls jumping to hell.' 'We have at last got what we had a right to, our own county to ourselves' meaning the county of Kildare.

He explained in a footnote: 'The popish multitude are taught to believe, that the Protestants have no right to reside in Ireland, or to any property in it'.<sup>9</sup>

Patrick O'Kelly's *General history* is the only account of the 1798 rebellion published by a former rebel from Kildare. A native of Kilcoo near Athy, he participated in the rising in south Kildare. After his father's death in 1803 he emigrated to America where he founded what became a 'flourishing academy' in Baltimore. In 1825 he returned to Ireland hoping to renew the leases on his recently deceased brother's land but arrived too late. He spent the next seven years in France teaching languages. In the early 1830s his translation of Abbe MacGeoghegan's,

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<sup>8</sup>Kevin Whelan, '98 after '98: the politics of memory' p. 135-40.

<sup>9</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 255.

eighteenth century, *History of Ireland* was published in Ireland. He lived most of the rest of his life in Ireland where he died in 1858.<sup>10</sup>

His reasons for writing a history of the rebellion are unclear. Perhaps as an academic he wished to record the events in his native county. His history is comparable to those of other former rebels. He acknowledges the existence of an extensive United Irish network in Kildare by 1798. However the rising itself is portrayed as a peasant uprising in reaction to the bloody disarming of April and May. His own role in negotiating a surrender at Knockallen is stressed. He is strongest when writing about events in south Kildare but cloudy on the north of the county. However his comment that one of those to fight in the north ‘...was eminent for his classical effusions, [and] frequently quoted lines from a lyrical poet’ is possibly a reference to himself.<sup>11</sup>

O’Kelly’s rebellion was an ill led, spontaneous and disorganised revolt, but nonetheless heroic. There are a number of reasons for the relative obscurity of the work. O’Kelly himself was a minor rebel figure from an area which produced a totally ineffectual mobilisation in 1798. Moreover it was published in the year when the first volumes of R.R. Madden’s *The United Irishmen: their lives and times* appeared.<sup>12</sup> The essentially apologetic nature of O’Kelly’s history is illustrated by Fr. Patrick Kavenagh’s use of verbatim extracts in his own work.<sup>13</sup> O’Kelly’s interpretation suited Kavenagh’s own argument which was coloured by the Catholic church’s condemnation of organised fenian resistance in the later nineteenth century.

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<sup>10</sup>Patrick O’Kelly, *General history* p. 308-12; Abbe MacGeoghegan, *History of Ireland, ancient and modern, taken from the most authentic records* trans. Patrick O’Kelly (Dublin, 1831 first published 1758); F.S. Bourke, ‘Patrick O’Kelly - an historian of the rebellion of 1798’ in *Irish Booklover* xxxviii, (Jun. 1941) p. 37-43 p. 17-8; Seamus O’Casaidé, ‘Patrick O’Kelly, the translator of Mac Geoghegan’ in *Irish Booklover* xxxviii (Feb. 1942) p. 84-6.

<sup>11</sup>O’Kelly, *General history* p. 92.

<sup>12</sup>R.R. Madden, *The United Irishmen: their lives and times* (7 vols., Dublin, 1842-6).

<sup>13</sup>Fr. Patrick Kavenagh, *A popular history of the insurrection of 1798* (4th edn., Cork, 1898) p. 31-7.

Thus he sought to separate a justified (and spontaneous) rising from the militant secret society which inspired it.<sup>14</sup>

Three other descriptions of the rebellion in Kildare by native participants or witnesses were published in the nineteenth century. Thomas Rawson included a short account of the major engagements in Kildare in his *Statistical survey of the County of Kildare* in 1807.<sup>15</sup> The only lengthy account of the events of 1798 and 1803 written by a former Kildare rebel, other than O'Kelly, is that of Bernard Duggan. A weaver, he participated in the battle of Prosperous on 24 May 1798 and subsequent fighting and was closely involved in the conspiracy of 1803. His narrative, composed in 1838, was published by R.R. Madden in 1846. The account is localised and makes little attempt to examine the underlying motivations for the events of 1798 or 1803. In fact Duggan had been a government informer since 1819. However the lack of an overbearing political subtext adds to the value of the source.<sup>16</sup> Mary Leadbeater's 'Annals of Ballitore' records the harrowing effect of the rebellion of 1798 on the rural tranquility of the Quaker village of Ballitore in south Kildare. Despite the geographical confines of the work, its neutrality and honesty render this very humsn chronicle a valuable and informitive source.<sup>17</sup>

The only modern attempt to place the 1798 rebellion in Kildare in the context of the preceeding years was that written by An tAth Seosamh O'Murthuile in the 1940s. His account of the rebellion itself was translated from Irish and published

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<sup>14</sup>Anna Kinsella, 'The nineteenth century interpretation of 1798' (M.Litt., T.C.D. 1992) p. 15-35; Kevin Whelan, '98 after '98: the politics of memory' p. 169-73.

<sup>15</sup>Thomas Rawson, *Statistical survey of the County of Kildare, with observations on the means of improvement* (Dublin, 1807).

<sup>16</sup>Title page of Duggan's narrative, Duggan's narrative, 1838, W.H. Cogan to R.R. Madden n.d. (T.C.D. Madden Papers 873/26, 29, 30); Madden, *United Irishmen* 3rd series, (3 vols., Dublin, 1846) vol. ii, p. 96-116, 120-1

<sup>17</sup>Mary Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater papers* (2 vols., London, 1862) vol. i., 'the annals of Ballitore' p. 211-41.

as *Kildare 1798 Commemoration* to mark the 150th anniversary of the rising in 1798. While he made use of contemporary accounts and archive material Fr. O'Murthuile's account belongs to the heroic genre.<sup>18</sup> Fr. Peadar MacSuibhne's *Kildare in '98* (1978) concentrates on the rebellion itself. His study is composed of a disorganised series of accounts of the engagements in the county. He makes little effort to made beyond the interpretations of O'Kelly or Kavenagh.<sup>19</sup> The foremost recent attempt to analyse and narrate the events of 1798 in Kildare, and nation-wide, was Thomas Pakenham's *The year of liberty*. He recognises the existence of a militarily experienced leadership, some of 'exceptional ability' in Kildare. However he casts the rebellion as a largely peasant affair whose motivations were varied and confused. The major battle at Ovidstown (19 June 1798) is not covered. Moreover the camp at Timahoe is portrayed as a diverse mesh of desperadoes, deserters, common fugitives and young farmers and artisans motivated by purely economic or agrarian grievances. The political import of the rebellion is lost.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the relative lack of attention received by County Kildare, study of the 1790s has witnessed a surge in interest particularly since the publication of Marianne Elliot's *Partners in revolution* in 1982. She illustrated the success of emissaries such as Theobald Wolfe Tone in attracting French support for an Irish republic.<sup>21</sup> Increasingly disaffection and rebellion in the 1790s have been placed in the context of politics and politicisation rather than purely agrarian or sectarian backgrounds.

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<sup>18</sup>An tAth Seosamh O'Murthuile, 'An t-eiri amach i gCill Dara 1798' in *Feasta* iml. 1, uimh 2-12 (Bealtine 1948 - Marta 1949) iml. 2, uimh. 1 (Aibreán, 1949); *idem.*, *Kildare 1798 commemoration* (Kildare, 1948).

<sup>19</sup>Fr. Peadar MacSuibhne, *Kildare in '98* (Naas, 1978).

<sup>20</sup>Thomas Pakenham, *The year of liberty: the history of the great Irish rebellion of 1798* (London, 1969) p.110-1, 274-5.

<sup>21</sup>Marianne Elliot, *Partners in revolution* (New Haven, 1982); *idem.*, *Wolfe Tone: prophet of Irish independence* (Yale, 1989).

As the revolutionary group with the most potential the United Irishmen who bridged conventional and out-of-doors politics, have received substantial study in recent years. The accepted view of a two phased movement forced from constitutional opposition to militant republicanism in 1795 has been broken down to reveal a more complex organisation. Internal divisions existed along organisational, strategic and class lines.<sup>22</sup> The success of the United Irishmen outside Ireland has prompted a reappraisal of their Irish success. Building on the work of J.S. Donnelly and others, Nancy Curtin has argued that the United Irishmen were highly successful in politicising and mobilising the population. She writes:

...they possessed a genius for propaganda evidenced not only in their wide ranging literary productions (newspapers, pamphlets, handbills, ballads, songs and poems) but also in their carefully planned demonstrations and riots and the calculated use of the symbols and rituals of their mobilisation.<sup>23</sup>

Other historians have pointed out the wider sources of politicisation. Jim Smyth comments it was 'intimately related to those wider processes of

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<sup>22</sup>Nancy Curtin, 'The transformation of the United Irishmen into a mass based revolutionary organisation' in *I.H.S.* xxiv no. 5 (1985) p. 463-92; L.M. Cullen, 'The internal politics of the United Irishmen' in David Dickson, Daire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (ed.), *The United Irishmen: republicanism, radicalism and reaction* (Dublin, 1993) p. 176-96; Micheal Durey, 'The Dublin Society of the United Irishmen and the of the Carey-Drennan dispute' in *Historical Journal* xxvii, (1994) p. 89-112

<sup>23</sup>N. Curtin, *The United Irishmen: popular politics in Ulster and Dublin 1791-1798* (Oxford, 1994) p. 7; J.S. Donnelly, 'Propagating the cause of the United Irishmen' in *Studies* lxxix, no. 273, (1981) p. 5-23; Kevin Whelan, 'The republic in the village' in *The tree of liberty* p. 59-96; Mary Helen Thuente, *The harp re-strung: The United Irishmen and the rise of Irish literary nationalism* (Syracuse, 1994); For an argument against the effectiveness of United Irish mobilisation and politicisation see Tom Dunne, 'Popular ballads, revolutionary rhetoric and politicisation' in David Dickson and Hugh Gough, *Ireland and the French Revolution* (Dublin, 1990) p. 139-55.

economic, social and cultural change usually described as modernisation'. He views the Catholic mobilisation of 1792-3 as crucial in widening the base of political debate in the 1790s. Smyth has also made an important contribution to our understanding of the Defenders revealing the existence of a middling class leadership core in Ulster.<sup>24</sup> The Defenders have been rescued from the obscurity of an anonymous group of Catholic peasants and emerged as a crucial revolutionary force of the period. Historians have begun to note the political dimensions of the group. The real problem with this group is the relative dearth of source material when compared in particular to the United Irishmen.<sup>25</sup>

The detailed research of Louis Cullen and Kevin Whelan has overturned the conventional view of Wexford in 1798 as a reactive sectarian uprising. They show Wexford society was deeply politicised by the events and debates of the 1790s. Cullen has illustrated the existence of an organised United Irishmen in Wexford contrary to the statements of Edward Hay and other apologists.<sup>26</sup> Daniel Gahan's recent work on the Wexford rebellion itself seeks to

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<sup>24</sup>Jim Smyth, *The men of no property: Irish radicals and popular politics in the late eighteenth century* (London, 1992) p. 33-78, 100-120.

<sup>25</sup>L.M. Cullen, 'The political structures of the Defenders' in Gough and Dickson (ed.), *Ireland and the French Revolution* (Dublin, 1990) p. 117-38; Thomas Bartlett, 'Select documents xxxviii: Defenders and Defenderism in 1795' in *I.H.S.* xxiv, no. 95 (1985) p. 373-94; Tom Garvin, 'Defenders, ribbonmen and others: underground political networks in pre-famine Ireland' *Past and Present* no. 96, (1982) p. 133-55; David Millar, *Defenders and peep of day boys* (Belfast, 1990).

<sup>26</sup>L.M. Cullen, 'The 1798 rebellion in County Wexford: United Irishmen organisation, membership and leadership' in Kevin Whelan (ed.), *Wexford: history and society* (Dublin, 1987) p. 248-95; *idem.*, 'The 1798 rebellion in its eighteenth century context' in P. Corish (ed.), *Radicals, rebels and establishments* (Dublin, 1985) p. 91-113; Kevin Whelan, 'The religious factor in the 1798 rebellion in County Wexford' in O'Flanagan, Ferguson and Whelan (ed.), *Rural Ireland 1600-1900* (Dublin, 1987) p. 62-85; *idem.*, 'The role of the Catholic priest in the 1798 rebellion in County Wexford' in Whelan (ed.), *Wexford: history and society* (Dublin, 1987) p. 296-315; *idem.*, 'Politicisation in

make sense of the course and nature of the rising in the context of pre-rebellion plans.<sup>27</sup> The other major centres of rebellion in Leinster outside Kildare - Wicklow, Carlow and Meath - have all received attention from historians.<sup>28</sup>

The attention placed on radicalism in the 1790s has tended to obscure the nature of the forces of loyalism and reaction in the same period. However the strength of the radical threat poses the question, how did the Irish government survive? Some work has highlighted this conservative element of the decade. A.P.W. Malcolmson's biography of John Foster reveals the workings of the Anglo-Irish elite.<sup>29</sup> Daire Keogh has examined the relationship between radicalism and the Catholic church.<sup>30</sup> Kevin Whelan has very recently begun to examine the role of the nascent Orange Order and the conservative reaction of the 1790s.<sup>31</sup> The period between the rebellions of 1798 and 1803 has received even less discussion in recent decades. Marianne Elliot reveals the continued threat of Irish radicalism in these years. Essays by Tom Bartlett and Daniel Gahan have examined the nature of post

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County Wexford and the origins of the 1798 rebellion' in Gough and Dickson (ed.), *Ireland and the French Revolution* (Dublin, 1990) p. 156-78.

<sup>27</sup>Daniel Gahan, *Wexford 1798, the people's rising* (Dublin, 1995).

<sup>28</sup>L.M. Cullen, 'Politics and rebellion: Wicklow in the 1790s' p. 411-501; Ruan O'Donnell, 'The 1798 rebellion in County Wicklow' in Hannigan and Nolan (eds.), *Wicklow: history and society* (Dublin, 1994) p. 341-78; Sr. Mary Duggan, 'County Carlow 1791-1801: a study in era of revolution' (M.A., U.C.D., 1969); Padraig O'Snodaigh, *'98 and Carlow: a look at the historians* (Carlow, 1979); J.G.O. Kerrane, 'The background to the 1798 rebellion in County Meath' (M.A., U.C.D., 1971); Seamus O'Lionsigh, 'The rebellion of 1798 in County Meath' in *Riocht na Midhe* vol. iii-v (1966-71).

<sup>29</sup>A.P.W. Malcolmson, *John Foster: the politics of Anglo-Irish ascendancy* (Oxford, 1978).

<sup>30</sup>Daire Keogh, *'The French disease' the Catholic church and radicalism in Ireland 1790-1800* (Dublin, 1993).

<sup>31</sup>Kevin Whelan, 'United and disunited Irishmen: the state and sectarianism in the 1790s' in *The tree of liberty* p. 99-130.

rebellion society in Wicklow and Wexford.<sup>32</sup> While 1798 might be viewed as a culmination of the ferment of the preceding decade and thus a concluding point, it is revealing to expand the period under discussion to 1803. ‘Emmet’s rebellion’ was a United Irish one. In Kildare at least, it was preceded by mobilisation against a background of inherent radicalism which continued to persist after 1798. The potential ramifications of this period has led Thomas Bartlett to suggest that: ‘the events of these years may have had an even greater impact than the rebellion itself’.<sup>33</sup>

Outside the rebellion itself some aspects of Kildare history in the late eighteenth century have received attention from historians. Pdraig O’Snodaigh has examined high politics in the period.<sup>34</sup> The populist figure of Lord Edward Fitzgerald has inspired biographies by John Lindsay, Ida Taylor and Patrick Byrne.<sup>35</sup> Lord Edward’s extended family especially his mother Emily and her sisters have also received attention.<sup>36</sup> Other Kildare figures have been discussed by historians

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<sup>32</sup>T. Bartlett, “‘The masters of the mountains’ the insurgent careers of Joseph Holt and Micheal Dwyer, County Wicklow, 1798-1803’ in Hannigan and Nolan (ed.), *Wicklow: history and society* p. 379-410; Daniel Gahan, “‘The Black Mob’ and the “‘Babes in the Wood’”: Wexford in the wake of the rebellion 1798-1806’ in *Journal of the Wexford Historical Society* no. 13, (1990-1) p. 92-110; Marianne Elliot, *Partners in revolution* p. 214-322.

<sup>33</sup>T. Bartlett, “‘The masters of the mountains’ the insurgent careers of Joseph Holt and Micheal Dwyer, County Wicklow, 1798-1803’ p. 408.

<sup>34</sup>Pdraig O’Snodaigh, ‘Notes on the politics of Kildare at the end of the 18th century’ in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* xvi (1981-2) p. 264-71.

<sup>35</sup>John Lindsay, *The shining life and death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* (London, n.d.); Ida Taylor, *The life of Lord Edward Fitzgerald 1763-1798* (London, 1903); Patrick Byrne, *Lord Edward Fitzgerald* (London, 1955).

<sup>36</sup>Brian Fitzgerald, *Emily duchess of Leinster 1731-1814: a study of her life and times* (Dublin, 1949); *idem.*, *Lady Louisa Conolly 1743-1821: an Anglo-Irish biography* (Dublin, 1950); Stella Tillyard, *Aristocrats: Caroline, Emily, Louisa and Sarah Lennox 1740-1832* (London, 1994).

notably Lawrence O'Connor, a Defender leader executed in 1795; William Aylmer a rebel commander in 1798 and James Smyth a United Irish leader at Leixlip.<sup>37</sup>

This study seeks to examine the issues of politicisation, radicalism and rebellion during the late eighteenth and early years of the nineteenth centuries. Chapter one provides an historical setting for the thesis. It deals with geography, land, population and political structures in late eighteenth century Kildare. Chapter two examines the effect of political debates of the early 1790s to the dismissal of Fitzwilliam as Lord Lieutenant in 1795. Some Militia disturbances took place in 1793 and 1794 but on a minor scale. Deference visibly broke down in Kildare in 1795. Chapter three discusses the origins and nature of Defenderism and their early links with the expanding United Irish organisation. Chapter four discusses the crucial twelve months before the rebellion during which the 'liberal party' in the county visibly weakened. The United Irishmen expanded rapidly and a conservative reaction attempted maintain the established order. The rebellion itself falls into two sections the subjects of chapters five and six respectively. During the first week of rebellion the United Irishmen controlled a large swathe of territory in Kildare capturing a number of strategic towns. Thereafter the rebellion revolved very quickly into something more akin to guerrilla warfare largely in the north of the county. The final chapter deals with the years after the 1798 rebellion up to and including the 1803 rising. Radicalism continued to exist at a popular level and thousands of men were prepared to rise in July 1803. By examining the issues of popular politics and rebellion it is hoped this study will contribute to the wider debate on this era of revolution.

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<sup>37</sup>Rev. John Brady, 'Lawrence O'Connor - a Meath schoolmaster' in *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* xlix, (1937) p. 281-7; Martin Tierney, 'William Aylmer 1772-1820' in *Irish Sword* iv, no. 23 (1963) p. 103-7; Seamus Cummins, 'Pike heads and the calico printer: Leixlip in '98' in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* xvi, (1985-6) p. 418-431.

## Chapter One

### County Kildare c.1790

Kildare is an inland county in the province of Leinster. It is bounded by Meath to the north, Offaly and Laois (King's and Queen's Counties in 1790) to the west, Carlow to the extreme south and Dublin and the rising Wicklow mountains to the east. It is 36.8 miles in length by 26 miles wide. The surface is in general flat. The most important rivers in the county are the Barrow which winds along the western border via Athy into Carlow and the Liffey which enters Kildare from the Wicklow mountains and exits through Celbridge and Leixlip. Two important natural features are particularly noteworthy. The vast Bog of Allen sprawls across the north east corner of Kildare. To the west of Kildare town lies the Curragh, described by Arthur Young as '....a sheep walk, of above 4,000 English acres, forming a more beautiful lawn than the hand of art ever made'.<sup>1</sup> This chapter provides an introduction to County Kildare at the beginning of the 1790s. It deals with the major family interests in the area, a description of towns and industry, population and finally political structures and recent political developments.

The Fitzgeralds of Carton cast a long shadow over Kildare in the late eighteenth century. The family's distinguished history both nationally and locally added to their prestige. Wakefield believed them to own almost one third of the county, 'and almost the whole of it nearly is let on determinable leases, there are on it of course no seats embellished with that expense which gentlemen might be induced to bestow on their own property'.<sup>2</sup> This fact was however outweighed by the family's residence in the county. Thomas Rawson who had been a political opponent

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Young, *A Tour in Ireland 1777-1779* (2 vols., 1780, Shannon 1970) vol. i p. 424.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Wakefield, *An account of Ireland statistical and political* (2 vols., London, 1812) vol. i p. 41.

of the second Duke (who died in 1804) wrote in 1807:

The late much to be regretted duke of Leinster was a lover of his country; he almost constantly resided at his magnificent seat of Carton, where he set an example of honesty and benevolence and by every humane attention to the wants of the industrious people, to whom he gave constant employment and charitable assistance, he called aloud on the nobility and gentry of Ireland to imitate so great and good an example.<sup>3</sup>

The Kildare seat of the Fitzgerald's at Carton was a frequent resort for travellers. Marc de Bombelles, a French diplomat, visited three times in 1784. He described the duke as 'Le premier seigneur de ce pays', and Carton itself as, 'grande et magnifique ou il a toute la representation d'un souverain, et la simplicité d'un honnete gentilhomme'.<sup>4</sup> William Robert Fitzgerald had succeeded his father James as duke of Leinster in 1773 at the age of twenty five. He acquired extensive family and political connections on both sides of the Irish Sea, through his mother Emily, daughter of Charles Lennox, second duke of Richmond. These included his uncle-in-law Thomas Conolly and his cousins the third duke of Richmond and Charles James Fox.

His political weight derived from a number of sources: his connections, his exalted noble station, his power in Kildare and his control of a phalanx of parliamentary seats. Edith Mary Johnston points out his importance to government in running the country.<sup>5</sup> He played an important role in the volunteer agitation during the late 1770s and early 1780s, and commanded a corps at the famous demonstration in Dublin on 4 November 1779 demanding free trade. Following the demise of the volunteers he played a less conspicuous national role. Writing in 1787 to his mother he betrays a lack of political interest and acumen:

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<sup>3</sup>Rawson, *Statistical survey* p. 52.

<sup>4</sup>Marc de Bombelles, *Journal des voyage en Grande Bretagne et Irlande, 1784* ed. Jaques Gury (Oxford, 1989) p. 233.

<sup>5</sup>E.M. Johnston, *Great Britain and Ireland 1760-1800* (London, 1963) p. 262-3.

...if I could at once see them [his brothers] all settled in their professions I believe I should myself give up all politics as I am not calculated for it. Indeed I should give myself very little trouble about it was it not a duty I owe my family.<sup>6</sup>

By 1788 he was posturing to enter government and took up a position in that year.<sup>7</sup>

The regency crisis of 1788-9 completely altered his political fortunes. Siding with his Foxite relations he backed the decision to request the Prince of Wales to become Irish Regent. The King's sudden recovery in March 1789 spelt disaster for the family.<sup>8</sup> A number of those who had supported the Prince of Wales' regency refused to rejoin Buckinghamshire's administration, including the Shannon, Ponsonby and Leinster interests. Together with some other individuals they formed an Irish Whig Club, issued a declaration and entered into a newly formalised parliamentary opposition. The Fitzgerald family did not emerge unscathed from the event which had served to highlight existing rifts along political lines. The duke's brothers Charles and Robert were avowedly Pittite, while Henry and Edward supported Fox, the faction which, for the moment, the duke allied himself.<sup>9</sup> The coming decade would place much greater strains on William Robert, whose politics vacillated between populism and the need for stability.

The other national figure resident in north Kildare was Thomas Conolly who lived at Castletown on lands adjacent to Carton estate. He was grand nephew of the celebrated William 'Speaker' Conolly and was recognised as the first

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<sup>6</sup> William Fitzgerald to Emily Fitzgerald, Carton 4th Dec. 1777 (N.L.I. Leinster Papers MS 617) [Brian Vesey Fitzgerald in a typescript version of the letters believes this was incorrectly dated and should be dated 1787, see N.L.I. MS 13022.]

<sup>7</sup> Leinster to Lord Temple, Dublin 17 Apr. 1788 and Frescati, 16 Jun. 1788 (P.R.O.N.I. Leinster Papers D.3078/3/4/14,16).

<sup>8</sup> Stella Tillyard, *Aristocrats* p. 357; R.B. McDowell, *Ireland in the age of imperialism and revolution 1760-1801* (Oxford, 1979) p. 339-342.

<sup>9</sup> Tillyard, *Aristocrats* p. 358.

commoner of the kingdom. Castletown itself was widely acclaimed. Young noted that: 'Mr. Conolly's at Castletown to which all travellers resort, is the finest house in Ireland, and not exceeded by many in England'. The French travellers de Bombelles and de Montbret readily agreed.<sup>10</sup> In politics Conolly prided himself on his independence, which frequently descended into fluctuation and indecision. Lena Boylan comments, he had 'a great appetite for Irish politics, but a very poor digestion....'<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the nascent Whig club was happy to receive his membership following his high profile embarrassment during the regency debacle (after which he lost his seat on the board of trade). Conolly had neither the same property nor influence in Kildare as the Leinster family. He did take a keen interest in activities on his land, particularly at Celbridge. However the bulk of his property and predominance lay in Donegal and Derry.

The dominance of the Fitzgerald family in Kildare politics ensured that other families participated at a less influential and often more localised level. The Bourkes (Mayo), Stratfords (Aldborough) and Moores (Drogheda), all peers of considerable importance held property interests in the county. The earl of Mayo's influence centred on the town of Naas. Three earls died between 1790 and 1794, the family finally settled in that year with the succession of John Bourke, fourth earl (the first earl's grandson). The family did not play an important role in Kildare politics at large. The Moore family was in a similar position. The sixth earl of Drogheda, Charles had succeeded in 1758.<sup>12</sup> His Kildare interest focused on his property at Monasterevan, however his influence lay outside. He held an array of military posts and was governor of Meath, King's and Queen's counties. After his wife's death in

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<sup>10</sup>Young *Tour in Ire.* p. 30; Coquebert de Montbret 'An 18th-century French traveller in Kildare' ed. Sile Ni Cinneide in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* xv (1974) p. 383; de Bombelles, *Journal de voyage* p. 235.

<sup>11</sup>Lena Boylan, 'The Conollys of Castletown, a family history' in *Quarterly Bulletin of the Irish Georgian Society* xi no. 4, (Oct.-Dec., 1968) p. 23.

<sup>12</sup>The countess of Drogheda (ed.), *The family of Moore* (Dublin, 1906) p. 127.

1783 he seems to have spent most of his time in London and Dublin and was created a marquis in 1791.<sup>13</sup>

The Stratfords played a somewhat more significant role in Kildare affairs, essentially because they spent more time in the county.<sup>14</sup> The head of the family was Edward, second earl of Aldborough whose major arena of influence lay in west Wicklow, while his principal residence was at Belan in Kildare. He controlled the borough of Baltinglass, for which his brothers John and Benjamin O'Neale were returned in 1790. The family aimed at Wicklow county representation but lost out in 1790, later seeking support from both government and the powerful Fitzwilliam group.<sup>15</sup>

Two recent arrivals represented very different interests in the county: the Lawless and La Touche families. Nicholas Lawless, a catholic, returned from France in the 1770s and conformed to the established church. By 1789 he had entered the house of lords as Lord Cloncurry.<sup>16</sup> His catholic background did not completely disappear. His land agent and solicitor were Thomas Broughall and Matt Dowling both prominent catholic politicians.<sup>17</sup> His son Valentine was to play an infamous role in the events of the next decade on both sides of the Irish Sea. The LaTouches, Huguenots and bankers, were more recent arrivals. According to M.F. Young they had purchased the Harristown estate from the Eustace family in 1783, John La Touche was the first occupant. He remained something of an unknown

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<sup>13</sup>The countess of Drogheda (ed.), *The family of Moore* p. 127; *Dictionary of National Biography* (London, 1894) vol. 38 p. 344.

<sup>14</sup>see Diary of Edward Stratford (second earl of Aldborough), 1792 (N.L.I. Stratford Papers MS 19,164).

<sup>15</sup>L.M. Cullen, 'Politics and Rebellion: Wicklow in the 1790s' p. 421.

<sup>16</sup>Valentine Lord Cloncurry, *Personal recollections* p. 19.

<sup>17</sup>*ibid.* p. 21.

quantity as regards local politics in 1790, but held extensive connections through his immediate family.<sup>18</sup>

The Aylmers and Wolfes were long established and locally important. The Donadea Aylmer branch was headed in 1790 by Sir Fitzgerald Aylmer an extensive landowner in the north of the county though much of his property covered the Bog of Allen. He had been brought up a Protestant and Hanoverian supporter. According to the family biographer, 'In politics he was a follower of the duke of Leinster and like that nobleman preferred patriotism to party'.<sup>19</sup> The other branches were of less consequence. The Painstown Aylmers were still 'ardent Roman Catholics and Jacobites'.<sup>20</sup> John Wolfe was head of the Wolfe family of Forenaughts in 1790. During The 1780s he sat as M.P. for County Kildare with the support of the duke of Leinster. Despite breaking his connection with the powerful Leinster interest at the 1790 election he continued to assume a powerful role locally.

Naas and Athy were the joint administrative centres of the county and the largest towns. Arnold Horner has estimated the population of Athy at 2,018 and that of Naas at 1,820 for the years 1798-1800.<sup>21</sup> Coquebert de Montbret, who travelled in Kildare in 1790, believed the towns to be 'about the same size'.<sup>22</sup> Athy was owned by the duke of Leinster. Austin Cooper, an antiquarian, described it in 1782 as: 'a small town situated on the River Barrow over which is a plain bridge of

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<sup>18</sup>Miss M.F. Young, 'The LaTouche family of Harristown, County Kildare' in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* vii (1912-14) p. 33-40

<sup>19</sup>Sir F.J. Aylmer, *The Aylmers of Ireland* (London, 1931) p. 225.

<sup>20</sup>*ibid.*, footnote p. 213.

<sup>21</sup>AA. Horner, 'The pre-famine population of some Kildare towns' in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* xiv (1964-70) p. 443-451. These figures are based on data from the *Journal of the Irish house of commons* (Dublin, 1796-1800), the accuracy of which is questionable; see below the divergence between Horner's figures for Kildare town and those of J. H. Andrews arrived at using a contemporary map.

<sup>22</sup>Coquebert de Montbret 'An 18th-century French traveller in Kildare' p. 381.

arches with a low square castle adjoining on the east side. Here is a market house, church and county court house, nothing remarkable in elegance of building'.<sup>23</sup> Richard Lucas includes Athy as the only Kildare town, in his *General directory* in 1788. He lists forty two teachers, merchants, tradesmen and others.<sup>24</sup>

Athy continued to expand during the early nineteenth century, however, Thomas Rawson's *Statistical survey* published in 1807 includes an interesting (and partisan) plea for investment in the town. 'Athy,' he wrote, 'is neglected, is in poverty and has not one manufacture carried on...if once an English company was established here, their success would soon induce hundreds of others to follow their example.'<sup>25</sup> Naas, owned by the Bourke family, was in a rather more prominent geographical position, from its proximity to Dublin and its position on the road to both Limerick and the south. However Thomas Campbell, visiting in the late 1770s, noted it as '....but a shabby looking place for a borough and shire town. But there are some pleasant seats near it'.<sup>26</sup> Rawson quite ambiguously stated '....It has now but little remains of its ancient splendour'.<sup>27</sup>

The other important towns included Kildare, Maynooth, Castledermot and Rathangan, and also belonged to the duke of Leinster. Kildare town elicited little comment from contemporary visitors. J.H. Andrews has estimated the population in 1798 at c.1,600, based on Thomas Sherrard's map of the town produced that year. Horner had estimated the population at 730.<sup>28</sup> Yet Andrews contends the town 'showed remarkably few signs of growth or prosperity' between the mid eighteenth

<sup>23</sup>Liam Price (ed.), *An eighteenth century antiquarian. The sketches, notes and diaries of Austin Cooper (1759-1830)* (Dublin, 1942) p. 86.

<sup>24</sup>Richard Lucas, *A general directory of the kingdom of Ireland* vol. ii (Dublin, 1788) p. 103-5.

<sup>25</sup>Rawson, *Statistical survey* p. 57. Rawson lived at Glasealy outside Athy.

<sup>26</sup>Thomas Campbell, *A philosophical survey of the south of Ireland* (Dublin, 1778) p. 64.

<sup>27</sup>Rawson, *Statistical survey* p. v.

<sup>28</sup>J.H. Andrews, *Kildare* (Irish Historic Towns Atlas no. 1, Dublin, 1986); Horner, 'The pre-famine population of some Kildare towns' p. 451.

and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>29</sup> Maynooth meanwhile benefited greatly from its proximity to the duke's seat at Carton. During the years of the first and second dukes it grew substantially as a planned town. Marc de Bombelles was obviously impressed, he describes it as 'un village bati par le Pere du Duc. On y voit des maisons uniformes, commodes et alligees....' He goes on to praise the industries established in the area.<sup>30</sup>

Castledermot in south Kildare, had, in mid century, been the second largest of the Fitzgerald towns, with a population of 945 in the period 1756-62.<sup>31</sup> Cooper described it in 1781 as 'but a small village of very little note,' having described certain ruins he added, 'If even there was a parish school in this town I would suppose it to be the ruins of it'.<sup>32</sup> Rathangan in mid century was a small village of less than one hundred people.<sup>33</sup> None of the noted visitors of the late eighteenth century mention it probably due to its position away from the major routes. Celbridge and Leixlip in the north east of the county both benefited considerably from their position close to Dublin and the patronage of Thomas Conolly of Castletown. Campbell described Leixlip as '....a neat little village...whose banks being prettily turfed with wood, and enlivened by gentlemen's seats afford a variety of landscapes beautiful beyond description'.<sup>34</sup> Celbridge also elicited a positive response from visitors. Marc de Bombelles was impressed by it, particularly the hat manufacturing introduced by Conolly.<sup>35</sup> Two other towns deserve mention. Kilcullen Bridge, south of Naas, was with Athy, one of the principal grain markets in

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<sup>29</sup>Andrews, *Kildare* p. 5.

<sup>30</sup>de Bombelles, *Journal des voyage* p. 233-4.

<sup>31</sup>Horner, 'The pre famine population of some Kildare towns' p. 449.

<sup>32</sup>Liam Price (ed.), *An eighteenth century antiquarian* p. 90.

<sup>33</sup>Horner, *op. cit.* p. 451.

<sup>34</sup>Campbell, *A philosophical survey* p. 55.

<sup>35</sup>de Bombelles, *Journal de voyage* p. 235.

the county. It was not favourably noted by Cooper, who described it as 'a dirty mean village with some good houses'.<sup>36</sup> Monasterevan on Kildare's western border with Queen's County belonged to the earl of Drogheda. In the 1750s it had an estimated population of 535.<sup>37</sup> The town did benefit from the earl's sponsorship, as well as from the growth of some smaller industries, particularly John Cassidy's Distillery, established in the 1780s, which underwent considerable expansion from 1792.<sup>38</sup>

The county in general was received quite favourably by visitors, the north in particular with Carton and Castletown were especial crowd pullers. Sile Ni Chinneide points out the absence of reference to poverty in Coquebert De Montbret's notes on the northern region, this is all the more striking when compared to his notes on the rest of the country.<sup>39</sup> De Bombelles too records a favourable picture of north Kildare in which most of his time in the county was spent. He continues to note positively the land further south on his journey to Timolin.<sup>40</sup> Campbell also comments favourably on the south and on leaving the county notes, 'on this side [i.e. south of] Castle-Dermot the country grows less pleasant'.<sup>41</sup> Indeed it is the towns which received most criticism from visitors, though poverty was evident in rural areas as well. Arthur Young noted on a journey from Dublin to Naas: 'Left Dublin the 24th of September [1777] and taking the road to Naas, I was again struck by the great population of the country, the cabbins being so much poorer in the vicinity of the capital than in the more distant parts of the kingdom'.<sup>42</sup>

Kildare was a largely rural county, agriculture being the principal occupation of the majority of the populace. Apart from the Bog of Allen the land

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<sup>36</sup>L. Price (ed.), *An eighteenth century antiquarian* p. 91.

<sup>37</sup>Horner, 'The pre-famine population of some Kildare towns' p. 451.

<sup>38</sup>John Holmes, 'Monasterevan Distillery' in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* xiv (1964-70) p. 483.

<sup>39</sup>de Montbret, 'An 18th- century French traveller in County Kildare' p. 385-6.

<sup>40</sup>de Bombelles, *Journal de voyage* p. 260-1.

<sup>41</sup>Campbell, *A philosophical survey* p. 95.

<sup>42</sup>Young, *Tour in Ire.* vol. i p. 419.

was excellent for tillage and suffered in consequence from overuse. Rawson describes the county as ‘...mostly flat, of fine arable soil, much exhausted as from its vicinity to Dublin, it has been for centuries the county from which the capital has principally drawn its supplies of grain’.<sup>43</sup> Rawson himself as agricultural inspector encouraged improvement in methods, but recognised short term leases and the resultant threat of ‘Captain Bidbest’ as a recurring hindrance to progress.<sup>44</sup> Certain landlords were attentive to the needs of their tenants. Young, for example praised Richard Nevill of Furness near Naas. However he goes on to comment, ‘Their [i.e. labourers] circumstances are the same as 20 years ago’. Brian Cantwell has summarised the rates of wages, rentals, food costs etc. noted by Young in Kildare which illustrates noticeable countywide differences, particularly a higher cost of living in north Kildare.<sup>45</sup>

The county did witness some industrial activity in the late eighteenth century. As mentioned Maynooth, Celbridge and Leixlip all received financial support for nascent manufacturing. Mills were also established at Celbridge. However two large scale projects dominated the proto-industrial landscape of Kildare in the period; Prosperous and canal construction.

Prosperous was founded in 1780 by Robert Brooke on land west of Clane. It was to be a centre for the manufacture of cotton and was a major innovation in Ireland’s industrial situation, an attempt, writes James Kelly, ‘...to introduce the principles and techniques of the industrial revolution into an Irish village setting’.<sup>46</sup> The project grew quickly but as early as 1782 Brooke was in

<sup>43</sup>Rawson, *Statistical survey* p. 2.

<sup>44</sup>*ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>45</sup>Young, *Tour in Ire.* vol i p. 423; Brian J. Cantwell, ‘Notes on Young’s Tour 1777-1779’ in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* xiii (1946-63) p. 136.

<sup>46</sup>James Kelly, ‘Prosperous and Irish industrialisation in the late eighteenth century’ in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* xvi, no. 5 (1985-6) p. 442; see also A. K. Longfield, ‘Prosperous 1776-1798’ in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* xiv (1964-70) p. 212-231.

financial difficulty, largely due to rather basic administrative errors. However he received extensive support both locally and from the Irish government. At its zenith in 1784 approximately 5,000 people were in Prosperous. Many had been encouraged to leave Dublin by a government eager to rid the city of disturbance and combination.<sup>47</sup> De Bombelles was quite optimistic when he visited in 1784, he wrote, 'les progress qu'ils ont deja fait ne permettant pas de douter que dans peu de temps L'Irlande n'aura a chercher hor de son royaume toute espece d'etoffes de cotton'. He more ominously noted that the problems of disorder and whiskey had not disappeared.<sup>48</sup> Prosperous quickly slid down hill and was finally taken out of Brooke's hands in 1786. It was run by trustees until 1792 when it was closed down thus ending Kildare's earliest brush with large scale industrialisation.

The other major economic undertaking in Kildare in the period was the construction of two canals. Work on the Grand Canal began in 1756, the idea being to link Dublin to the river Shannon. With government and local backing it had reached Sallins by 1780. It continued to make steady progress through Kildare in the following decades, reaching in turn Monasterevan (1786), Athy (1791), Philipstown (1798) and Tullamore (1799).<sup>49</sup> The junction with the Barrow at Athy was particularly important. The Barrow had been rendered navigable linking Athy and the Grand Canal with the south.

Two other projects were not so successful. In 1786 the 'County of Kildare Canal Company' was incorporated under the patronage of the government and several of Kildare's leading gentlemen, including the duke of Leinster. Its task was to build a canal from the Grand Canal to Naas and further south. By 1789 they had reached Naas but encountered serious financial difficulty thereafter, work to Kilcullen had ceased by 1791. The company was eventually purchased by the Grand

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<sup>47</sup>J. Kelly, 'Prosperous and Irish industrialisation in the late eighteenth century' p. 452-8.

<sup>48</sup>de Bombelles, *Journal de voyage* p. 244.

<sup>49</sup>V.T.H. and D.R. Delany, *The canals of the south of Ireland* (Plymouth, 1966) p. 46-7.

Canal company in 1808.<sup>50</sup> The construction of the Royal Canal was a larger disaster on a larger financial scale. Construction began in 1789 and by 1796 it had reached Kilcock via Broadstone and Maynooth. Its path through the Bog of Allen and its proximity to the Grand Canal seriously affected its prosperity, V.T.H. and D.R. Delany state: 'It can honestly be said to have been quite unnecessary'.<sup>51</sup> Despite the financial difficulties of the ventures Kildare benefited greatly from the passing trade. Rawson was certain the increased navigability and ease of travel in the county was a great advantage to agriculture.<sup>52</sup> Daily services travelled between Dublin and Monasterevan, encouraging the county in general and Monasterevan in particular as a 'centre of commerce'.<sup>53</sup>

Ascertaining the population of Kildare previous to the 1821 census is a necessary but difficult task. Pre 1821 population figures were largely calculated by multiplying the number of houses in a county (based on the hearth money collector's returns) by the average number of people in a house. Two obvious sources of error arise. Firstly, inaccuracy in the figure used for the number of houses on the side of deficiency due to a range of factors. The hearth collectors may have missed houses, ignored houses or simply failed to visit isolated houses, problems which were undoubtedly exacerbated by areas such as the Bog of Allen. The second difficulty was in deciding on an average number of people per house. Figures ranged from 5 to 6.5.<sup>54</sup>

The following table illustrates the various calculations of the number of houses and/or people in County Kildare in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries:

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<sup>50</sup>Ruth Delany, 'The County of Kildare Canal' in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* xv (1971-6) p. 122-35.

<sup>51</sup>V.T.H. and D.R. Delany, *The canals of the south of Ireland* p. 77.

<sup>52</sup>Rawson, *Statistical survey* p. 41.

<sup>53</sup>D. A. Beaufort, *Memoir of a map of Ireland* (London, 1792) p. 57.

<sup>54</sup>K. H. Connell, *The population of Ireland 1750-1845* (Oxford, 1950) chapter one.

Year	No. of Houses	No. of People	Source
1788	11,272	[71, 570]*	G.P. Bushe, 'An essay towards ascertaining the population of Ireland' <i>R.I.A. Trans.</i> iii, (1789) facing p. 143.
1790	11,205	56,000	D.A. Beaufort, <i>Memoir of a map of Ireland</i> (London, 1792) p. 57.
1791	10,605		Wray's hearth money returns in T. Newenham, <i>A view of the natural, political and commercial circumstances of Ireland</i> (London, 1809) app. xvii, p. 20.
1813	14,564	85,133	W. Shaw Mason, <i>A statistical account or parochial survey of Ireland</i> vol. iii (Dublin, 1819) p. xvii.
1821		99,065	Census of Ireland, 1821
1831		108,424	Census of Ireland, 1831

\*This figure is taken from the Dundas Papers. The author, based on the hearth money returns of 1788 (which Bushe also used) reaches the population figure by using the following figures for the number of people in a house. In houses of one hearth, 6.25, two hearths 5.625, new houses 4.25 and paupers houses 5.2.<sup>55</sup>

Unfortunately Thomas Rawson makes no attempt, unlike many of the other statistical surveys under taken by the Dublin Society, to establish the county's population. He mentions elsewhere, 'The population is immense' especially where cheap fuel was available, 'in which this county so abounds'.<sup>56</sup> Bishop Daniel Delany

<sup>55</sup>N.L.I. Dundas Papers 54/31.

<sup>56</sup>Rawson, *Statistical survey* p. 2, 23.

furnishes (average) population figures for Kildare in his statement made to government relative to the situation of his diocese in 1801. However the figure of 39,000 only covers the area under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin, whereas Archbishop Troy fails to provide figures for the Dublin Diocese sector of the county in his report.<sup>57</sup>

K. H. Connell settles on a figure of 5.65 for the average number of people in a house c.1790.<sup>58</sup> The figures for the number of houses in Kildare in the years 1788 to 1791 surprisingly drop by over 1,000. This is undoubtedly a reflection of inaccuracy rather than an indication of any decline in population. Taking the largest figure, 11,272 and Connell's average people per house figure of 5.65 we arrive at a population total of 63,687. This total seems more convincing than Beaufort's 56,000 arrived at using a people per house average of five. While 63,687 seems realistic, the number of houses at 11,272 almost certainly errs on the deficient side. While an exact population is impossible to arrive at Bushe's figure of 71,570 may not be excessive.

An attempt to enumerate the religious affiliation of the populace is to add a further layer of complexity. Only Edward Wakefield furnishes complete data based on Beaufort's population of 56,000. He states there were 54,134 Catholics and 1,866 Protestants.<sup>59</sup> Mason includes figures based on the incomplete returns of members of the established clergy in 1814 (only five parish returns are included). He calculates 6,573 Protestants and 19,028 Catholics in a total of 25,601.<sup>60</sup> The respective ratios are 29:1 and 3:1. These are so strongly divergent it is difficult to draw conclusions. Given that Kildare was recognised as a largely catholic county,

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<sup>57</sup>Viscount Castlereagh, *Memoirs and correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh* ed. Marquis of Londonderry (12 vols., London, 1848-53) vol. iv, p. 149,135.

<sup>58</sup>Connell, *Population* p. 24-25.

<sup>59</sup>Wakefield, *An account of Ireland* vol. ii p. 630-1.

<sup>60</sup>Mason, *A statistical account* vol. iii p. xlix.

the latter ratio seems rather low, but to what extent reality reached the former is problematic.

The political structure of Kildare in 1790 may be analysed at two levels; parliamentary representation and local government. Both levels were dominated by the second duke of Leinster, William Robert Fitzgerald. This is reflected in his control of parliamentary seats in the county, which returned ten members to the Irish house of commons. Two were returned for the county itself and two others for each of the boroughs of Athy, Naas, Kildare and Harristown.

The election of the county members was strongly affected by Leinster's control. One contemporary commentator believed Kildare to be 'a close Leinster county'.<sup>61</sup> In fact he was one of the few patrons able to carry a county election single-handedly. This is clearly demonstrated by the events of the 1790 election, particularly the inability of the of the sitting M.P.s to stand for re-election. Both men deserted the Leinster interest in 1790 and joined the administration. Lord Charles Fitzgerald, the duke's brother opposed William Robert's stance on the regency question. He publicly announced his incapacity to stand due to political differences with his brother.<sup>62</sup> John Wolfe of Forenaughts had been expected to stand again for the county as late as 1790.<sup>63</sup> However he purchased a seat in the borough of Killybegs and joined the administration under the influence of his uncle, Arthur Wolfe the Attorney General.<sup>64</sup>

A further impetus to the independent nature of the M.P.s returned for Kildare was the county's proximity to Dublin and its resultant acquaintance with the

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<sup>61</sup>E.M. Johnston, 'The state of the Irish House of Commons in 1791' in *R.I.A Proc.* vol. 59, sec. C, no.1 (1957-59) p. 30.

<sup>62</sup>*F.J.* 27 May 1790.

<sup>63</sup>Falkland, *Parliamentary Representation, being a political and critical review of all the counties, cities and boroughs of the kingdom of Ireland with regard to this presentation by Falkland* (Dublin, 1790) p. 42.

<sup>64</sup>Johnston, 'State of the Irish House of Commons in 1791' p. 24-5.

events of the Irish Parliament. Falkland characterised the county's electors as men of 'steady, independent and patriotic principles'.<sup>65</sup> In 1790 the duke's brother Edward was elected with Maurice Keatinge of Narraghmore. The latter was nominally an independent but the support of the Leinster interest was crucial to his position. Both men were liberal in their political sympathies.

William Fitzgerald directly controlled three of the boroughs in County Kildare responsible for electing M.P.s - Athy, Kildare and Harristown - through his control of membership of the corporations. The former two were freeman boroughs in which the franchise extended to the freemen of the borough and members of the corporation. Falkland states twelve burgesses voted for M.P.s in both boroughs.<sup>66</sup> Harristown was a corporation borough in which the right of franchise extended only to members of the corporation. It was a classic rotten borough. Only one house stood in 1790.<sup>67</sup> Whereas the boroughs of Athy and Kildare exercised some minor functions, that of Harristown existed merely to perpetuate itself and elect M.P.s.<sup>68</sup> No officers were elected after its disenfranchisement in 1800.

Lord Henry Fitzgerald and Lt. Col. Arthur Ormsby were elected as members for Athy in July 1790. Lord Henry however chose to represent Dublin for which he was elected with Henry Grattan on the Whig platform. Ormsby seems to have been a friend of the Leinster family. He was joined by Fredrick John Faulkner, a relation of the same family through Emily the duke's mother.<sup>69</sup> Simon Digby of Landenstown and Robert Graydon of Kilashee were elected to represent Kildare.

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<sup>65</sup>Falkland, *Parliamentary representation* p.42.

<sup>66</sup>*ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>67</sup>see Alexander Taylor, *A map of the County of Kildare 1783* (reprint Dublin, 1983).

<sup>68</sup>see Minute Book of the Corporation of Harristown 1714-90 (P.R.O.N.I. Leinster Papers D.3078/4/2)

<sup>69</sup>Thos. U. Sadlier, 'Kildare Members of Parliament 1559-1800' in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* vii (1912-14) p. 312-14.

Digby was M.P. for Kildare for thirty five years from 1761 to 1796. Both were strongly attached to the Leinster interest. Harristown was represented in 1790 by Sir Fitzgerald Aylmer head of the Donadea Aylmer family and Arthur Burdett, both brought in by the duke of Leinster.

The borough of Naas was outside the Fitzgerald family's influence and by 1790 was owned by the Bourke family. The head of the family had been created earl of Mayo in 1785, for his strong attachment to government. A corporation borough, it had been divided with the Burgh family of Oldtown, however Falkland writes, '...the late Mr. Burgh happened to die when his eldest son was quite an infant, the other family took advantage of that circumstance to gain an ascendancy in the borough'.<sup>70</sup> The corporation too was dominated by members of the Bourke family in this period.<sup>71</sup> The head of the family in 1790 was the first earl, John Bourke. That year his son John Bourke jun. (Lord Naas 1785-90) and another John Bourke (son of Joseph Deane Bourke, archbishop of Tuam, the earl's second son) were elected. According to one commentator the latter opposed government.<sup>72</sup> However the first Earl died and was succeeded by his son John Bourke who was in turn replaced in parliament by Sir James Bond. Bond supported government and seems to have purchased the seat from Mr. Burgh of Oldtown who was granted possession of the seat 'during Lord Mayo's [i.e. the second earl of Mayo] lifetime'<sup>73</sup>

For the purposes of local administration Kildare was divided into fourteen baronies and half baronies and one hundred and thirteen civil parishes. It was by barony for example that the Grand Jury allotted money for road building and other works. At the head of the local political machinery, nominally at least, was the county governor. Not surprisingly the post was held by the duke of Leinster. The other key positions were the high sheriff and the grand jury.

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<sup>70</sup>Falkland, *Parliamentary Representation* p. 42.

<sup>71</sup>see Minute Books of Naas Corporation, 1665-1842 (T.C.D. MSS 2251-2254).

<sup>72</sup>Johnston, 'State of the Irish House of Commons in 1791' p. 30.

<sup>73</sup>*ibid.* p. 30.

Theoretically the Lord Lieutenant appointed the high sheriff who in turn chose the grand jury. To complete the circle, the grand jury submitted three names annually to government from which a high sheriff was chosen. However the reality was less rigid, as R.B. McDowell states, ‘...the crown in the appointment of a high sheriff and the high sheriff when selecting grand jurors were limited in their choice by contemporary convention’.<sup>74</sup> The office of high sheriff, according to Edward Wakefield, was one ‘...of great ambition in Ireland’.<sup>75</sup> The post was held by Maurice Keatinge in 1790. He was replaced (probably due to his impending election) by John Taylor on 6th March. The two previous incumbents had also been noted liberals; Richard Griffith (1788) and Thomas Wogan Browne (1789).<sup>76</sup>

Wakefield, writing in 1812, describes the selection of the grand jury as follows: ‘Gentlemen desirous of being on the jury, are present in the town on the morning the assizes commence, leaving their cards with the sheriff, who, in court calls over such names as he chooses to select, and the first twenty three who answer, are sworn in’.<sup>77</sup> Their duty was to raise and spend money on the county; on roads, gaols, various officers etc. Rawson, who was county treasurer, noted 8,000 pounds was spent on roads and bridges, which he believed ‘..are in general kept in good repair, but they are many years behind the counties of Louth and Meath’.<sup>78</sup> The grand jury presentment lists for a number of assizes survive from 1791 through to the early nineteenth century (only 1794, 1798 and 1803 have not been traced in the years 1791-1803). Not only do they list the money to be raised and spent per barony

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<sup>74</sup>R.B. McDowell, *The Irish Administration 1801-1914* (London, 1964) p. 164.

<sup>75</sup>Wakefield, *An account of Ireland* vol. iii p. 364.

<sup>76</sup>John Ribton Garstin, ‘The high sheriffs of the County Kildare’ in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* ii (1896-99) p. 204.

<sup>77</sup>Wakefield, *An account of Ireland* vol. ii p. 347.

<sup>78</sup>Rawson, *Statistical survey* p. 36.

but the majority list the grand jury for that particular meeting, which enables us to ascertain the state of local politics in a given year.<sup>79</sup>

Responsibility for law and order basically rested with the men of property in the country. The task was unpaid, but was a method of demonstrating one's attachment to government and thereby soliciting promotions and favours. It is unclear exactly how many magistrates or justices of the peace were in Kildare in 1790. *The Gentleman's and Citizen's Almanack* lists seventy one justices of the peace for the county in 1795. A further twenty one had been added by 1798, though certainly not all of them were active.<sup>80</sup>

Thomas Pakenham characterised Kildare as 'the county of great wooden demenses' and 'liberal landlords'.<sup>81</sup> Many of the politically active inhabitants of the county were of liberal views, something aided by the politics of the dominant interest. The Leinster family was often a source of patronage at a local level. As has been noted the three most recent high sheriffs, Wogan Browne, Griffith and Keatinge were noted liberals. A number of wealthy and influential Catholics were quite powerful locally. Wakefield lists Archibald, O'Reilly, Caulfield and Cassada [i.e. John Cassidy of Monasterevan].<sup>82</sup> John Esmonde and Thomas Fitzgerald were to play key roles in Kildare in the 1790s. Wogan Browne, of an influential catholic family, converted in 1785, but Wakefield noted as late as 1812, 'Wogan Browne although a convert, is still considered a Catholic'.<sup>83</sup>

Kildare quite openly demonstrated its liberal character by its stance on regency question. The following resolutions were passed at a meeting held on 12

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<sup>79</sup>Grand Jury presentment lists; Lent 1791, 1792, 1795, 1796, 1799, 1801, 1802; Summer 1793, 1796, 1797, 1800, 1802.

<sup>80</sup>*The Gentleman's and Citizen's Almanack* 1795, 1798.

<sup>81</sup>Pakenham, *The year of liberty* p. 60, in a footnote he lists the Fitzgeralds, Conollys, Keatinges, Brownes and Lawlesses.

<sup>82</sup>Wakefield, *An account of Ireland* vol. ii p. 612.

<sup>83</sup>*ibid.*, p. 612

March 1789 (two days after George III's recovery) and reveal a mixture of defiance and a repetition of the principles of 1782;

That there is no parliament competent to appoint a regent for Ireland for any purpose whatsoever save the parliament of this realm.

That the royal assent given to Irish acts of parliament is the assent of the King of Ireland.

That our thanks be returned to the Lords and Commons of Ireland for asserting the rights of parliament and the independence of this country against the unconstitutional attacks lately made thereon by the ministers of the crown.<sup>84</sup>

The county's political establishment was to be severely tested during the 1790s as the basis of political participation expanded considerably. The liberal political stance became increasingly difficult to adhere to as radicalism and reaction polarised society in the second half of the decade.

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<sup>84</sup>Regency resolutions of Co. Kildare 12 March 1789 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers unsorted collection).

## Chapter Two

### Politics and Politicisation 1791-1795

The period between the start of the 1790s and the end of Fitzwilliam's viceroyalty was one of unprecedented political activity throughout Ireland.<sup>1</sup> The campaigns for Catholic relief 1791-3, and parliamentary reform radicalised public opinion and encouraged widespread participation. Kildare was relatively peaceful during these years. Political issues did not prove to be highly divisive on a public level among the county establishment, a circumstance aided by the absence of Defender violence which spread from Ulster to north Leinster in 1792-3.

Kildare Catholics had received a measure of political acceptance during the 1770s. A number were somewhat reluctantly admitted to the Naas Volunteers in 1779 with the blessing of John Wolfe and the duke of Leinster.<sup>2</sup> Thomas Fitzgerald and William O'Reilly were admitted to the 'association of this county' in 1779, probably a reference to the Anna Liffey Club, founded in 1773 as an armed body sworn to assist in maintaining law and order in Kildare.<sup>3</sup>

A number of prominent Kildare Catholics were involved in the Catholic Committee in the 1780s. Thomas Wogan Browne attended frequently until his conformity to the established church in 1785.<sup>4</sup> James Archibald, Dominic W.

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<sup>1</sup> R.B. McDowell, *Ireland in the age of imperialism and revolution* p. 351-461; W.E.H. Lecky, *A History of Ireland in the eighteenth century* (5 vols., London, 1892) vol. iii p. 1-211.

<sup>2</sup>'Naas Volunteers 1779' in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* xi (1930-33) p. 468-469, information on other corps is not available.

<sup>3</sup>James Spencer, Rathangan to John Wolfe 25 Feb 1779 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers); 'Rules and resolutions of the Anna Liffey Club' in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* xii (1935-45) p. 124-7.

<sup>4</sup>R. Dudley Edwards, 'The minute book of the Catholic Committee 1773-1792' in *Archivium Hibernicum* ix (1942) p. 43, 45, 46, 89, 92, 103.

O'Reilly, Micheal Aylmer and Christopher Nangle also attended.<sup>5</sup> The return of elected delegates from Kildare to the committee from 1784 added a new dimension to Catholic politics in the county. In that year the Catholics of Naas returned Pat Dease, Thomas Braughall (both were also elected for Drogheda, Dundalk and Dublin) and Francis Dermot.<sup>6</sup> In 1791 delegates were returned from Athy, Thomas Fitzgerald, Garrett Fitzgerald and Jos. Pat Cahill. Dan McGuire was elected to represent Castledermot.<sup>7</sup> Some of these names remain completely elusive, appearing in neither local nor national agitation. Thomas Fitzgerald of Geraldine was the most prominent Kildare activist and was to play an important role in both arenas. The 1791 election produced a broader based and more liberal committee with more frequent meetings.<sup>8</sup> By March of that year Fitzgerald had demonstrated his liberal allegiance within Catholic politics by replacing one of the sub committee members forced to stand down due to non compliance with the forceful wishes of the general committee. He continued to perform an important role at a national level and chaired a meeting in 1792.<sup>9</sup>

The Kenmareite secession of December 1791 extended Catholic politics even more broadly. Sixty eight members of the Catholic committee headed by Kenmare, Fingall, Gormanstown and Troy left the body on its refusal to pass a declaration of unconditional loyalty and presented a separate address on 27 December 1791. Dominic Wm. O'Reilly was the only Kildare signatory.<sup>10</sup> The radical leadership had the backing of the county. A meeting of Kildare Catholics was held in Athy on 14 January, chaired by Thomas Fitzgerald. It resolved that the

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<sup>5</sup>Edwards, 'The minute book of the Catholic Committee 1773-1792' p. 103, 117.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.*, p. 95, 98.

<sup>7</sup>*ibid.*, p. 118, 120.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas Bartlett, *The fall and rise of the Irish nation: The Catholic question 1690-1830* (Dublin, 1992) p. 127-8.

<sup>9</sup>Edwards, 'The minute book of the Catholic committee 1773-1792' p. 125, 133-4, 166-7.

<sup>10</sup>*F.J.* 27 Dec. 1791.

Catholic committee were 'the only body competent to declare the sentiments of the great body....that we earnestly exhort our prelates and pastors from any interference in politics...theirs the spiritual, theirs [sic] the temporal'. It is noted at the end of their resolutions that: 'The above resolves supported by the voices of some hundreds of reputable landowners'.<sup>11</sup> The reference to 'hundreds' of landowners may indicate general support among Catholics for this stance rather than the attendance of a large number of landowners. They may have been prominent tenants. Nonetheless their actions provoked an angry response from local Protestants.

The meeting produced a response from the corporation of Athy. At a meeting held on the 26 January it passed resolutions addressed to its M.P.s. They stated, 'We know well the firm basis on which our constitution is raised, and are too well assured of its value, to wish, or to approve any change, in which the Protestant Ascendancy may be endangered'. It requested its members to vote against any further 'measure that may tend to alter our present happy constitution under which we have all so long prospered'.<sup>12</sup> Ormsby and Faulkner, the sitting M.P.s promised to pay the 'greatest attention to the address'.<sup>13</sup> The borough was directly controlled by the duke of Leinster, which has led Pdraigh O'Snodaigh to assert the Athy resolutions were a 'rather pathetic device used...to get off the hook of Catholic emancipation' and proves he was 'not a political radical'.<sup>14</sup>

While it is true that the duke was never a political radical, conflicting reports of his position at this point may provide an insight into his reasoning. William Drennan noted in December 1791 that the duke had 'declared warmly for the Catholics'.<sup>15</sup> In the same month the *Freeman's Journal* reported that the duke

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<sup>11</sup>*D.E.P.* 7 Jan. 1792.

<sup>12</sup>*D.E.P.* 31 Jan. 1792.

<sup>13</sup>*D.E.P.* 7 Feb. 1792.

<sup>14</sup>P. O'Snodaigh, 'Notes on the politics of Kildare at the end of the 18th century' in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* xvi p. 270. He mistakenly dates the address as 1793.

<sup>15</sup>William Drennan, *The Drennan Letters* ed. D.A. Chart (Belfast, 1931) p. 71.

had made overtures to government about the possibility of entering the administration. His offer had been turned down on the grounds of expense.<sup>16</sup> Uncertainty concerning the duke's position on Catholic politics and his own need to placate both sides of the debate might have produced his acceptance of the Athy resolutions. A simpler consideration may have resulted in them i.e., the radical tone of the Catholic address and large scale support it mustered in the duke's backyard.

The rift with Leinster was serious and unexpected one for the Catholics of the county. It damaged prospects of support for their cause and detached them from the prime source of local patronage. The breach was speedily repaired by an address presented following a meeting at Naas on 23 March. The deputation presenting it was headed by James Archibald and Thomas Fitzgerald, chairman and secretary of the meeting respectively, and Dominic Wm. O'Reilly, Charles Aylmer, John Fitzgerald, Richard Dease, John Esmonde and Daniel Caulfield. It expressed thanks for the duke's 'protection and brotherly kindness' and hoped that his influence would 'dispel the mist of intolerance which unhappily perverts the minds of some of our countrymen'.<sup>17</sup> He returned his gratitude for the address and stated '...whenever the legislature has thought it proper to take up the cause of Catholics, it has always met with my support....'<sup>18</sup>

In July plans were made to attach Thomas Conolly to the Catholic cause. It was agreed Edward Byrne, John Keogh and Thomas Fitzgerald would visit Castletown. Theobald Wolfe Tone, with a Catholic deputation met both Conolly and

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<sup>16</sup>*F.J.* 17 Dec. 1791.

<sup>17</sup>*D.E.P.* 29 Mar. 1792; Thomas Fitzgerald Papers, 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/42/18). This incident does not seem to mark the reunion of the leading Catholic activists of the county, O'Reilly and Micheal Aylmer of Lyons signed the Kenmareite address of thanks in May 1792 (*D.E.P.* 12 May 1792).

<sup>18</sup>*D.E.P.* 29 Mar. 1792.

Leinster at Carton in September.<sup>19</sup> 'The duke very friendly,' he noted, 'and declares his approbation of the whole of the Catholic proceedings.' His comments on Conolly were less than flattering, describing him as, '...a strange rambling fool; talked for an hour, without the least connection, about the union, a regency, Mr Fox, the Whig club, the Catholics, a petition bill, a place bill, a union, *Da Capo*, etc'. More importantly his support was secured.<sup>20</sup>

Sir Hercules Langrishe's Catholic relief act was passed grudgingly in April 1792. Pro-Catholic petitions were overwhelmingly rejected and the attacks on Catholics which accompanied the legislation resulted in the introduction of fresh strategies to the relief campaign. Tone was formally appointed secretary to the committee in July 1792 signalling a shift in policy. Reconciliation with the Kenmareite faction was also achieved during the summer. The plan for a convention was a truly radical departure. Protestant opinion immediately made its opposition felt through grand jury resolutions, as many as twenty three were presented in mid 1792. The Kildare grand jury remained silent.<sup>21</sup>

Nancy Curtin has contended that: 'The election of delegates encouraged the extension of the Catholic question deep into the Irish countryside, further politicising and polarising inhabitants'.<sup>22</sup> The selection of delegates was to be carried out on as wide a base as possible. 'Respectable' people were to be appointed 'electors' at meetings in private houses, electors were in turn to choose three to four delegates and one to two associate delegates (Dublin residents).<sup>23</sup> Kildare chose,

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<sup>19</sup>Theobald Wolfe Tone, *The autobiography of Theobald Wolfe Tone 1763-1798* ed. R. Barry O'Brien (2 vols., London, 1893), vol. i p. 94.

<sup>20</sup>*ibid.*, vol. i p. 126-7.

<sup>21</sup>Bartlett, *The fall and rise of the Irish nation* p. 150-1; *F.J.* August-September 1792 *passim*.

<sup>22</sup>Curtin, *The United Irishmen* p. 49-50.

<sup>23</sup>'On the manner of conducting the election of delegates', in *Vindication of the cause of the Catholics of Ireland adopted at a meeting at Taylor's Hall, Backlane December 7 1792* (Dublin, 1793) p. 33-38.

Thomas Fitzgerald, Charles Aylmer, John Esmonde, Christopher Nangle, James Archibald and Randall McDonnell. Three other Kildare men William Dunn (Queen's Co.), Walter Fitzgerald (Carlow Co. and Town) and Richard Doyle (Wicklow Co.) were returned. The 1791 delegates from Athy and Castledermot also attended.<sup>24</sup> The process of calling a convention significantly heightened public mobilisation. In its choice of delegates the electorate clearly placed itself on the liberal-radical wing of Catholic politics. Fitzgerald, Aylmer and Esmonde were all to have radical links later in the decade. Archibald was one of the county's most prominent activists. The absence of the equally prominent O'Reilly may indicate a reluctance to choose one of the older guard.

The commotion of Catholic politics in December and January 1792-3 was accompanied by a development in the Whig political camp under the leadership of the duke of Leinster. At a meeting on the 5 December 1792 the Whig club had split over whether to introduce the Catholic question for discussion. The Kildare based trio Hamilton Rowan, Wogan Browne and Griffith had all argued for its introduction, this was voted down, however, and its debate postponed until 18 January.<sup>25</sup> Probably in response Richard Griffith wrote to the duke on 9 December urging him of the need for a new association to combat the republicanism of the new Volunteers and United Irishmen, as well as the timidity of the Whig club. He enclosed a plan for a group called 'Friends of the people'.<sup>26</sup> He also hinted it would be a prudent move given Lord Edward's recent republican outbursts. He had failed to obtain an army post in April 1792 due to his opposition in parliament. While in France in November he famously denounced his noble title and formed a warm

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<sup>24</sup>*A full and accurate report of the debates in the parliament of Ireland in the session 1793; on the bill for the relief of his Majesty's Catholic subjects* (Dublin, 1793) p. xii-xxvi.

<sup>25</sup>*D.E.P.* 8 Dec. 1792.

<sup>26</sup>Fitzgerald (ed.), *The earls of Kildare* second addenda p. 267-8.

friendship with Thomas Paine.<sup>27</sup> Leinster replied to Griffith on 10 December outlining his political opinions and declaring his readiness to step forward in favour of relief and reform.<sup>28</sup>

The first meeting of the Association of the Friends of the Constitution, Liberty and Peace, took place in the King's Arms Tavern in Fownes Street, Dublin on 21 December. The duke chaired the meeting with Griffith as secretary. An address was unanimously passed. Central to their political credo was the belief, 'That the permanent peace and welfare of Ireland can only be established by the abolition of all civil and political distinctions arising from difference in religious opinion, and by a radical and effectual reform in the commons house of parliament'.<sup>29</sup> It was not however republican and urged resistance to any attempt to 'introduce new forms of government into this country....'<sup>30</sup> The group received a mixed response from radicals. Drennan simply dubbed it the Leinster 'society', 'association' or 'club'. He noted it was 'endeavouring by all methods to injure our little societies', and hoped 'the north will see through this fawning aristocracy who come on the field so late and so languidly'.<sup>31</sup> The duke did make approaches to the liberal wing of the United Irishmen through T.A. Emmet who reported on 7 January 1793, the duke 'wished coalesce and act with them in all their pursuits'.<sup>32</sup> With hindsight however Emmet concurred readily with Drennan.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Fitzgerald (ed.), *The earls of Kildare* second addenda p. 264-5; McDermott (ed.), *The memoirs of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* p 126-9. He was finally dismissed from the army in 1793.

<sup>28</sup>Duke of Leinster to Richard Griffith 10 December 1792 in Fitzgerald (ed.), *op. cit.* p. 268-271.

<sup>29</sup>*D.E.P.* 24 December 1792; N.A.I. Reb. Papers, 620/19/125.

<sup>30</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>*Drennan letters* p. 112, 116, 118.

<sup>32</sup>R.B. McDowell, 'Proceedings of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen' in *Analecta Hibernica* xii (1949) p. 58.

<sup>33</sup>W.J. MacNeven (ed.), *Pieces of Irish history* (New York, 1807) p. 64-65.

The association was initially quite successful. Its meetings continued with regularity throughout January and February 1793.<sup>34</sup> It received praise from a number of societies in the north and new branches were formed (as the parent society had called for) in Wexford, Waterford, Meath, Athlone and Lisburn.<sup>35</sup> However, the Dublin organisation began to run out of steam towards the end of February. A meeting was to be held on the 25 February, 'to receive the report of the committee appointed to prepare a plan of parliamentary reform'.<sup>36</sup> The ensuing meetings seem not to have reached agreement, one held on the 1 March was adjourned until 6 March. This is the last mention of the Dublin association assembling.<sup>37</sup> It is safe to assume the group fell to pieces at this point though it did receive some later mention in the press.<sup>38</sup> The war with France which was declared in February was instrumental in the groups demise. The experiment did serve to place the Leinster interest firmly in the liberal camp at a time when this position became increasingly difficult to maintain. Even with its element of respectability it failed to attract the support of many Whigs who viewed it as too radical or many radicals for whom it was not radical enough.

The granting of Catholic relief in April 1793 and the accompanying dose of restrictive legislation (gunpowder, Militia and convention acts) ended Kildare's Catholic agitation until Fitzwilliam's arrival. The summer assizes of 1793 held in Athy marked the official entry of Catholics into local politics. At the quarter sessions held in July the duke of Leinster himself attended. He was met by 'an immense crowd the horses instantly taken from the carriages and drawn through he town with shouts and acclamations of "success to the House of Leinster", a general illumination at night, bonfires, etc'. He was entertained by Catholic inhabitants

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<sup>34</sup>*D.E.P.* Jan.-Feb. 1793 *passim*.

<sup>35</sup>*D.E.P.* 5 Jan., 17 Jan., 19 Jan., 2 Feb., 5 Feb. 1793.

<sup>36</sup>*D.E.P.* 21 Feb. 1793.

<sup>37</sup>*D.E.P.* 28 Feb., 2 Mar. 1793

<sup>38</sup>*D.E.P.* 27 Apr. 1793; *The Freeman's Journal* reported its demise on 15 Oct. 1793.

attended also by the M.P.s and bench while 'ale was given to the populace'.<sup>39</sup> Thomas Fitzgerald was granted a commission of the peace by the government to add to the deputy governorship he had received in May.<sup>40</sup>

The grand jury panel included six Catholics called by the liberal high sheriff, Maurice Keatinge.<sup>41</sup> The *Dublin Evening Post* urged the counties of Ireland to 'look with a steady eye to Kildare and imitate her glorious example'.<sup>42</sup> Ominous signs were already evident however. A bonfire held by O'Reilly of Kildangan was not so successful. According to James Alexander his provision of porter to 'drink his majesties [sic] health' directly resulted in a small turnout. For Alexander this was one of a number of signs of growing disaffection.<sup>43</sup>

The involvement of the 'populace' at Athy reveals how broad the political base had become. In 1793 a pamphlet was recovered by government circulating from Rathcoffey. The author condemned the war with France in the name of poor manufacturers, on the basis that war would result in economic ruin for that group. It concluded: 'We do not want charity. We do want work. We are starving. For what. A war?'<sup>44</sup> Thomas Collins, a government informant, initially reacted by stating 'I saw one with the Naas postmark and dated from Racophy [sic] but I cannot

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<sup>39</sup>*D.E.P.* 25 Jul. 1793; *F.J.* 23 Jul. 1793.

<sup>40</sup>*F.J.* 4 May 1793.

<sup>41</sup>*County of Kildare Summer Assizes August the 4th 1793* (n.p., 1794). The Catholics were: Thomas Fitzgerald, John Esmonde, Micheal Aylmer, James Archibald, Dominic Wm. O'Reilly and Richard Dease. Lord Edward Fitzgerald was foreman.

<sup>42</sup>*D.E.P.* 25 Jul. 1793.

<sup>43</sup>James Alexander, *Some account of the first apparent symptoms of the late rebellion in the County of Kildare, and an adjoining part of the King's County with a.....narrative of some of the most remarkable passages in the rise and progress of the rebellion in the County of Wexford* (Dublin, 1800) p. 18.

<sup>44</sup>Printed pamphlet dated Rathcoffey 1 May 1793 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/20/19).

think Rowan the author, if he is dating it from his own house, [it] is very singular'.<sup>45</sup> His later letters portray Archibald Hamilton Rowan's house at Rathcoffey as a centre of radical activity. He twice reported the existence of a large number of 'squibs' printed at the Rathcoffey press.<sup>46</sup> While many were undoubtedly destined for the Dublin population, a number must have found their way around the Kildare countryside.

The hinterland of Rathcoffey was a nexus for a group of active liberal and radical politicians. Five miles lay between Hamilton Rowan and Richard Griffith at Millicent, with Wogan Browne at Castle Browne and Theobald Wolfe Tone at Bodenstown between. Tone's father Peter held a freehold lease on the land of Theobald Wolfe of Blackhall (uncle of John Wolfe of Fortnaughts), who was Tone's godfather and the source of his name. When Tone was temporarily suspended from Trinity College following his involvement in a fatal duel in 1782, it appears the intervention of the Wolfe family was crucial in securing his reinstatement.<sup>47</sup> His diary reveals substantial contacts with Wogan Browne and Rowan during 1792. At dinner in September they drank 'The spirit of the French mob to the people of Ireland'.<sup>48</sup> In December 1793 Thomas Russell dined at Millicent with Tone, Griffith, 'a sensible man' and Wogan Browne, 'who reads an essay on universal representation'.<sup>49</sup> These glimpses provide an insight into the extensive links between Kildare liberals and United Irishmen which was further augmented by ties between both groups and Catholic politicians, for example John Esmonde of Osberstown or Charles Aylmer at Painstown.

<sup>45</sup>McDowell, 'Proc. of the Dublin Soc. of United Irishmen' p. 79.

<sup>46</sup>*ibid.*, p. 80, p. 87, p. 92.

<sup>47</sup>Marianne Elliot, *Wolfe Tone: prophet of Irish independence* p. 12, 23; George Wolfe, 'The Wolfe family of County Kildare' in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* iii (1899-1902) p. 367.

<sup>48</sup>*Autobiography of Theobald Wolfe Tone* vol. i p. 126-7.

<sup>49</sup>Thomas Russell, *Journals and memoirs of Thomas Russell 1791-5* ed. C.J. Woods (Dublin, 1991) p. 138.

The most compelling evidence for the politicisation of County Kildare in the early 1790s is that of James Alexander.<sup>50</sup> A resident of Ross in Wexford, he was a native of Harristown, near Monasterevan and visited there for a period from January 1793. He contended that: 'The late rebellion has been much longer setting on foot in this kingdom than very many people are aware of. I perceived strong symptoms of it, when I was last in Harristown'.<sup>51</sup> Having heard 'expressions of disaffection' among the peasantry, he attended their social gatherings, 'in order to feel their political pulses'. Loyal toasts he quickly discovered were either over ruled or 'passed over in silence'.<sup>52</sup>

Political radicals were becoming more vocal. George Cummins, a Kildare apothecary, is reported by Alexander as observing that: 'The people of this kingdom are beginning to open their eyes to perceive their natural rights'.<sup>53</sup> Mary Leadbeater noticed the same trait in Malachi Delany of Ballitore whom she described; 'Though a great talker and qualified to handle various subjects he confined himself to two - religion and politics. His mode of treating the first consisted in ra[n]ting at the clergy, and the last in abusing the government'.<sup>54</sup> Both Cummins and Delany were deeply involved in United Irish activities later in the decade. Alexander was unable to uncover the origin of political fomentation in west Kildare and concluded, 'I believe some newspapers went a good way into the business; for I never knew the people in your [his brother's] neighbourhood anything like so attached to these vehicles of information and political sentiment'.<sup>55</sup>

Opposition to the embodiment of the Militia was viewed by Alexander as a symptom of widespread political radicalism. The Militia act was

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<sup>50</sup>Alexander, *Some account* p. 13-22.

<sup>51</sup>*ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>52</sup>*ibid.*, p. 14-15.

<sup>53</sup>*ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>54</sup>Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater Papers* vol. i p. 198.

<sup>55</sup>Alexander, *Some account* p. 19.

passed in April 1793. By March of the following year only two county units remained unembodied: Cavan and Kildare.<sup>56</sup> Maurice Keatinge was initially appointed colonel of the Kildare body in April 1793. Henry McAnally states he simply did not take up the post.<sup>57</sup> During the summer of 1793 anti Militia riots occurred throughout Ireland. Thomas Bartlett has identified three centres of violent resistance in Leinster: (a) a triangle encompassing Carlow, Queen's County and Kilkenny, (b) Meath and (c) Wexford.<sup>58</sup> Queen's County was severely disrupted. A meeting was held at Stradbally, a few miles west of Athy, at the end of June to discuss the problem. A full county meeting followed a few days later which requested military assistance and reported 'emissaries' in the county.<sup>59</sup>

James Alexander's account of Militia opposition in the Monasterevan region refers to 1793. Harristown itself was not in Kildare but was situated in a part of King's County to the south of West Offaly barony. This area was largely comprised of bogland and bounded to the west by Queen's County and to the north, east and south by Kildare. The disturbances which affected this district obviously spilled over into its natural hinterland in Kildare. He states that: 'When the parochial lists of persons qualified to serve in the Militia appeared, there was no bounds to their expressions of indignation'.<sup>60</sup> He observed 'remarkably strong and healthy looking beggars about the county at this point'. These he learned were emissaries of some sort spreading disaffection about the Militia. They were working in Harristown, Walterstown, Nurney and Kildoon (the latter three in West Offaly). A

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<sup>56</sup>Henry McAnally, *The Irish Militia 1793-1816* (Dublin, 1949) p. 54.

<sup>57</sup>*D.E.P.* 24 Apr. 1793; *F.J.* 20 Apr. 1793; McAnally, *op. cit.* p. 54.

<sup>58</sup>Thomas Bartlett, 'An end to the moral economy: the Irish militia disturbances of 1793' in *Past and Present* no. 99 (1983) p. 49-53.

<sup>59</sup>*D.E.P.* 2 Jul., 6 Jul. 1793; Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 66.

<sup>60</sup>Alexander, *Some Account* p. 15.

local man informed him, 'as for Kildare [town] it is too full of them already!' Cummins was prepared to use the opportunity to spread sedition.<sup>61</sup>

Priests became objects of suspicion as it was they who had to provide lists of fit persons for military service from which names would be selected. In Monasterevan and Kildangan chapels were shut up. The people,

would suffer no priest to officiate therein, till he gave them his solemn oath that he did not furnish any parochial list or part of a list to any officer or any other person concerned in penning down the names of the persons supposed liable or qualified to serve in the intended Militia.<sup>62</sup>

Alexander, however, reports no major gathering in opposition to the Militia.

Why was the Kildare unit not embodied in 1793? McAnally offers two reasons. Firstly the duke of Leinster was only offered the colonelcy after it was 'hawked about' due to his opposition to government. Secondly, 'the fact that Kildare was a rather unruly county'.<sup>63</sup> The former is certainly more plausible than the latter given Kildare's relative tranquillity in a period when other counties witnessed severe outbreaks of violence. (McAnally tended to minimise Militia resistance in any case). This concurs with the view of Charles W. Fitzgerald, who stated that the duke of Leinster's opposition meant he did not attend the levees of the Lord Lieutenant 'and it was only after consulting some of his friends that he waited upon him to receive it'.<sup>64</sup>

Leinster seems to have been in favour of the Militia Bill early in 1793 and was finally offered the command in May 1794.<sup>65</sup> The duke appears to have been

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<sup>61</sup>Alexander, *Some account* p. 15-16.

<sup>62</sup>*ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>63</sup>McAnally, *Irish Militia* p. 54; repeated by P. O'Snodaigh, 'Notes on the Volunteers, Militia, Yeomanry and Orangemen of County Kildare in the 18th century' in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* xv (1971-6) p. 44.

<sup>64</sup>Fitzgerald (ed.), *The earls of Kildare* second addenda p. 274.

<sup>65</sup>*Drennan letters* p. 143; Fitzgerald (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 274; *F.J.* 28 May 1794.

confident of his ability to raise a unit (only 280 men were needed under the terms of the act). The press reported he intended to raise it voluntarily, difficulties however arose.<sup>66</sup> Lord Edward who had recently moved to Kildare town, in a letter to his mother on 19 July wrote, 'We have been busy here about the Militia the people do not like it much - that is the common people and farmers - even though Leinster has it, they do not thoroughly come into it, which I am glad of as it shows they begin not to be entirely led by names'.<sup>67</sup>

Militia disturbances appeared in Kildare in the same month. A hundred men entered the village of Ballitore 'tendering an oath to all of their own class whom they met, that they should not join either military or army, but be true to their own cause'.<sup>68</sup> Near Kilcullen a 'riotous assembly' gathered at Redgap where 'they swore several of the inhabitants, not to pay rent or taxes'. The crowd was dispersed by a Militia unit stationed there.<sup>69</sup> The *Dublin Evening Post* reported further 'petty disturbances' in August, but fails to specify the location. A 'mob' attempted to swear gentlemen against accepting commissions or aiding in the Militia. On the institution being 'humanely explained...they dispersed without committing the smallest violence or depredation'.<sup>70</sup>

Bartlett has argued that: 'the anti Militia riots of 1793 helped to create that atmosphere of fear and repression that made the '98 possible and some sort of '98 inevitable'.<sup>71</sup> In Kildare the limited disturbances which occurred marked a new

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<sup>66</sup>*D.E.P.* 17 Jun. 1794; *F.J.* 19 Jun. 1794.

<sup>67</sup>McDermott (ed.), *Memoirs of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* p. 186.

<sup>68</sup>Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater Papers* vol. i p. 200.

<sup>69</sup>*F.J.* 26 Jul. 1794. On 15 June 1793 a meeting of the 'Associations of Kilcullen, Castledermot and Narraghmore' had convened following a disturbance at Kilcullen market. Resolutions were passed condemning 'illegal combinations' and vowing to protect farmers. This fracas was not connected with the militia. [*D.E.P.* 18 Jun. 1793].

<sup>70</sup>*D.E.P.* 18 Aug. 1794.

<sup>71</sup>Bartlett, 'An end to the moral economy: the Irish militia disturbances of 1793' p. 44.

departure. The loose association of the lower orders against the Militia (and its tentative promotion of agrarian issues) prefigured more organised Defenderism. Lord Edward had noted, without regret, the loosening of paternalistic ties between his brother the duke and the lower orders i.e. the breakdown of the moral economy which is the topic of Bartlett's study. The duke's policy of voluntary enlistment probably helped limit resistance by rendering it unnecessary. The fact that Kildare's disorder took place in 1794 (with the exception of west Kildare), not 1793, points to the importance of purely local and immediate factors. The Kildare Militia was embodied in July 1794, the last in the country to do so. The commissions were signed in that month and from August the Militia were stationed in Athy.<sup>72</sup> At the end of September a full embodiment had still not taken place, the total membership of the unit was only 101.<sup>73</sup> The small number of protests which had occurred did not lead to any organised disturbance. No fresh violence was reported during the rest of the year.

Recent research has suggested that the 'lull' which entered radical politics in 1794 was more apparent than real.<sup>74</sup> In Kildare political agitation had ceased in the aftermath of the 1793 relief act. The news in late 1794 that Earl Fitzwilliam, one of the Portland Whigs who had joined Pitt's government, was to be appointed Lord Lieutenant triggered a jolt in activity among liberal and radical activists. The duke of Leinster found himself in a difficult position. Unlike the Portland Whigs (and many Irish Whigs) he opposed the war with France like his cousin Charles James Fox who remained in opposition. His problem surfaced when he was asked by Fitzwilliam to move an address in support of the war in the house of lords. Writing in reply on 17 January he stated he could not 'step forward the mover

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<sup>72</sup>*D.E.P.* 5 Aug. 1794; T. Graves 'Officers of the Kildare Militia 1794-1817' in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* xii (1935-45) p. 194-96; Fitzgerald (ed.), *The earls of Kildare* second addenda p. 274.

<sup>73</sup>Militia Ireland, Kildare 1793-1798 (P.R.O. WO 13/2923); *F.J.* 2 Oct 1794.

<sup>74</sup>N. Curtin, 'The transformation of the United Irishmen into a mass based revolutionary organisation 1794-6' p. 463-92; L.M. Cullen, 'The internal politics of the United Irishmen' p. 176-96.

of an address approving of a war I have so long reprobated,' though he added 'I am as ready as any man to stand forth and support the system of government that your excellency is about to establish'.<sup>75</sup> He was appointed Clerk of the Hanaper at the start of the year.<sup>76</sup>

Kildare Catholics speedily convened a meeting in Kildare town in January following Dublin meetings in December. They agreed 'a humble application be made to parliament in the ensuing sessions praying for a total repeal of the penal and restrictive laws still affecting the Catholics of Ireland'. A petition was drawn up by Ambrose O'Ferrall, Charles Aylmer, John Esmonde and Christopher Nangle. It was requested that the County's M.P's lay the address before the house of commons <sup>77</sup> The address was presented directly to the Lord Lieutenant by a deputation on 16 February. This included the duke of Leinster, Col. Keatinge and Dr. Daniel Delany, Catholic Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin as well as fourteen prominent Catholics.<sup>78</sup> It marks the apogee of unity among the pro-Catholic group in the county, particularly given the presence of Delany and Leinster. The suddenness of the opportunity offered by Fitzwilliam's appointment facilitated this alliance which included all elements of the Catholic political spectrum. The address congratulated the viceroy on his appointment and choice of 'distinguished characters' as counsels and called for the completion of Catholic relief.<sup>79</sup> Fitzwilliam was recalled exactly one week later, shattering hopes.

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<sup>75</sup>Fitzgerald (ed.), *The earls of Kildare* second addenda p. 275.

<sup>76</sup>*F.J.* 29 Jan. 1795.

<sup>77</sup>*D.E.P.* 27 Jan. 1795; *F.J.* 17 Feb. 1795.

<sup>78</sup>*D.E.P.* 19 Feb. 1795. The Catholics were: Dominic Wm. O'Reilly, Patrick Latten, Daniel Caulfield, Gerald Aylmer, Charles Aylmer, John Cassidy (secretary), James Hussey, Thomas Ryan, Walter Dowdall, Richard Dease, Captain Hussey, John Esmonde, Thomas Dillon and Thomas Fitzgerald (chairman).

<sup>79</sup>*D.E.P.* 19 Feb. 1795.

The Kildare response was swift. The Catholics immediately condemned his removal.<sup>80</sup> A meeting held at Kildare town under Daniel Bergin (chairman) and Thomas Braughall (secretary) produced one of the first condemnations. They issued resolutions predicting dire consequences: 'we apprehend that universal distrust and jealousy would pervade the country and that forged plots would again be resorted to in order to justify legal oppression'.<sup>81</sup>

A full meeting of the 'Gentlemen, freeholders and inhabitants of the County of Kildare' was held at Naas on 4 March, chaired by the high sheriff, Sir Fenton Aylmer. Fourteen resolutions were drawn up concluding that dismay and the continuation of abuses would be the result of Fitzwilliam's departure. Two petitions were to be drawn up. The first to the viceroy himself to be delivered by Aylmer, the second to the King, to be delivered by Micheal Aylmer and John Taylor. The meeting was adjourned until 26 March.<sup>82</sup> The former address expressed 'deep despondency at the apprehension of your excellency's sudden and unexpected departure'.<sup>83</sup> The latter was presented on 18 March, it lamented Fitzwilliam's recall, stating 'we apprehend that his excellency's departure will announce a return to the old system of administration in this country,' and sought the King's intervention.<sup>84</sup> The county meeting reassembled on 26 March (Fitzwilliam departed the previous day). It passed fresh resolutions, repeating its regret and stating the best method of judging the new administration was 'the success or failure of the serious question of Catholic emancipation'.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>*D.E.P.* 3 Mar. 1795.

<sup>81</sup>*D.E.P.* 5 Mar. 1795. The paper later stated the meeting was attended by people of all religious persuasions and not only Catholics as had been reported elsewhere [*D.E.P.* 7 Mar. 1795].

<sup>82</sup>*D.E.P.* 5 Mar. 1795.

<sup>83</sup>*D.E.P.* 7 Mar. 1795.

<sup>84</sup>*D.E.P.* 28 Mar. 1795; *Walker's Hibernian Magazine* (1795, part i, Jan-Jun) p. 272-3.

<sup>85</sup>*ibid.*

County Kildare's reaction to the 'Fitzwilliam episode' served to outline its own liberal stance on the renewed issues of Catholics relief and parliamentary reform. Its resolutions and addresses were full of bitter disappointment. A Catholic relief bill had been introduced to parliament by Grattan in February. By March even the duke of Leinster was reluctant to raise catholic hopes, the measure was heavily defeated in April.<sup>86</sup> While the county establishment's vocal response indicates a united front, the role of government linked elements, such as John Wolfe remains unclear.

It has been aphoristic to divide study of the 1790s into two distinct periods separated by the debacle of Fitzwilliam's two month sojourn. His viceroyalty it is argued marked the beginning of militant and underground republicanism, a view facilitated by the emergence of a distinctly militarised radicalism in Ulster in 1795.<sup>87</sup> Kildare fits the division in one major sense, that is, organised violence became common from 1795. The limited Militia riots were the small scale beginnings of this mixture of grievances and physical force. They did not lead to an atmosphere of 'fear and repression' but were put down quietly and effectively.<sup>88</sup> It is tempting to view the Defender incursion as a direct result of the popular expectations and frustrations of early 1795. However political events would only partially explain their introduction and would not account for their continued activity and spread further into Kildare.

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<sup>86</sup>*F.J.* 28 Mar. 1795.

<sup>87</sup>McDowell, *Ireland in the age of imperialism and revolution* p. 443-4, 470-73; Nancy Curtin provides an influential counter argument in 'The transformation of the United Irishmen into a mass based revolutionary organisation 1794-6', especially p. 468-476. Her arguments apply largely to Dublin and Ulster.

<sup>88</sup>*D.E.P.* 25 Jul. 1795, seems to indicate a division over the use of military force [favoured by a faction headed by LaTouche] to dispel a riot caused by a 'drunken vagrant' which Keatinge effectively dealt with. It may have been at Kilcullen, see above footnote 69.

What characterised the Kildare elite in the period to 1795 was a lack of divisiveness. Initial indecision in the dominant Leinster interest over the Catholic question gave way to full support of the cause and an attempt to harness control of the relief/reform bandwagon. This lack of open disagreement did not stunt the politicisation of the lower classes, indeed it encouraged radical activity. The large liberal section of the county attempted to continue their stance after 1795. However as Defenderism and the United Irishmen were introduced into an already quite politicised county divisions naturally appeared. They were compounded by the growing weakness of the Leinster faction in the county.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>Harristown borough was sold to the LaTouche family in 1793 and the duke seems to have been in financial difficulty during this period. See P. O'Snodaigh, 'Notes on the politics of Kildare in the late 18th century' p. 271. He dates the decline to the start of the decade. Not only were Kildare politics affected by the decline of the duke's influence, but his own increasingly minority position accelerated this development.

## Chapter Three

### 'To be true to the French', Defenders and United Irishmen in Kildare July 1795- April 1797

Agrarian disturbances were a continuous feature of eighteenth century Ireland since the initial Whiteboy outbreaks in Munster in 1761.<sup>1</sup> Kildare was affected by the second wave of Whiteboy violence in the late 1770s. Houghing of cattle and threatening letters were used in an attempt to intimidate land owners. A county meeting of magistrates held at Naas in 1778, initiated a subscription to bring those involved to justice and noted they 'frequently meet and concert their wicked schemes in houses in their neighbourhood'.<sup>2</sup> The Defenders emerged from the Armagh troubles of the late 1780s are recognised as a novel development. Historians have viewed them as a transition phase between the agrarian Whiteboys and the revolutionary movements of the nineteenth century such as Ribbonism.<sup>3</sup>

The origins of the Armagh Troubles and the Defenders themselves remain disputed. Contemporary reports stated violence had originated in a non-sectarian, non-political localised brawl which eventually crystallised in sectarian gang warfare.<sup>4</sup> David Miller's study placed the origins of the troubles in the socio-

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<sup>1</sup>Jim Smyth, *The men of no property* p. 33-51.

<sup>2</sup>County Meeting, Naas, 9 Nov. 1778 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers ).

<sup>3</sup>T. Bartlett, 'Select documents xxxvii: Defenders and Defenderism in 1795' p. 374; T. Garvin, 'Defenders, Ribbonmen and others: underground political networks in pre-famine Ireland' p. 133-5.

<sup>4</sup>J Byrne, *Impartial account of the late disturbances in the County of Armagh* (Dublin, 1792). L.M. Cullen has argued the pamphlet was written by the later United Irishman Rev. James Quigley, not simply as an apologia but with the political motive of minimising the significance of the violence. L.M. Cullen, 'Late eighteenth century politicisation in Ireland: problems in its study and its French links' in P. Bergeron and L.M. Cullen (ed.), *Culture et politique pratique en Irlande xvieme- xviiieme siècle* (Paris, 1991) p. 137-144.

economic sphere.<sup>5</sup> Marianne Elliot has outlined the importance of the latent sense of dispossession still alive particularly in Catholic Ulster.<sup>6</sup> However Louis Cullen and more recently Jim Smyth have argued the Defenders must be viewed in a political context. Cullen writes that: 'Political circumstances are the only unifying factor in accounting for what took place across a progressively wider area. If a political theme is taken as the main issue in Armagh, it links the county with a much wider region'.<sup>7</sup> The 'contagion effect' explains the initial spread of the disturbances from its Armagh heartland. The political mobilisation of the early 1790s also provided an impetus to Defender expansion.<sup>8</sup> Two key events are crucial. Firstly the embodiment of the Irish Militia spread Defenderism via sworn soldiers themselves, as well as through discontent with a growing military presence in the country. Secondly the 'Armagh Outrages' of 1795-6, which spread a vengeful population throughout the country particularly Connaught.

The Defenders moved steadily south during the early 1790s. By December 1792 they had appeared in north County Meath. J.G.O. Kerrane points out the importance of the sectarian element in this region where a colony of 'Scots' (i.e. Presbyterians) came under attack. He sees both political developments and economic grievances behind their appearance.<sup>9</sup> The dissemination continued through

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<sup>5</sup>David Miller, 'The Armagh Troubles 1784-95', in S. Clark and J.S. Donnelly Jr. (ed.) *Irish peasants: violence and political unrest 1780-1914* (Manchester, 1983) p.155-91.

<sup>6</sup>M. Elliot, 'The origins and transformation of early Irish republicanism' *International Review of Social History* xxii pt. 3 (1978), p. 411-5; *idem*, 'The Defenders in Ulster' in H. Gough and D. Dickson (eds.), *Ireland and the French Revolution* (Dublin, 1990) p. 222-33

<sup>7</sup>L.M. Cullen, 'The political structures of the Defenders' p. 118; Jim Smyth, *The men of no property* p. 45-51.

<sup>8</sup>see Jim Smyth, *The men of no property* p. 52-78.

<sup>9</sup>J.G.O. Kerrane, 'The background to the 1798 rebellion in Co. Meath' (M.A., U.C.D. 1971) p. 25-37.

1793 as Defender violence was emulated by the establishment, particularly in the form of the Meath Association.

The eruption of Defender violence in Kildare in July 1795 must be viewed in the context of the resurgence which occurred in County Meath in the early summer of 1795. Kerrane has commented on the nature of the fresh disturbances which most strongly affected the south of the county. He argues the motivating factors behind the attacks were economic rather than religious in the less sectarian atmosphere of south Meath. This is articulated in the 'Market Town Document' of June 1795. The notice was posted up in all the market towns of the county and sought to regulate rent, wages, food prices and tithes. Kerrane contends the pamphlet was written by Lawrence O'Connor, 'one of the few men of education to be a Defender'. However if O'Connor was not a unique example of 'middling' class Defender membership there is no real evidence to substantiate this view.<sup>10</sup> The outbreak in Kildare may also be connected with national politics. In the same way that Jim Smyth links political mobilisation and the disturbances of 1792-3, the sudden departure of Fitzwilliam and swift negative reaction in Kildare may have created a climate in which popular hostility to the new government (whose coercive intentions were revealed in Carhampton) was channelled, at a popular level, into the Defenderism, already encroaching on the Kildare border.<sup>11</sup>

Defenderism was first publicly revealed in Kildare on the arrest of Lawrence O'Connor and Micheal Griffin at Kilcock, for attempting to swear Bartholomew Horan of the South Mayo Militia, on 12 July. The court's description of the oath O'Connor had tendered was as follows: '.... to be loyal to all brother

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<sup>10</sup>Printed in Bartlett, 'Defenders and Defenderism' p. 391; Kerrane 'Meath' p. 52-57; see J. Smyth *The men of no property*, p. 115-6.

<sup>11</sup>Deirdre Lindsay believes there was 'some connection' between Fitzwilliam's removal and the upsurge in Defenderism. See D. Lindsay, 'The Fitzwilliam episode revisited' in D. Dickson, D. Keogh and K. Whelan (eds), *The United Irishmen: republicanism, radicalism and reaction* (Dublin, 1993) p. 205.

defenders, and the French, and that they would soon land, and they would have the Kingdom of Ireland to themselves'.<sup>12</sup> O'Connor received much contemporary and later attention being one of the few Defender leaders tried during the period. He was steward and manager to the Rowley family of Summerhill in County Meath, parish clerk and a successful schoolmaster. His eloquent post verdict speech at his trial, in which he expounded the meaning of 'Love, Liberty and Loyalty' is a rare explanation of Defender symbolism by a Defender.<sup>13</sup>

The events of the period between O'Connor and Griffin's arrest and their trial in late August are crucial in understanding the spread of Defenderism into the county. The day after their arrest both men were conducted from Kilcock to Naas jail, along with several other prisoners, under the supervision of Sir Fenton Aylmer (as high sheriff), Wogan Browne, Micheal Aylmer and Thomas Ryan when a rescue attempt was made.<sup>14</sup> According to Richard Nevill a crowd of 'about 600' had gathered in Kilcock and news of the intended rescue had reached the Sheriff. The party arrived at Clane safely. However a number of gentlemen were waylaid and Ryan was shot at twice, the second attempt wounding him.<sup>15</sup> A proclamation issued later stated the 'armed mob' administered 'unlawful oaths to many inhabitants of the

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<sup>12</sup>'Trial of Lawrence O'Connor and Micheal Griffin for High Treason' in *Walker's Hibernian Magazine* 1795 vol ii, (Jul.- Dec.) p. 351. The fullest trial report is contained in this volume, p. 351-5, 425-34.

<sup>13</sup>For biographical details see, Rev. John Brady, 'Lawrence O'Connor: A Meath Schoolmaster' *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* vol. xlix, (Jan.- Jun. 1937) p. 281-7. See below p. 60-1.

<sup>14</sup>An official statement of what occurred can be found in a proclamation issued from a county meeting held at Naas, 24 July 1795. See *F.J.* 28 July 1795. The proclamation is reproduced in Francis Plowden, *An historical view of the state of Ireland* (2 vols., London, 1803), vol. ii appendix no. xcvi, p. 235-239.

<sup>15</sup>Letter of ----- Nevill to 'My Dear Marquis' describing incidents involving Defenders in County Kildare n.d. [mid 1795] (N.L.I. MS 15,060).

said county and did plunder several houses of arms and ammunition, and did publicly declare vengeance against the said....magistrates'.<sup>16</sup>

Nevill importantly stated 'they [i.e. the mob] mostly came from cy [sic] Meath'<sup>17</sup> a claim augmented by the need to administer oaths locally. This seems to indicate the initial burst of violence was not perpetrated by sworn but previously inactive Defender cells in the area, but by fresh recruits backed by south Meath Defenders, possibly from O'Connor's own area around Summerhill. The attempted rescue does signal his influence. Camden reported to Portland that O'Connor '....declared himself to be at the head of the combinations in Meath and that no person of wealth or situation was concerned with Defenderism in that county'. While he was probably not a county leader (if indeed such a post existed) he was obviously important in the south Meath-north Kildare area.<sup>18</sup> He was held at Naas, but transferred to New Prison, Dublin at some point in August.<sup>19</sup>

The Defender threats were serious. On 20 July Lady Louisa Conolly reported to her husband that George and Sarah (her sister) Napier's house in Celbridge had come under attack from 150 Defenders. The leaders demanded arms but a lone housekeeper refused entry and the group left. The attack prompted panic at Castletown. Thomas Conolly was absent and Louisa effectively put the house into a 'state of defence'. She also attempted to urge the Celbridge populace to denounce Defenderism.<sup>20</sup>

O'Connor's reputation was secured not only by his stature locally. The scale of the violence in a previously tranquil county ensured maximum

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<sup>16</sup>*F.J.* 28 Jul. 1795.

<sup>17</sup>Nevill to My Dear Marquis, n.d (N.L.I. MS 15,060).

<sup>18</sup>Bartlett, 'Defenders and Defenderism in 1795' p. 394.

<sup>19</sup>*F.J.* 15 Aug. 1795; Rev. John Brady, 'A rebel schoolmaster' in *Irish Book Lover* vol. xxviii, no. 4 (Feb. 1942) p. 92.

<sup>20</sup>Lady Louisa Conolly to Thomas Conolly, endorsed 20 Jul. 1795 (P.R.O.N.I. Mc Peake Papers T.3048/B/14); Stella Tillyard, *Aristocrats* p. 373-4.

publicity. The violence posed a serious problem for the county establishment. Camden recognised the problem and recounted the events in a letter to Portland.

I should not have thought it necessary to have troubled your grace with this representation of a transaction which does not appear to deserve particular notice, was not the country where it happened so near the capital, had it not taken place in a country which has usually been quiet and had not the ingenuity of detailers of intelligence here magnified this.... into a regular engagement between the military and the people of this country.<sup>21</sup>

The reaction was immediate. A meeting of local magistrates was held at Sallins on 18 July, chaired by the duke of Leinster. It offered a £300 reward for the capture of those involved in the ambush of Ryan and resulted in the calling of a full county meeting in Naas on 24 July.<sup>22</sup> Camden praised the 'proper alarm' and swift action of the Kildare gentry, and enclosed the resolutions of the Sallins meeting in a subsequent letter to Portland.<sup>23</sup>

The Naas meeting issued a lengthy proclamation offering various rewards in a serious attempt to arrest the spread of Defenderism. Not only did it offer rewards for the offences committed around Clane, it also offered '...an ample and adequate reward to any person who shall give any information.... of any meetings of Defenders intended to be held....'<sup>24</sup> The meeting resolved in the strongest terms to unite against Defenderism. A subscription was collected to aid this process and a committee of justices of the peace established to manage the fund. The amount donated increased steadily during August.<sup>25</sup>

Local initiatives were also undertaken in an attempt to prevent the spread of Defenders. In Kilcock an oath was taken by forty three 'principal

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<sup>21</sup>Camden to Portland, 15 Jul. 1795 (P.R.O. HO 100/58/136-7).

<sup>22</sup>*F.J.* 24 Jul. 1795.

<sup>23</sup>Camden to Portland 24 Jul. 1795 (P.R.O. HO 100/58/157-60).

<sup>24</sup>*F.J.* 28 Jul. 1795.

<sup>25</sup>*F.J.* and *D.E.P.* Jul.-Aug. 1795 *passim*.

inhabitants' before the local justice of the peace, John Walsh. They swore to assist the civil powers, and surprisingly, that any oaths they had already taken 'we shall not keep the same'.<sup>26</sup> The tenants of Richard Nevill of Rathmore, east of Naas swore a similar oath on 22 July, accompanied by the Protestant and Roman Catholic clergy of the area.<sup>27</sup> Defenderism continued however to spread throughout the north of the county during August and September. In early August six Defenders were arrested by Sir Fenton Aylmer. The *Freeman's Journal* reported they had formed a 'confederacy' to burn his house. Twenty two Defenders had already been lodged in Naas jail.<sup>28</sup> A few nights later a Defender was shot in Kilcock.<sup>29</sup> A number of Defenders were found guilty at the Athy assizes of various offences, including three executed for the shooting of Ryan.<sup>30</sup> They reputedly repented at their execution stating, 'the sole object of their pursuit was to get about two acres of cheap land and to raise the price of workman's labour'.<sup>31</sup> In late September fourteen more were apprehended in Naas by Carhampton, and six a few nights later.<sup>32</sup>

Rev. John Walsh, vicar at Kilcock, the epicentre of Defenderism in Kildare, emerges from the Rebellion Papers as the most spirited resister of Defenderism in the north of the county. In August he wrote to government, 'to recount all the occurrences which have engaged the attention of the active justices of the peace of Kildare since I had the honour of an interview with you would at

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<sup>26</sup>Oath of the 'principal inhabitants of Kilcock' against Defenderism 21 Jul. 1795 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers, 620/22/18)

<sup>27</sup>*D.E.P.* 25 Jul. 1795, 143 names are listed.

<sup>28</sup>*F.J.* 8 Aug. 1795.

<sup>29</sup>*F.J.* 11 Aug. 1795.

<sup>30</sup>*F.J.* 18 Aug. 1795.

<sup>31</sup>*F.J.* 22 Aug. 1795.

<sup>32</sup>*F.J.* 26 Sept. 1795. The paper reported the six had cut off an old man's ear for refusing to take a Defender oath. A week later, following complaints, it stated the arrests had taken place in the Naas-Blessington area, not Naas itself.

present be more than I could wish to perform'. He indicated serious disaffection among the soldiers stationed at Kilcock.<sup>33</sup> Walsh as landlord and vicar, was of course a particularly potent object of wrath for Defenders. His letters also reveal him as a man determined on ecclesiastical promotion. In a letter addressed to Sackville Hamilton in October he indicates the problems he faced. He had determined to level a commons in his neighbourhood, 'inhabited by a people who have been closely leagued together by combination oaths'. He claims it was from here the life of Ryan had been sought. However he did not receive the full support of unnamed local landowners. The killing of a bullock provided the opportunity to urge the handing up of arms and the threat of levelling. At this point the area became peaceful, and several gentlemen offered to provide compensation if the dwellings were destroyed. Walsh felt this intervention undermined his proposed actions.<sup>34</sup> The determined unity of the Kildare establishment of July 1795, was much more difficult to maintain at ground level, particularly given the inevitable clash between those of heavy handed tendencies such as Walsh, and the numerous liberal landowners of north Kildare.

The trial of Lawrence O'Connor and Micheal Griffin held at Naas on 31 August, following an adjournment from Athy, provides the historian with information on the Defenderism O'Connor and others were disseminating in north Kildare. The evidence presented indicates a number of Defenders had been sworn in Kilcock before O'Connor's arrest.<sup>35</sup> Two oaths were found which revealed a strong connection with hopes of French assistance, as well as an indication of an organised system of Defender committees. It was also shown O'Connor himself was a freemason.<sup>36</sup> The two were not surprisingly found guilty. The most remarkable part of the trial occurred after the verdict. On one of the oaths was written 'Love, Liberty

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<sup>33</sup>John Walsh to ---- 20 Aug. 1795 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers, 620/22/34).

<sup>34</sup>John Walsh, Kilcock to Sackville Hamilton 5 Oct. 1795 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers, 620/22/44).

<sup>35</sup>*Walker's Hibernian Magazine* 1795 vol. ii (Jul.- Dec.) p. 352.

<sup>36</sup>*ibid.*, p. 354, p. 425.

and Loyalty'. O'Connor proceeded (in a frequently quoted passage) to explain the symbolical meaning of the words.

By *love* was to be understood that affection which the rich ought to shew [sic] the poor in their distress and need but which they withheld from them....

*Liberty* meant that liberty which every poor man had a right to use when oppressed by the rich in laying before them and expostulating with them on their sufferings - but the poor man in this country had no such liberty....

*Loyalty* he defined as meaning that union which subsisted at present among the poor - he would die in that loyalty - it meant that the poor who formed the fraternity to which he belonged would stand by each other.<sup>37</sup>

A 'colloquium' then took place between Judge Finucane and O'Connor, in which O'Connor congratulated the judge for letting his lands directly to his tenants.<sup>38</sup>

O'Connor's comments have not failed to draw observation from historians. Lecky noted that: 'There appears to have been nothing in it either of politics or religion'.<sup>39</sup> Dr. Micheal Beames concluded that:

With its emphasis on the obligation of the rich to the poor and its underlying concept of a just social relationship between the classes, O'Connor's speech is much closer to the spirit of the Donaghmore Whiteboys than to the Defenders of Ulster. It may be taken as indicative of how little real impact nationalist and republican sentiments had on the Irish peasantry outside Ulster in this period.<sup>40</sup>

O'Connor's evidence reveals the importance of socio-economic grievances in the spread of Defenderism out of its sectarian heartlands into areas such as south Meath and north Kildare. His aim was not social revolution, but a form

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<sup>37</sup>Walker's *Hibernian Magazine* 1795 vol. ii (Jul.- Dec.) p. 430-1.

<sup>38</sup>*ibid.*, p. 431.

<sup>39</sup>Lecky, *Ireland in the eighteenth century* vol. iii p. 392.

<sup>40</sup>M.R. Beames, 'Peasant movements, Ireland 1785-1795' in *Journal of Peasant Studies* ii no. 4 (1975) p. 506.

of social justice, within which social and economic relationships would be regulated. Thomas Bartlett has argued that O'Connor was articulating the idea of 'moral economy,' which had already disappeared. The contempt for law and order illustrated by the shooting of a Catholic magistrate (Ryan) serves to portray this.<sup>41</sup>

The political subtext is important however. Molyneux, writing in the *Dublin Evening Post* noted '...they [the Defenders] are now sworn, and in the hitherto peaceable county of Kildare, TO BE TRUE TO THE FRENCH'.<sup>42</sup> The conspiratorial element of Defenderism in Kildare cannot be ignored. Marianne Elliot has traced tentative Defender - French links to as early as 1792.<sup>43</sup> O'Connor's complete silence on the subject is revealing in itself. The oath produced in court also had a revolutionary cap of liberty, and the words 'Jacob's ladder,' probably of millenarian import.<sup>44</sup>

Lawrence O'Connor was executed outside Naas jail on 7 September. He was given no opportunity to address the crowd. His head was 'fixed on the top of the jail upon an iron spike seven feet high'.<sup>45</sup> Camden claimed this measure had originated from him and 'am told the whole circumstances of this case had a great effect on the people'.<sup>46</sup> Griffin as a old man was recommended for clemency. He was still in jail in early 1796 awaiting execution scheduled for April of that year.<sup>47</sup> O'Connor's reputation in the martyrology of the 1790s was further established by

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<sup>41</sup>T. Bartlett, 'An end to the moral economy: the anti militia riots of 1793' p. 194-5; Plowden noted the importance of this event, see Plowden *An historical view of the state of Ireland* vol. ii, part 1, p. 537.

<sup>42</sup>*D.E.P.* 28 Jul. 1795.

<sup>43</sup>Elliot, *Partners in revolution* p. 58.

<sup>44</sup>*Walker's Hibernian Magazine*, 1795 vol. ii, (Jul.-Dec.) p. 354.

<sup>45</sup>*ibid.*, p. 433-4.

<sup>46</sup>Camden to Portland, 9 Sept. 1795 (P.R.O. HO 100/58/335-44).

<sup>47</sup>J. Bird, Under Sheriff, Co. Kildare to ---- 27 Mar. 1803 [sic 1796] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/23/54).

the appearance of a poem in 1798 entitled *The martyr of liberty*.<sup>48</sup> The arrest, attempted rescue and trial of Lawrence O'Connor, all of which occurred with maximum publicity, fuelled the encroachment of Defenderism into the county.<sup>49</sup> Once introduced it took firm root in the north of the county.

The key local response to escalating violence was a military one. Dublin Castle used execution and transportation against convicted Defenders in an attempt to quell the situation. The north of the county was saturated with military stations. Following requests for assistance on 18 July, Camden replied to the duke of Leinster on 25 July that troops were to be dispersed around the county; at Kilcock, Hortland, Carbery, Clane, Prosperous, Naas, Celbridge, Maynooth and Leixlip, to add to the existing military presence.<sup>50</sup> The Fermanagh and Sligo militia, under General Craig, were dispatched the next day from Dublin.<sup>51</sup> In late September Camden continued to report Defender disturbances in north east Kildare, and ominously a move into south County Dublin via Leixlip and Celbridge.<sup>52</sup> By October 1795 the initial outbreak of Defenderism, which was confined to the north of the county, died down. The Defender movement in Kildare appears to have simply remained inactive or dormant rather than dissolving.

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<sup>48</sup>*The martyr of liberty, a poem on the heroic death of L. O'Connor, executed at Naas, in Ireland, on a charge of high treason, Sept. 7th 1796.* [sic] *Addressed to all the Irish. By an English brother printed for the United Irishmen. 1798* (Dublin, 1798). A hand-written note on the National Library copy states it may have been composed by Thomas Moore while at college. Brady contended the note was in R.R. Madden's handwriting. See John Brady 'Lawrence O'Connor: A Meath schoolmaster' p. 287. The *Freeman's Journal* reported O'Connor had requested his heart be sent to the Dublin United Irishmen, *F.J.* 5 Sept. 1795.

<sup>49</sup>The press also latched onto O'Connor's case. See *F.J.* 18 Jul., 15 Aug., 17 Aug., 5 Sept., 15 Sept. 1795; *D.E.P.* 19 Sept. 1795.

<sup>50</sup>Fitzgerald (ed.), *The earls of Kildare* second addenda, p. 280.

<sup>51</sup>*F.J.* 25 Jul. 1795; Camden to Portland 29 Jul. 1795 (P.R.O. HO 100/58/171-7).

<sup>52</sup>Camden to Portland 25 Sept. 1795 (P.R.O. HO 100/58/335-44).

In late 1796 convicts on a prison ship at Cobh offered to give information on Defenderism in Kildare. In October they contacted a Cork doctor through John Kenny a fellow convict. He wrote:

They are two Defenders and their names is [sic] Patrick Connor and Edward Byrne. They say that they can make information against thirty men in the County of Kildare for high treason and Defenderism and will from that the leading men come into the informant's houses and gave them powder balls and guns for the purpose of entering gentlemen's houses and say that when they refused to be concerned that they threatened their lives in case of their refusal and informed them that the high sheriff of the county of Kildare (Mr Aylmer) and a Mr Brown[e] were Defenders and if they were not that they should not live in that country.<sup>53</sup>

John Wolfe informed government in December that 'Aylmer' had also received 'repeated application' from the same prisoners. He also named Lawrence Drennan and Micheal Gavacan. He was sceptical but nonetheless advised the information should be pursued.<sup>54</sup> In the same month Rev. John Walsh sent two letters which a neighbouring curate Mr Franson had received from Byrne and Connor, to Thomas Pelham.<sup>55</sup> Walsh seems to have arrested them sometime between late 1795 and early 1796, and states they were committed on 'Hanlon's evidence'. Hanlon was a soldier in the Royal Irish Artillery. An attempt was made on his life on 31 January 1796 in Thomas Street, Dublin, to prevent him giving evidence at Naas assizes.<sup>56</sup> Edward Byrne stated in his letter 'I mean to inform your honours of a

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<sup>53</sup>Robert Harding, Cork to Edward Cooke, 10 Dec. 1796 (N.A.I. S.O.C. 1015/28).

<sup>54</sup>John Wolfe to Edward Cooke, 16 Oct. 1796 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/26/114).

<sup>55</sup>John Walsh to Thomas Pelham 4 Dec. 1796. Enclosed: Edward Byrne and Patrick Connor, Cove of Cork, to Rev Mr Franson, Colgaugh, near Kilcock. (also addressed to Mr Wade and Mr Watson) 14 Nov. 1796 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/26/109 (4))

<sup>56</sup>Eleven men were tried for the crime in early March, *F.J.* 1 Mar., 3 Mar. 1796; Musgrave refers to Hanlon as a magistrate, Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 142

conspiracy which still is in existence against you....' He goes on to list names and reveals a plot to murder Franson. Connor in a separate letter reveals a conspiracy 'to take away the lives of Squire Aylmer, Squire Brown[e]<sup>57</sup> and Squire Ryan and Sir Fenton Aylmer,' (i.e. all those involved in escorting Lawrence O'Connor from Kilcock to Naas). The Defenders in the area seem to have been quite well organised and spreading.

Thomas Hopkins and James Miny were two committee men and swore in a great number of Defenders....and also told us that as soon as the French were landed and should conquer the kingdom that we should have the principal gentlemen's places and that we should be raised out of slavery and misery....<sup>58</sup>

It is unclear what happened to the convicts and their information must be treated carefully given their desperate situation. Their letters do reveal a well organised though locally motivated Defender organisation. The conspiracy targeted local magistrates though no major attacks are reported during the winter of 1795. The *Freeman's Journal* reported an attack on a 'poor man' who lived near Lord Carhampton's demesne at Lutterellstown in February.<sup>59</sup> Other than this no serious incidents seem to have taken place during the first half of 1796. The Insurrection Act, passed in February 1796, was applied to no part of Kildare until May 1797, even then with serious division. John Wolfe reported in December 1796 that: 'The country around here and at Kilcock and its vicinity appears perfectly at rest, so far as Defenderism is concerned, but there have been a great number of highway robberies,

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<sup>57</sup>A copy of the document in John Walsh's hand omits Wogan Browne's name, perhaps a politically motivated oversight. This copy is enclosed with the original, N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/26/109 (4).

<sup>58</sup>Edward Byrne and Patrick Connor, Cove of Cork to Rev Mr Franson, Colgaugh, near Kilcock 14 Nov 1796 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/26/109 (4)). They noted, 'we wrote to Mr Sheriff Aylmer but we had nothing from him.'

<sup>59</sup>*F.J.* 13 Feb. 1796.

and some burglaries lately committed'.<sup>60</sup> J.G.O. Kerrane maintains the beginning of a United Irish - Defender amalgamation can be traced to early 1796 in the south Meath - County Dublin - north Kildare area. In Kildare one figure was particularly influential in the emergence of the United Irish movement, Lord Edward Fitzgerald.

The quixotic and enigmatic figure of Lord Edward played a pivotal role in the growth of the Kildare United Irishmen. His francophile leanings were well established and enshrined in his romantic marriage to Pamela de Genelis, the reputed daughter of duc D'Orleans. His radical reputation was established by outbursts such as that in the house of commons on its anti-volunteer stance in 1793 when he stated: 'I do think that the Lord Lieutenant and the majority of this house are the worst subjects the king has'.<sup>61</sup> Lady Sophia Fitzgerald noted,

....we were pretty sure that had he been expelled [from] the house, the County of Kildare would undoubtedly have chosen him again....I wish he was not quite so warm and violent. It is so impolitic, I think to set out with much violence, for by doing so he may cause more harm than good.<sup>62</sup>

In June 1794, the Edward and Pamela moved into Thomas Conolly's house, Kildare Lodge in Kildare town.<sup>63</sup> During 1795 while riding on the Curragh with Arthur O'Connor, he became involved in an argument with a party of military concerning the provocative green tie he was wearing.<sup>64</sup>

Thomas Moore states Fitzgerald joined the United Irishmen in early 1796.<sup>65</sup> While this is not impossible, it is unlikely. L.M. Cullen has argued T.A. Emmet and W.J. MacNeven played an important role in the growth of a secret

<sup>60</sup>John Wolfe to Edward Cooke 27 Dec. 1795 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/22/57).

<sup>61</sup>McDermott (ed.), *The memoirs of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* p. 162-5

<sup>62</sup>Gerard Campbell, *Pamela and Edward Fitzgerald* p. 82.

<sup>63</sup>Lena Boylan has identified the house on a contemporary map, see L. Boylan, 'Kildare Lodge, Lord Edward Fitzgerald's house' in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* xvi no.1 (1977-8) p. 26-34.

<sup>64</sup>McDermott (ed), *The memoirs of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* p. 202-4

<sup>65</sup>*ibid.*, p. 204.

organisation during 1795-6 in Dublin, contrary to their 1798 statement to government. They denied membership of the 'second phase' of the United Irishmen before 'September or October 1796'<sup>66</sup> It is more plausible that Fitzgerald and O'Connor joined the Leinster movement in the Autumn of 1796, after internal wrangles over the form and control of the group had ceased. Fitzgerald and O'Connor had undertaken a mission to France via Hamburg in May 1796. O'Connor met with Lazare Hoche while Fitzgerald was prudently advised not to enter France due to his Orleanist connections.

Fitzgerald's interaction with local communities in Kildare is crucial. In 1796 James Alexander's sister informed him '...that about the year 1796 his lordship resided in Kildare, danced among the rustics at bonfires and in short conducted himself with such condescension, freedom and affability that, like Absalom of old, he stole away the hearts of the people'.<sup>67</sup> His activities were undoubtedly part of the creation of a revolutionary United Irish movement in Kildare. The earlier phase of the United Irish movement had no Kildare branches and few Kildare members. This is largely explained by the presence of a large and powerful liberal group in the county. Three early members with Kildare connections are noteworthy. Archibald Hamilton Rowan fled the country in 1794. John Esmonde, a native of Gorey, County Wexford, was a prominent Catholic activist in Kildare as illustrated in chapter two. 'John Lube Esq. Co. Kildare' was a brother of George Lube (often spelled Looby) a rebel leader in 1798. John Lube's house in Tours became a rendezvous Irish exiles in the early nineteenth century.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>L.M. Cullen, 'The internal politics of the United Irishmen' p. 188-192; T.A. Emmet, W.J. MacNeven and A. O'Connor, *Memoire or detailed statement of the origins and progress of the Irish union* (London, 1802)p. 9.

<sup>67</sup>James Alexander, *Some account* (1800) p. 22.

<sup>68</sup>R.B. McDowell, 'The personnel of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen' in *I.H.S.* ii (1940) p. 46, 33, 39; N.A.I. Prisoners Petitions and Cases 482, Memorial of George Lube to Lord Lieutenant, 16 May 1800. The petition is included in a letter from John Lube, Summerhill (George's brother) to

The initial United Irish focus of its organisation building in Kildare was the established Defender movement of the north. The nature of the 'alliance' is described by Marianne Elliot as follows:

The United Irish society imposed its more efficient hierarchical structure on the Defenders and temporarily harnessed their numerical superiority to its programme of secular republicanism in which social and religious, but not necessarily political and economic equality predominated. But the rank and file Defenders did not want equality; rather they sought political and economic superiority to which they felt their numbers and historic claims entitled them.<sup>69</sup>

The reappearance of Defender disturbances may have taken place at the instigation of United Irish activists, working in Kildare. Serious disorder emerged during the late summer - early autumn of 1796. As early as June John Walsh was shot at while searching for stolen sheep. He reported a riot involving the Carlow and South Mayo militia. 'This unfortunate business,' he wrote, 'has brought to light a deep laid scheme to alienate the mind of the soldiers from their duty.'<sup>70</sup> In August Fenton Aylmer reported Defender activity in the Meath/Kildare/King's County area.<sup>71</sup> The Defender association spread slowly south during this renewed outburst. Lord Aldborough was seriously worried by the presence of three notorious 'Defenders' or 'Regulators' near Belan.

They ....frequent each fair market and ale house threatening to knock the brains of every Protestant and to regulate the price of labour....of land and

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Edward Cooke 16 May 1800. Miles Byrne, *The memoirs of Miles Byrne, edited by his widow* (1863, Shannon, 1972) p. 275.

<sup>69</sup>M. Elliot, 'The origins and transformation of early Irish republicanism' *International Review of Social History* xxii pt. 3 (1978) p. 421.

<sup>70</sup>John Walsh, Kilcock to Edward Cooke, 27 Jun. 1796 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers, 620/23/196).

<sup>71</sup>Sir Fenton Aylmer, Donadea to --- 28 Aug 1796 (N.A.I. S.O.C. 1015/23).

value of provisions....if left here they will poison the minds of the ignorant there about this neighbourhood.

His solution was the press gang.<sup>72</sup> This was an isolated incident though it does demonstrate the ability of Defenderism to spread quickly, if somewhat erratically. Camden reported the reactivation of Defenderism to Portland in August. Meetings, he stated, had recommenced 'within these two months,' in Kildare, Dublin and Meath. A national meeting of United Irishmen and Defenders was to be convened to draw up a 'general plan'.<sup>73</sup>

In Kildare the impetus towards United Irish - Defender alliance had both northern and Dublin roots. James Hope, the Templepatrick radical, visited Kildare on a number of occasions during 1796 and 1797. In his memoir he writes,

A secret delegation was resolved on [from Ulster in 1796] and I was one of two persons who were appointed to proceed there to disseminate our views among the working classes. We succeeded in our wishes and likewise formed connections with Meath and Kildare which soon extended to the other counties.<sup>74</sup>

His lengthy treks around the country must be viewed in this context. He made one trip from Dublin specifically to Prosperous in 1796.<sup>75</sup> According to Thomas Addis Emmet the Ulster United Irishmen played a key role in forging links with the Defenders of Kildare, Meath and Dublin.<sup>76</sup>

Lord Edward Fitzgerald also had extensive northern links and stayed in Belfast with O'Connor in November 1796. A paper seized by a Lieutenant Ellison confirms the northern involvement. A United Irish provincial committee had been formed in Leinster and Dublin itself was organising well. Kildare had petitioned to

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<sup>72</sup>Lord Aldborough to Edward Cooke, 9 August 1796 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers, 620/24/97).

<sup>73</sup>Camden to Portland 6 Aug. 1796 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers, 620/18/11/1).

<sup>74</sup>'Autobiographical memoir of James Hope' in Madden, *United Irishmen* 3rd series, vol. i p. 238-9.

<sup>75</sup>*ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>76</sup>MacNeven, *Pieces of Irish history* p. 119-20.

Ulster for support. It also stated, '[Dublin] will pay as soon as possible for the forwarding of the business in the upper part of the County of Meath and Kildare; Dr. C. Q. takes from Newry fifteen constitutions to the County Kildare, and promised to distribute them there with much attention'.<sup>77</sup> The Newry connection is further illustrated by eleven Kildare subscribers to John Corry's *Odes and elegies* published in the town in 1797. These included Lord Edward Fitzgerald and George Cuming [sic - Cummins].<sup>78</sup> A paper seized in early November stated that Meath, Westmeath, Kildare and Dublin had 16,000 United Irishmen.<sup>79</sup>

The arrest of a number of prominent Ulster radicals including Thomas Russell and Samuel Neilson, in September 1796 caused some panic in Leinster. Boyle reported in October that: 'The Defenders in Co. Dublin, Meath, Kildare and Westmeath are very quiet since the taking up [of] the Belfast men - the magistrates and associations in the above counties are very attentive'.<sup>80</sup> A further event militated to some extent against the continuing United Irish - Defender co-operation in Leinster; the formation of the Irish Yeomanry. The idea for such a body had been floated from late summer. Col. Keatinge's *On the defence of Ireland* published anonymously in 1795, had urged the formation of a Yeomanry led by men of 'liberal principle' with rank and file composed of peasantry.<sup>81</sup>

While Keatinge's ideas proved too radical for government, they sanctioned the formation of a Yeomanry in the early winter of 1796. Fenton Aylmer

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<sup>77</sup>*The report from the secret committee of the house of commons with an appendix* (Dublin, 1798) p. 57-8.

<sup>78</sup>John Corry, *Odes and elegies, descriptive and sentimental with the patriot a poem; by John Corry* (Newry, 1797).

<sup>79</sup>*The report from the secret committee of the house of commons with an appendix* p. 80-1.

<sup>80</sup>Information of B, Oct. 1796, (i.e. Thomas Boyle of Drumcondra) (N.A.I. Reb. Papers, 620/18/3).

<sup>81</sup>[M.B.St.L. Keatinge], *On the defence of Ireland* (Dublin, 1795) p. 35-6. William Drennan noted government's anger at the publication, see *Drennan letters* (Belfast, 1931) p. 230, 276

had offered to form a corps in August.<sup>82</sup> Keatinge and Lord Aldborough made similar approaches in September.<sup>83</sup> The government's initiative was quickly taken up in Kildare. The *Dublin Evening Post* reported six companies had been formed by early October.<sup>84</sup> A number of meetings were held under the duke of Leinster in the baronies of North Salt, Ikeathy and Western Narragh and Rheban and Kilkea and Moone to form corps.<sup>85</sup> The Kildare corps were not the Protestant/loyalist rallying point of other counties. A meeting held to elect officers to an Athy force under the command of the duke of Leinster resulted in conflict between liberal figures, particularly Thomas Fitzgerald and conservatives.<sup>86</sup> An early 1797 list contains fifteen units in the county. Eight units had officers who had been involved in Catholic and/or liberal politics earlier in the decade.<sup>87</sup> The loyalist - liberal wrangle for control at a local level is further illustrated by the quarrel between Richard Griffith and Henry Stamer of Prosperous, ostensibly concerning the raising of corps.

In October the Clane cavalry had been granted commission with Griffith as Captain and John Esmonde his First Lieutenant. The disagreement with Stamer can be traced to the same month. Griffith had written to John Wolfe recommending the duke of Leinster as Commander of the yeoman cavalry in County Kildare, he added:

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<sup>82</sup>Sir Fenton Aylmer to ---- 26 Aug 1796 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/24/158).

<sup>83</sup>Maurice Keatinge to ---- 6 Sept. 1796, Lord Aldborough to Edward Cooke 19 Sept. 1796 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/25/133).

<sup>84</sup>*D.E.P.* 13 Oct. 1796.

<sup>85</sup>*D.E.P.* 6 Oct., 15 Oct., 5 Nov. 1796.

<sup>86</sup>Two letters, Thomas Fitzgerald to Duke of Leinster n.d. [late 1796] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/42/18 Thomas Fitzgerald Papers 1798 ).

<sup>87</sup>*A list of the officers of the several district corps of Ireland together with the date of their respective commissions and an alphabetical index, Dublin Castle, 26th Jan 1797* (Dublin, 1797); Oliver Snoddy, 'The Volunteers, Militia, Yeomanry and Orangemen of Co. Kildare in the 18th century' in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* xv (1971-76) p. 46-48.

What have you done with Mr Stammers? His real object is to be a man of consequence and to raise an independent corps of 'unwashed artificers' in Prosperous. He could muster about ten or twelve to serve on foot. There are but five horsemen in the town and they swear they will not go out of the barony.<sup>88</sup>

Griffith's argument was based on social prestige and practicality, but Wolfe did not fail to side with the loyalist Stamer against Griffith, a prominent liberal. Writing to Cooke in January 1797 he stated that:

'Great exertions have been made (as Mr Stamer tells me) by Griffith and Esmonde (who's Griffith's Lieutenant) to get the people of Prosperous, who are all Stamer's tenants, to quit their landlord and to join them - the people are disposed to stand by Stamer - but it is a matter of struggle and nothing would so completely run Stamer down as government countenancing the efforts against him.<sup>89</sup>

In a further letter dated the same day (perhaps mistakenly), Wolfe informed government of his own decision not to raise a corps in the area. Stamer had decided to reside in Prosperous, 'on account of the alarming situation of affairs.....to give effect to the loyalty and spirit of the inhabitants of Prosperous....' He intended to raise an infantry corps in the town.<sup>90</sup> The incident not only illustrates the increasing local divisions, particularly at the beginning of an election year, but the importance of John Wolfe as a local power broker.

The *Memoire of the state prisoners* asserts the military organisation of the United Irishmen was not formed until November or December 1796.<sup>91</sup> Recent research suggests the military aspect of the United Irishmen was in existence, to

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<sup>88</sup>Richard Griffith, Millicent to John Wolfe 13 Oct. 1796 (N.L.I. Wolfe papers).

<sup>89</sup>John Wolfe, Forenaughts, to Edward Cooke 5 Jan. 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/28/44)

<sup>90</sup>John Wolfe to Edward Cooke 5 Jan. 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/28/51); L.M. Cullen comments on the episode in 'Politics and rebellion: Wicklow in the 1790s' p. 441-2.

<sup>91</sup>Emmet *et al*, *Memoire or detailed statement of the origins and progress of the Irish union* p. 11.

some degree, as early as 1792. The links forged with Defenderism during the latter half of 1796 undoubtedly involved the formation of armed societies. The failed Bantry Bay expedition seems to have inspired the nascent United Irish groups in north Kildare and provoked interest elsewhere. Troops had been stationed from 1794 and cordial relations had existed with the local inhabitants. The invasion scare of late 1796 caused a flurry of military manoeuvres, and Mary Leadbeater noted, 'We were relieved from the present apprehension of invasion, but it caused a ferment in the minds of the people'.<sup>92</sup>

From December 1796 to January 1797 reports of radical political activity in Kildare increased as the United Irishmen spread, initially in the north Kildare region which had been the Defender heartland. Gradually reports arrived in Dublin from further south. In December Wolfe asked Cooke to send him a description of Keenan '...whom you mentioned as recruiting for the rebels at Sallins'.<sup>93</sup> On 3 January, in a letter to John Beresford he noted the appearance of Defenderism 'in this neighbourhood,' (i.e. outside Naas), and an attempt to administer oaths. He also states his intention of 'going on a patrol [sic] to prevent any nocturnal meetings'.<sup>94</sup> Two days later he reported 'Defender activity' at Kilcock, and a failed attempt six to eight weeks previously to 'administer oaths' in Kilcullen. Perhaps on the strength of this fact, he concluded, 'I have every reason at present to believe the people in general of this country - quiet, loyal and contented'.<sup>95</sup> Later in the same month John Walsh wrote a despairing and wearied letter to Thomas Pelham, requesting a transfer, '....beyond the horizon of those places where my exertions have rendered me odious to a vile democracy....' He hinted strongly at the inactivity of the neighbouring magistrates, stating his move

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<sup>92</sup>Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater papers* vol. i p. 207.

<sup>93</sup>John Wolfe to Edward Cooke 10 Dec. 1796 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/26/114).

<sup>94</sup>John Wolfe to John Beresford 3 Jan. 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/28/27).

<sup>95</sup>John Wolfe to Edward Cooke 5 Jan. 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/28/44).

would encourage others to ‘....stem the torrent of corruption which threatens to deluge this ill fated country’.<sup>96</sup>

The repeated reports of attempts to administer oaths as far south as Kilcullen are a reflection of the United Irish extension in Kildare. In late February the Meath loyalist Rev Thomas Knipe reported disturbances in the Clonard area involving the ‘French Militia’. They made ‘one dreadful distinction,’ according to Knipe, ‘while they robbed papists, they robbed and endeavoured to murder Protestants’.<sup>97</sup> The recruitment drive was carried on both by local zealots and wandering emissaries. In late May a warrant was issued for the arrest of James Murphy for administering illegal oaths. A witness stated he had been active in Maynooth, Lucan, Leixlip, Kilcock, Dunboyne and Westmeath.<sup>98</sup>

At what point the Defender groups of north Kildare became part of the United Irish system is unclear. Information received from the informant Nicholas Maguan, put the Kildare United Irishmen at 850 on 4 April 1797. He noted however ‘The number in the business is immense, though unacquainted with the system or organisation’.<sup>99</sup> This is probably a reference to undigested Defender cells. A return dated 25 April, puts the Kildare total at a credible 3,452. (The Leinster total was 16, 198 including Louth).<sup>100</sup> This would suggest the Defenders of north Kildare were affiliated to the united system by April 1797 though the spread south had yet to start in earnest. Thomas Boyle reported in the same month that: ‘All the people of the counties of Dublin, Meath and Kildare are now raised again and become as wicked as ever’.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>John Walsh, Kilcock to Thomas Pelham 25 Jan. 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/28/145).

<sup>97</sup>Rev Thomas F. Knipe to Thomas Pelham 23 Feb. 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/28/292).

<sup>98</sup>Warrant of Thomas Conolly for the arrest of James Murphy for administering illegal oaths 29 May 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/30/228).

<sup>99</sup>*The report from the secret committee of the house of commons with an appendix* p. 133.

<sup>100</sup>E. Boyle to Edward Cooke 12 May 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 6220/30/61).

<sup>101</sup>Information of B, April 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/18/3).

As noted even by late April few signs of radical activity are evident further south than Naas or Kilcullen. The growth of a United Irish organisation in north Kildare gave the county group a momentum of its own, particularly given the weakening position of the Ulster movement in 1797, aided by key radical figures further south. Lord Edward Fitzgerald remained crucial. Lady Lucy Fitzgerald, Edward's younger sister noted the frequent presence of the Kildare apothecary George Cummins at Kildare Lodge in late 1796. Cummins close association with Lord Edward suggests the creation of a countywide organisation dates to this period. This information is extracted from 'Lady Lucy's Journal'. She had travelled from England supposedly to visit Carton and Castletown, but spent much of her time at Kildare Lodge. Her political sympathies were certainly radical, however her love for Arthur O'Connor was a further incentive to her ardent patriotism.<sup>102</sup>

By late April 1797 the deteriorating situation in Carbery Barony had led to a move to proclaim it under the terms of the 1796 Insurrection Act. John Tyrell of Clonard informed Pelham of this course of action on the 26 April.<sup>103</sup> This attempt was made over the head of the duke of Leinster who had remained relatively quiet during the period 1795-96. However the military solution was viewed as a direct challenge to his authority and a threat to the liberal party generally who were to vigorously oppose the measure. In doing so the county establishment was seriously divided, the ensuing public loyalist - liberal debate fuelled radical politics and the spread of the militarised United Irishmen throughout Kildare.

The Defenders in Kildare are important because they provided the United Irishmen with a pool of organised radicals when the movement began to organise nationally. However the Defenders are also significant in their own right. O'Connor's arrest and subsequent events provided an immediate 'reason' for Defenderism in north Kildare. Its primary targets were the landlords of the north of

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<sup>102</sup>Gerard Campbell, *Pamela and Edward Fitzgerald* p. 111-2.

<sup>103</sup>John Tyrell to Thomas Pelham 26 April 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/29/315). A copy reply states government's intention to proclaim.

the county, in a sense a physical articulation of the socio economic code expressed by O'Connor. The movement was quite well organised though not on the same scale as the hierarchical United Irish structures. Defenderism provided a serious challenge to the liberal county establishment. The military response only served to fuel Defender resentment. By winter 1795-6, as the immediacy of the events of July - August 1795 waned, so did Defender activity. It was the possibility of United Irish links that reactivated the movement in the second half of 1796. By early 1797 a solid United Irish structure was established in north Kildare.

## Chapter Four

### Liberal failure, the Kildare United Irishmen and conservative response May 1797 - May 1798

May 1797 was a crucial month for all sections of Kildare's political spectrum. The proclamation of Carbery barony and failure of a county meeting encouraged loyalists and simultaneously rendered the liberal position obsolete. The events revealed, publicly, deep establishment divisions. These divisions were manifested to a lesser degree over smaller scale issues during the preceding years but they were now linked to countywide problems. Liberals were concerned at the spectre of military disarming in Ulster, while conservatives viewed the mounting level of violence as part of a political conspiracy. Public debate and disaffection were fuelled. The United Irishmen subsequently spread rapidly into southern Kildare.

Carbery barony was one of the most disturbed baronies in the county. Two organised attacks close to the Meath border were particularly serious. On 30 April three hundred armed men attacked the house of the prominent loyalist Rev. George Knipe at Castle Rickard. Twelve or thirteen men entered the house and Knipe was shot dead.<sup>1</sup> Captain Fearnought, alias John Tuite, was captured in May 1797 and convicted of the murder in Trim in 1799.<sup>2</sup> The evidence of John Coghlan, one of the gang, stated Tuite was a United Irish leader, though as the alias suggests he had earlier been a Defender. Knipe's murder was organised and carried out because 'it had been published in the committee' that he was an Orange leader, and

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<sup>1</sup>*F.J.* 2 May 1797

<sup>2</sup>T.B and T.J. Howell, *A complete collection of state trials* (33 vols., London, 1809-28) vol. xxvii p. 1127-1134. For T.F. Knipe's Orange associations see below p. 117; *F.J.* 11 May 1797.

with his brother Thomas Fredrick planned 'to bring 100,000 men from the north and that the two Knipe's would destroy Ireland'.<sup>3</sup>

A similarly large party of two hundred and fifty attacked the house of Stephen Sparks at Castle Carbery on 7 May in an engagement more akin to the events of 1798. The rebel group seems to have been led by one James Dunn a carpenter from Clonkeen. A letter published in the *Freeman's Journal* named him as a rebel Lieutenant - General.<sup>4</sup> Stephen Hyland a blacksmith who took part in the attack later identified two canal keepers, two farmers, a miller, a shoe maker, Lord Harberton's gate keeper, a shepherd and 'a great many more'. Eight men were arrested on his evidence.<sup>5</sup> Sparks himself recounted the events in a letter to Pelham, 'having seen various accounts in the publick [sic] papers of the late attack on me by the Defenders, not one of which is correct'. The rebels had gathered on a nearby hill in the evening and about ten o'clock formed into fifteen companies, '...they began to exercise and manoeuvre, marching and wheeling with great appearance of regularity'. Sparks stated he had feared such an attack given the disturbed nature of the neighbourhood and his position as a yeoman sergeant. At midnight an attack commenced which lasted over an hour. The assailants retreated on the arrival of the Wicklow Militia under Captain Hempenstall, from Edenderry. At least six rebels were killed and one militia man mistakenly shot by the beleaguered loyalists in the house.<sup>6</sup> Both attacks underlined the vulnerability of loyalists and the organisation of

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<sup>3</sup>T.B and T.J. Howell, *A complete collection of state trials* vol. xxvii p. 1129-30.

<sup>4</sup>Extract of a letter from Edenderry dated 7 May in *F.J.* 11 May 1797, possibly the work of William Lambert.

<sup>5</sup>William Lambert to ---- Edenderry 10 May 1797. Enclosed: Examination of Stephen Hyland of New Chapel in the County Kildare, 10 May 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/30/47). William Kennedy was tried for his part in the attack in August. It was claimed Hyland's evidence had been extracted by force, see below p. 95.

<sup>6</sup>Stephen Sparks, Castle Carbery to Thomas Pelham 14 May 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/30/66).

the United Irishmen in these localities. The attacks were characterised by both preparation and cohesion.

The 1796 Insurrection Act empowered two or more justices of the peace to summon a meeting of justices of the peace at which those assembled could petition the Lord Lieutenant to have all or part of a county 'proclaimed'. The proclaimed area would effectively be under martial law, anything construed as disorder was to be dealt with severely.<sup>7</sup> John Tyrrell notified government of his intention to convene a meeting to discuss the situation in Carbery barony in late April. This was held on 8 May at Naas. Those in favour of proclamation outnumbered the liberals by almost two to one. This marked a serious decline in the duke of Leinster's control in Kildare. The following list of those present evidences the political divisions at the meeting:

In favour of proclamation:

earl of Mayo

Viscount Allen

Fenton Aylmer

John Wolfe

John LaTouche

Richard Nevill

Richard Griffith

Theobald Wolfe

John Tyrrell

Charles Palmer

John Montgomery

Thomas Tyrrell

James Carlisle

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Against:

duke of Leinster, chairman

Thomas Wogan Browne, teller

W.B. Ponsonby

M.B.St.L. Keatinge

Rev. Dean Cadogen Keatinge

John Taylor

Thomas Fitzgerald

James Archibald

Richard Dease

Thomas Ryan

Dom. Wm. O'Reilly

William Donnellan

<sup>7</sup>36 Geo. III c.20 An act to more effectively suppress insurrections and prevent the disturbance of the publick peace.

John Greene

John Johnson Darragh

Thomas Fredrick Knipe

Thomas Kelly

Micheal Aylmer

Edward Hendrick

William Patrickson

Garret Tyrrell <sup>8</sup>

The division is slightly deceptive, particularly in the case of Sir Fenton Aylmer. A letter to the castle written on the day of the meeting clearly demonstrates his opposition to the measure. He recounted the rising number of rebel attacks in search of arms: 'Instances of this sort are becoming every day more and more serious...there are few nights the villains are not out and few nights we [presumably his Yeomanry unit] are not out...notwithstanding they avoid all our vigilance....' He recognised the need for action but declared his opposition to proclamation despite signing the memorial: 'I preferred it to suffering a continuation of the system of murder and assassination and robbery both of arms and money that pervaded confident am I that there are other means that would be more likely to keep down the flames'.<sup>9</sup>

Wogan Browne expressed similar sentiments in a letter dated the next day. Indeed L.M. Cullen has argued the letters of Aylmer and Wogan Browne present a 'concerted protest'.<sup>10</sup> Wogan Browne restated many had voted for

<sup>8</sup>List of justices of the peace assembled at Naas May 8 1797 who signed the memorial for proclaiming the Barony of Carbery (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers). The list has thirty three names, while Wogan Browne stated in a letter to Pelham that thirty five magistrates had been present (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/30/46 Wogan Browne to Thomas Pelham 9 May 1797). The list contains the names of the twenty one memorialists, perhaps Wolfe omitted abstentions.

<sup>9</sup>Sir Fenton Aylmer to ---- 8 May 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/30/38). He seems to suggest the meeting took place on 7 May.

<sup>10</sup>L.M. Cullen, 'Politics and rebellion: Wicklow in the 1790s' p. 443.

proclamation in the absence of a constructive alternative. However he was firmly opposed to proclamation which he feared would incite further violence.

....it appears to me that the wound lies very deep and that means of conciliation as well as repression are necessary to heal it and that I fear, such a measure in such a place will by the publick [sic] be considered less a social regulation extended for the purpose of quieting this county than a political expedient used to prepare Leinster as Ulster has been for proscription and execution.<sup>11</sup>

Further attacks were perpetrated in the Clonard area later in the month. One 'insurgent' was killed as he attempted to escape a militia party. 'His body was hung up as an example, in a place where he had been heard to say he would plant the tree of liberty'.<sup>12</sup> The attacks and violent counter measures, accompanied by the forthcoming proclamation of the area produced hysteria in some quarters. Rev. George Armstrong of Rosscarbery reported rumours of a massacre to take place between 20 and 24 May. 'This matter,' he wrote, 'happening at this particular time when disaffection and sedition are bursting out in so many places, cannot but give us some uneasiness'. The covering letter written by Sir John Freke, was more sober. He believed the report to be 'exaggerated'.<sup>13</sup>

Plans for the convening of a county meeting seem to have materialised towards the end of April 1797 around the same time plans to proclaim Carbery were first floated. For liberals the answer to the desperate situation in Ulster and the worsening condition of Leinster was conciliation - based on the major plank of their programme: parliamentary reform. The duke of Leinster informed Camden

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<sup>11</sup>Wogan Browne to Thomas Pelham 9 May 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/30/46).

<sup>12</sup>*F.J.* 20, 23 May 1797.

<sup>13</sup>Sir John Freke, Donadea Castle to ---- 24 May 1797. Enclosed: Rev George Armstrong, Rosscarbery to ---- n.d (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/30/168).

he would support renewed liberal activity in Kildare in April.<sup>14</sup> The *Dublin Evening Post* reported on 2 May this action had cost the duke his position as clerk of the Hanaper and his command of the Kildare militia.<sup>15</sup> The proposed meeting mimicked similar Whig efforts in other counties, however the Kildare meeting was to be convened on the widest base possible - i.e. inhabitants. This possibly reflects the democratic leanings of organisers such as Wogan Browne. The *Freeman's Journal* attacked the idea on the grounds that it was the 'heterogeneous offspring of a turbulent and ambitious party'.<sup>16</sup> A requisition was presented to Robert LaTouche the high sheriff, signed by, among others, the duke of Leinster and Lord Cloncurry. The meeting intended to discuss the propriety of petitioning the king for the dismissal of his Irish ministers.<sup>17</sup>

LaTouche refused to convene the proposed gathering on the strength of a counter requisition signed by sixty four prominent conservatives. These included a number of peers: Drogheda, Aldborough, Carhampton, Mayo, Leitrim, Allen, Harberton and Oxmanston. They argued 'a meeting at this time would be highly injurious to the peace and tranquillity of the county'.<sup>18</sup> Richard Griffith recognised the importance of this move. He had changed allegiance from the Leinster camp in late 1796. For example he resigned his Whig club membership in November of that year. However he also realised the weakness of the loyalist position: 'You tell me of the great lords etc. etc. who have signed it,' he wrote to

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<sup>14</sup>(copy of) duke of Leinster to Camden 25 April 1797 (P.R.O. HO 100/69/238-9); Fitzgerald (ed.), *The earls of Kildare* second addenda p. 291. This work dates the letter 26 April.

<sup>15</sup>*D.E.P.* 2 May 1797.

<sup>16</sup>*F. J.* 1 Jun. 1797.

<sup>17</sup>*D.E.P.* 13 May 1797.

<sup>18</sup>*D.E.P.* 23 May 1797.

John Wolfe, 'I should rather see the names of a score of good substantial farmers, and some Roman Catholics'.<sup>19</sup>

An attempt to circumvent the rebuff was made by the liberals by convening the meeting through the county governor - the duke of Leinster. A meeting was planned for 15 May in the Eagle in Eustace Street, Dublin but no information is available on its proceedings. The Kildare liberals released a statement dated 26 May. A county meeting was arranged for 29 May at Naas. This notification was followed by a long list of names occupying almost a whole page in the *Dublin Evening Post*.<sup>20</sup> The same statement having made its point, cancelled the proposed assembly. Lawless and Wogan Browne were personally informed by Pelham that the danger of such a meeting was apparent to government and suitable military force would be used to prevent it.<sup>21</sup> A proclamation dated 17 May banned unusually large gatherings of people primarily in a clamp down on the United Irishmen. This machinery was applied against the Kildare liberals. A military force, under the command of Arthur O'Connor's brother was despatched to Naas by an apprehensive Dublin Castle.<sup>22</sup> Valentine Lawless' biographer, W.J. Fitzpatrick stated:

Government resolving to stifle this expression of public opinion, despatched a large force under the command of Major John O'Connor, to the seat of the danger in Kildare. O'Connor vowed direful vengeance on the rebellious town, and declared that the simple fact of two county Kildare puppy dogs engaging in personal conflict on the day of the projected

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<sup>19</sup>James Gordon, *History of the rebellion in Ireland in the year 1798* (Dublin, 1801) p. 251; R. Griffith to John Wolfe 5 May 1797 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>20</sup>*D.E.P.* 27 May 1797.

<sup>21</sup>Thomas Pelham to Wogan Browne and Hon. V.B. Lawless, Dublin Castle 25 May 1797 in W.J. Fitzpatrick, *The life, times and contemporaries of Lord Cloncurry* p. 132; Cloncurry, *Personal recollections* p. 52-3.

<sup>22</sup>*F.J.* 20 May 1797.

meeting, would be the signal for him to make an instantaneous hash of the populace and conspirators.<sup>23</sup>

On 28 May Richard Nevill informed government that Wogan Browne had been distributing handbills in his area. The handbills dated 26 May simply encouraged the Kildare populace not to meet at Naas but to sign a petition which would be circulated. Nevill menacingly stated that anyone entering Rathmore with such a petition would be 'detained....and I shall know how to deal with him'.<sup>24</sup> Wogan Browne also enclosed the handbill in a letter to Pelham the following day. He explained he had attempted to ensure the meeting did not take place. He argued the meeting could not have been banned on the grounds that the county was proclaimed since the requisition was signed on the 4 May [before the petition for proclamation was submitted]. Neither could it be banned because it was 'unusually dangerous' - similar sized meetings had taken place in Westmeath and Southhampton (he enclosed three newspaper cuttings in support). He concluded:

....that this county was prevented from meeting lest we should petition his majesty for the dismissal of ministers....But steady to our purpose we will not thus be deterred sir, from an attempt to convey our opinion to his majesty.<sup>25</sup>

In place of a meeting a petition was circulated throughout the county from late May. It was a firm declaration of the Whig position in the country. A number of copies printed on broadsheets survive in the Rebellion Papers. Charles Hamilton Teeling reprinted the document in 1832.<sup>26</sup> The petition was a populist strategy and

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<sup>23</sup>W.J. Fitzpatrick, *The life, times and contemporaries of Lord Cloncurry* p. 132; Valentine Lord Cloncurry, *Personal recollections* p. 52.

<sup>24</sup>Richard Nevill to ---- 28 May 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/30/221). The enclosed handbill was a shorter version of the liberal press statement also dated 26 May, see *D.E.P.* 27 May 1797.

<sup>25</sup>Wogan Browne to Thomas Pelham 29 May 1797. Enclosed: one handbill and three newspaper cuttings (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/30/237).

<sup>26</sup>'To the kings most excellent majesty. The humble petition of the governor, magistrates, freeholders and inhabitants of the county of Kildare' (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/53/35 one copy, 620/54/41 five

was circulated and posted up around the county. Stephen Sparks found one posted to Carbery church door. 'I am sure it is not what it proposes,' he wrote, 'the petition of the magistrates and freeholders of this county and I think put up merely to encourage that feeling of disaffection carried on in the lower order of people in this county'.<sup>27</sup> The author, claimed Leonard McNally, was Wogan Browne. One thousand copies were to be printed and distributed by John Chambers of Abbey Street.<sup>28</sup> Valentine Lawless claimed the petition was prepared by Wogan Browne, Patrick Latten and himself. He noted it was signed by 'several hundreds of the first men of that county,' while Teeling claimed it eventually bore six thousand signatures.<sup>29</sup> It was finally presented to the King at St. James by Lord Henry Fitzgerald in October.<sup>30</sup> An article appeared in the *Freeman's Journal* at the same time arguing the petition was a 'gross misrepresentation' of the actions of ministers and an attempt to 'to irritate and deform the placidity of the human mind'.<sup>31</sup> The liberal attempt to harness the weight of public opinion behind their cause was seriously damaged by the lack of a meeting. They would find it increasingly difficult to hold the middle ground in Kildare, which was viewed as suspicious by worried conservatives.

The duke of Leinster's support for the liberal campaign cost him not only his minor administration place, but also his seat on the privy council and his command of the Kildare Militia. All three were the subjects of an extensive correspondence between the duke and Camden during April and May 1797. Many of

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copies); C.H. Teeling, *History of the Irish rebellion of 1798 and sequel to the history of the Irish rebellion of 1798* (Shannon, 1972, I.U.P. reprint of 1876 edition) p. 162-4.

<sup>27</sup>Stephen Sparks, Castle Carbery to Mr Pelham 15 Jun. 1797. Petition enclosed (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/31/103).

<sup>28</sup>J.W. [McNally] to ---- 29 May 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/10/121/62); *The Press* 16 Dec. 1797 repeated this assertion.

<sup>29</sup>Cloncurry, *Personal recollections* p. 51; C.H. Teeling, *History of the Irish rebellion of 1798* p. 162.

<sup>30</sup>*D.E.P.* 10 Oct. 1797.

<sup>31</sup>*F.J.* 16 Oct. 1797 'A few observations on the Co. Kildare petition.'

the letters were published in *The earls of Kildare and their ancestors*.<sup>32</sup> Camden's eagerness to keep the duke of Portland informed ensured a fuller version exists in the Public Record Office's HO 100 papers. Camden included both copies and originals of correspondence in two letters to Portland.<sup>33</sup> Both men realised the importance of the duke of Leinster to Irish politics and stability. Camden included Leinster's correspondence to demonstrate the necessity of his actions.

As noted above the duke of Leinster informed Camden of his decision to support the Kildare liberals on 25 April. This caused a flurry of letters between the two men which evidences the Irish government's concern at the strength of the Kildare group. Camden immediately requested a meeting at the castle which the duke declined stating that: '...as my mind is made up let the event be what it will at this critical moment'.<sup>34</sup> Camden replied noting that:

It is impossible for me not to consider the notice you have given me as a virtual relinquishment of the office your grace holds under his majesty's government, and I shall therefore think it incumbent on me to recommend a successor to your grace in that appointment.<sup>35</sup>

The letter seems to have incensed the duke whose reply was terse, 'If I am not thought worthy of holding a civil employment,' he wrote, 'I certainly cannot hold a military one, nor can I think of remaining at the privy council board.'<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup>Fitzgerald (ed.) *The earls of Kildare* second addenda p. 291-4, 305-6.

<sup>33</sup>Camden to Portland, 28 April 1797 (P.R.O. HO 100/69/236-7), Camden to Portland, 19 May 1797 (P.R.O. HO 100/69/328-9).

<sup>34</sup>(copy of) Camden to Leinster 27 April 1797 (P.R.O. HO 100/69/240-1), Leinster to Camden '7.30 p.m.' 27 April 1797 (P.R.O. HO 100/69/242-3); Fitzgerald (ed.), *The earls of Kildare* second addenda p. 292.

<sup>35</sup>Camden to Leinster 27 April 1797 (P.R.O. HO 100/69/244-5); Fitzgerald (ed.), *The earls of Kildare* second addenda p. 292-3.

<sup>36</sup>Leinster to Camden 28 April 1797 (P.R.O. HO 100/69/324-5); Fitzgerald (ed.), *The earls of Kildare* second addenda p. 293.

To Camden's request for clarification, the duke stated his determination to resign his military command following his civil 'dismissal'.<sup>37</sup> The matter of resignation from the command of the Kildare militia was not entirely cleared until a brief correspondence in mid May. Leinster wrote to Camden enclosing the memorial of Ensign Aylmer, who wished to travel to England. The officer in question may have been Gerald Aylmer of Lyons who resigned his command on 13 July 1797.<sup>38</sup> He added his determination to resign which Camden reluctantly accepted the following day commenting '....that his Majesty's service might suffer by your grace's resignation'.<sup>39</sup>

The protracted correspondence signifies the difficulty in dealing with a major liberal figure in Ireland. While the duke's public anti-government stance could not be tolerated, his treatment was a delicate matter as revealed by Camden's reports to Portland. In England the conduct of Leinster and Lord Edward had become quite public according to Lady Charlotte Strutt, a relation.<sup>40</sup> The state of the Kildare militia itself was a matter of some concern. In late April Camden informed Portland the duke had requested the body be removed from their camp in Dublin where they were in danger of radical contamination.<sup>41</sup>

On 10 May Lady Lucy Fitzgerald recorded, colourfully, in her diary  
May 10 - We had an alarm in the evening that brother Leinster and Edward  
were both to be taken up. Brother Leinster had yesterday a most curious

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<sup>37</sup>Camden to Leinster 29 April 1797 (P.R.O. HO 100/69/324-5), Leinster to Camden 30 April 1797 (P.R.O. HO 100/69/330-1); Fitzgerald (ed.), *The earls of Kildare* second addenda p. 293-4.

<sup>38</sup>Leinster to Camden 11 May 1797 (P.R.O. HO 100/69/332-3; Sir F. J. Aylmer, *The Aylmers of Ireland* (Dublin, 1931) p. 200; Tenison Graves, 'Officers of the Kildare militia 1794-1817' in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* vol. xii, (1935-45) p. 196.

<sup>39</sup>Camden to Leinster 13 May 1797 (P.R.O. HO 100/69/325-7), Leinster to Camden 14 May 1797 (P.R.O. HO 100/69/328-9); Fitzgerald (ed.), *The earls of Kildare* second addenda p. 305-6.

<sup>40</sup>Gerald Campbell, *Edward and Pamela Fitzgerald* p. 133.

<sup>41</sup>Camden to Portland 28 April 1797 (P.R.O. HO 100/69/246-7).

scene with Lord Carhampton who is a wicked madman. He scolded and stormed, said brother Leinster was at the head of that gang of assassins the United Irish. He did him too much honour for he is not one.<sup>42</sup>

A brief exchange of letters followed, copies of which exist in the Wolfe Papers and are reprinted in full in *The earls of Kildare and their ancestors*. On the evening of the argument Leinster wrote, angrily defending the conduct of the regiment and himself and demanded a 'court of enquiry' be established to refute allegations.<sup>43</sup> Lord Carhampton's reply stated he had interrogated two United Irishmen of the Kildare regiment who stated the duke himself was a member and implied a large number were also. He argued the duke should hold his military position given the turbulent times. No apology was forthcoming. Indeed Carhampton added that the duke had earlier agreed there were signs of disaffection among his men.<sup>44</sup> Leinster refuted the possibility of action in a subsequent response and again stated his wish for a 'court of enquiry and affirmed the 'excellent discipline' of the corps.<sup>45</sup> Two United Irishmen of the Kildare regiment, Daniel Mahon and Thomas Carty, were found guilty of sedition and mutiny on 30 May 1797. One witness stated Carty had declared to Captain Walker: 'That there were more of them than him.....that the duke of Leinster had given up his commission, and that they need not be afraid, for that the head men of the kingdom were to take charge of them'.<sup>46</sup>

Carhampton had similarly accused Micheal Aylmer - not of disaffection but of inactivity. Aylmer complained to Thomas Pelham, enclosing the offending letter. He noted he was always a vigilant magistrate. Pelham's reply was a

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<sup>42</sup>'Lady Lucy's Diary' in Gerald Campbell, *Edward and Pamela Fitzgerald* p. 119.

<sup>43</sup>Leinster to Carhampton, Leinster House 9 May 1797 in Fitzgerald (ed.), *The earls of Kildare* second addenda p. 294-5

<sup>44</sup>Carhampton to Leinster, Royal Hospital 10 May 1797 in Fitzgerald (ed.), *The earls of Kildare* second addenda p. 296 -300

<sup>45</sup>Leinster to Carhampton n.d. in Fitzgerald (ed.), *The earls of Kildare* second addenda p. 300-5.

<sup>46</sup>*The report from the secret committee of the house of commons with an appendix* p. 255.

diplomatic attempt to diffuse the situation, in which he asserted confidence in Aylmer.<sup>47</sup> Carhampton's attitude is indicative of the conservative response to the liberal challenge. Carhampton viewed the political situation as a conflict between loyal subject and insurgent in which the position of Leinster and others particularly in Kildare was at least suspect and at worst traitorous.

The appointment of John Wolfe as commander of the Kildare militia on 20 May 1797 evidences the government's need to support the loyalist minority in Kildare.<sup>48</sup> The appointment explains Wolfe's possession of the Carhampton - Leinster letters. An undated letter from John Carlisle, a Captain (and later Major) in the Kildare militia congratulated Wolfe on his appointment and noted, 'You will be agreeably surprised by finding it not in so desperate a state as is universally believed'. He implicitly noted the existence of United Irishmen in the unit but asserted many were now prepared to 'repent' possibly given the situation of their comrades.<sup>49</sup> A number of officers resigned their position following the duke of Leinster's departure. These included: Major Dominick William O'Reilly, Capt. Richard Rice, Lt. William Aylmer and Ensign William Donnellan.<sup>50</sup>

The failure of Whig strategies was underlined by the failure of Ponsonby's reform bill in the house of commons on 15 May 1797. Lord Edward and Arthur O'Connor had been in favour of secession from the house. On this occasion Henry Grattan and his fellow Whig M.P.s adopted the radical measure. In a long speech Grattan bemoaned the lost opportunity and concluded:

We have offered you our measure you will reject it; we deprecate yours; you will persevere; having no hopes left to persuade or dissuade and having

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<sup>47</sup>Micheal Aylmer to Thomas Pelham 24 May 1797. Enclosed: Lord Carhampton to Micheal Aylmer and (copy) Pelham to Aylmer 26 May 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/30/172).

<sup>48</sup>Tenison Graves, 'Officers of the Kildare militia 1794-1817' p. 194; Fitzgerald (ed.), *The earls of Kildare* second addenda p. 306; *F.J.* 10 Jun. 1797.

<sup>49</sup>J. Carlisle to John Wolfe, Leinster Street n.d. [May or Jun. 1797] (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>50</sup>Tenison Graves, 'Officers of the Kildare militia 1794-1817' p. 194-6.

discharged our duty , we shall trouble you no more and after this day shall not attend the house of commons.<sup>51</sup>

The liberal - conservative wrangle over the proclamation of Carbery barony and county meeting was rendered further significance by the forthcoming elections. The decision to withdraw from the house of commons placed liberal interests in a difficult position. In Kildare the Leinster party abstained from the election. However the abstention was neither rigid nor certain, even as late as July. On 10 July Robert LaTouche, the high sheriff requested the duke's support in the event of Lord Edward's not standing. The duke's reply evidences the uncertainty.

I am not yet certain whether Lord Edward reclines standing for the county *between you and I* I am inclined to think he will....I certainly cannot give my interest to anyone that does not declare for Catholic emancipation. At any rate I shall not give my interest to Mr Wolfe.<sup>52</sup>

Lord Edward's subsequent decision not to stand allowed the LaTouche interest to assert itself. Lord Edward informed the duke of his decision on 17 July.<sup>53</sup> An address to the county's electors appeared in the press the following day. Valentine Lawless claimed the work came from his pen. 'What is to be expected from a parliament returned under martial law ?' he wrote.<sup>54</sup>

The ambiguous position of the Leinster family created uncertainty during the election. A further difficulty was caused by the apparent drop in the number of electors from 1,500 (in 1790) to 300.<sup>55</sup> Maurice Keatinge stood again as an independent candidate. Three others offered themselves as candidates in late July.

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<sup>51</sup>*The parliamentary register or history of the proceedings and debates of the house of commons of Ireland* (17 vols., Dublin, 1782-1801) vol. xvii, p. 570.

<sup>52</sup>Fitzgerald (ed.), *The earls of Kildare* second addenda p. 311.

<sup>53</sup>*ibid.* p. 312.

<sup>54</sup>*D.E.P.* 18 Jul. 1797; Cloncurry, *Personal recollections* p. 54.

<sup>55</sup>*Belfast Newsletter* 31 Jul. 1797 in G.C. Bolton, *The passing of the Irish act of union* (Oxford, 1966) p. 153

John LaTouche (Robert's father) on 18 July, Joseph Henry of Straffan on 22 July and John Wolfe on 24 July.<sup>56</sup> Henry offered himself as a liberal in the vacuum that had emerged. An address to the freeholders of the county signed 'A Freeholder' urged him to stand down: 'What can you hope for at the present juncture in returning an independent member?...reserve his virtues and abilities for times when they may be of use to us'.<sup>57</sup> Henry subsequently withdrew his short lived candidature after one week. He had not received the support of his potential power base - the liberals of north Kildare. Valentine Lawless claimed to have written his address on this occasion.<sup>58</sup>

The pro-government vote hung in the balance between LaTouche and Wolfe. Robert LaTouche had obviously decided not to stand given Leinster's hesitancy because he would have had to resign as high sheriff. Three letters in the Wolfe Papers evidence the importance of the Leinster interest in this situation. Both William Grattan and Robert Graydon declined supporting Wolfe on this basis.<sup>59</sup> He withdrew his candidacy on 28 July. His address stated did not want 'to invoke the county in a contest without the strong possibility of success'.<sup>60</sup> A letter to the castle dated the same day indicated Wolfe's frustration. John LaTouche had obviously canvassed Leinster's support without consulting him. He complained he did not expect an election until after the next session and therefore had deferred registering his friends. '....had any other person but Mr LaTouche stood on the duke of Leinster's interest I should have succeeded, but he went to the duke without holding any communication to me'.<sup>61</sup> Louis Cullen comments that Leinster's policy 'appears

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<sup>56</sup>*D.E.P.* 20, 22, 25 Jul. 1797.

<sup>57</sup>*D.E.P.* 27 Jul. 1797

<sup>58</sup>*D.E.P.* 3 Aug. 1797; Cloncurry, *Personal recollections* p. 54.

<sup>59</sup>Robert Graydon to John Wolfe 27 Jul. 1797, William Grattan to [John Wolfe] 27 Jul. 1797 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>60</sup>*D.E.P.* 1 Aug. 1797.

<sup>61</sup>John Wolfe to ---- 28 Jul. 1797 (N.A.I. O.P. 34/8).

to have been guided by the prospect of ditching a more determined loyalist in favour of a less declared one'.<sup>62</sup> John Wolfe's more proclaimed conservative stance in local matters, his government ties and his defection from the Leinster camp seven years earlier swayed the Leinster strength to LaTouche. Maurice Keatinge and LaTouche were duly elected without a contest. Mary Leadbeater recorded the popular celebration at Keatinge's victory through bonfires and 'the first illuminations ever held in Ballitore'.<sup>63</sup>

Leinster's fading dominance in local politics was illustrated by the results of the borough elections in County Kildare in 1797-8. The borough of Athy was sold to William Hare of Ennismore in County Kerry. He was pro-government in politics and brought in his son Richard to fill the second seat. Harristown had been sold to the LaTouche interest in 1793. The deaths of the sitting M.P.s, Sir Fitzgerald Aylmer in 1794 and Arthur Burdett in 1796, enabled Robert LaTouche and his brother John to take possession of the seats. Both men were returned in 1797. The third Leinster borough of Kildare was also sold. Simon Digby, one of the longest serving Leinster M.P.s, resigned his seat in 1796 on accepting a government place. This seat was subsequently sold to Jones Harrison. In 1797 the vacant seats were sold to James Fitzgerald, the prime serjeant and Bridges Henniker (brother-in-law of Lord Aldborough). By 1797 both seats for the earl of Mayo's borough of Naas had been sold to George Damer (Viscount Milton) and Walter Yelverton. Thomas Pelham and Francis Hely Hutchinson were elected in 1797. Pelham chose to sit for Armagh Borough and was replaced by Sir John McCartney.<sup>64</sup>

The duke of Leinster effectively abandoned his important local position in the autumn of 1797. He travelled to Bristol Hot Wells with his wife who was seriously ill. He remained there until the following May when he went to

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<sup>62</sup>L.M. Cullen, 'Politics and rebellion: Wicklow in the 1790s' p. 421.

<sup>63</sup>*D.E.P.* 18 Jul. 1797; Mary Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater papers* vol. i, p. 209-10.

<sup>64</sup>Thos U. Sadlier, 'Kildare members of parliament 1559-1800' in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* vii (1912-14) p. 314-6, xiii (1915-17) p. 73-5, 489-501, xx (1920-22) p. 166-73.

London.<sup>65</sup> Valentine Lawless was persuaded to return to England to continue his studies at the same time. Fitzpatrick claimed he had been elected to the executive committee of the United Irishmen in autumn 1797. He later became involved in United Irish activities in England.<sup>66</sup> The very public liberal - conservative wrangle which had commenced in late April further radicalised public opinion by underlining the impotency of the moderate approach. Moderate politicians were increasingly pulled towards radical or loyalist camps. The liberal campaign had been specifically designed to mobilise the weight of public opinion. Their failure to field a candidate at the election implicitly recognised the worthlessness of parliamentary tactics and for some indicated the expediency of 'out of doors' mobilisation. From May 1797 reports of United Irish activities in south Kildare rapidly increased.

Patrick O'Kelly wrote in 1842:

In 1797, the system of United Irishmen was fast approaching to its crisis, and in no county of Ireland, were the people so much alive to all the purposes of propagating their cause, and organising themselves, as in the county of Kildare.<sup>67</sup>

While reports of radical activity in south Kildare increased the north remained extremely disturbed. A number of attacks and arrests were reported from Celbridge in May.<sup>68</sup> The duke of Leinster's town of Maynooth further exhibited the extent of disturbance in the area. Richard Cane a yeoman Sergeant explained to Pelham, '...perhaps there is not in the kingdom a town more seditious and disloyal'.<sup>69</sup> A list of disturbances compiled by Richard Nevill in the same month illustrates the level of terror. 'The banditti,' he wrote, 'carry about fire in tea kettles to set fire to cabins.'

<sup>65</sup>Fitzgerald, (ed.), *The earls of Kildare* second addenda p. 312-3.

<sup>66</sup>Cloncurry, *Personal recollections* p. 57; Fitzpatrick, *The life, times and contemporaries of Lord Cloncurry* p. 128, 142.

<sup>67</sup>Patrick O'Kelly, *General history* p. 22.

<sup>68</sup>*F.J.* 11 May, 27 May 1797.

<sup>69</sup>Richard Cane, Maynooth to Thomas Pelham 27 May 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/30/210).

He listed eleven attacks on respectable citizens in six days largely in search of arms and ammunition for the expanding society.<sup>70</sup>

While Nevill believed the area around Naas itself was tranquil John Wolfe did not. He requested troops of the Romney Fencibles be sent to the area. He noted large assemblies of people.<sup>71</sup> Indeed Wolfe's opinion seems to have hardened during this period. Information received from his uncle Theobald Wolfe suggested the unreliability of Yeoman corps commanded by his political opponents.

He tells me that the duke's Yeomanry, Browne's and Sir Fenton Aylmer's exercised together at Kilcock last Sunday, that Browne took the command or at least the lead and Sir Fenton Aylmer remained quiescent; he does not say the duke was there: I have thought this worth communicating to you because I think it leads or may lead to something very mischievous.<sup>72</sup>

In a letter to John Wolfe, Theobald stated bluntly that the Leinster corps were 'noted for associating with croppies'.<sup>73</sup> A neighbour at Naas, John Ravell Walsh favoured a conciliatory attitude. He suggested the use of an oath 'comfortable to the oath of allegiance' to be used to gauge the loyalty of the populace. He also criticised the heavy handed actions of some magistrates whose behaviour 'contrasts with the conduct of proper magistrates' and puts them in danger.<sup>74</sup>

Reports began to reach Dublin castle of radical activity on Kildare's southern borders. A radical newspaper was read to the inhabitants of Baltinglass each Sunday and oaths administered.<sup>75</sup> Robert Cornwall reported Carlow people

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<sup>70</sup>Richard Nevill to ---- 21 May 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/30/138).

<sup>71</sup>John Wolfe to Thomas Pelham 23 May 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/30/156).

<sup>72</sup>John Wolfe, Balbriggan to Edward Cooke 23 Jun. 1797 marked 'private' (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/31/141).

<sup>73</sup>[Theobald Wolfe] to John Wolfe n.d. [1797] (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers)

<sup>74</sup>John Ravell Walsh, Strawberry Lodge near Naas to ---- 6 Jun. 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/31/45).

<sup>75</sup>Maurice Tracey, Carlow to Thomas Pelham 26 May 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/30/198).

travelling to Kildare for meetings in August.<sup>76</sup> Benjamin O'Neale Stratford reported from north Wicklow in June, 'I hear that the contagion of the county Kildare is likely to erupt into this part to which I fear it is too near'.<sup>77</sup> His brother Lord Aldborough, writing in September outlined a desperate situation in his locality:

....bandittis burn houses and pillage them and steal lead in whatever shape they can find it...and rob the Yeomanry at night in their lonely houses of arms under the pain of murdering them or burning their houses.<sup>78</sup>

He argued only a military solution was suitable - the barony (Kilkea and Moone) should be proclaimed, while barracks could be established at Baltinglass, Ballitore, Timolin and Castledermot. His suggestions were not moved upon at this point.

Despite the almost hysterical tone of Aldborough's letter, it was rather solitary. Very few reports arrived from Kildare from July to October. In July the body of a murdered Kildare militia man was found buried at Naul. The murdered Corporal, John Thompson, had given a deposition against Dublin United Irishmen at the end of June. The 'conversion' of militia bodies stationed within the vicinity of the capital was a primary concern of the Dublin organisation.<sup>79</sup> The stationing of a military camp on the Curragh in August seems to have curtailed the ability of United Irishmen in the area, though Pollock a crown councillor believed its effects were limited.<sup>80</sup>

The summer assizes held at Athy at the end of August served to publicly manifest again the radical - conservative divisions in the county. The grand

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<sup>76</sup>Robert Cornwall to ----- 29 Aug. 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/34/18).

<sup>77</sup>Benjamin O'Neale Stratford to ---- 9 Jun. 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/31/65).

<sup>78</sup>Lord Aldborough, Castledermot to Thomas Pelham 29 Sept. 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/32/147).

<sup>79</sup>John Wolfe to Edward Cooke 13 Sept. 1797. Enclosed: Examination of Hannah Bradley, wife of Charles Bradley of Blackcastle near Naul n.d. (N.A.I. S.O.C. second series 3110/1-2); Examination of John Thompson Corporal in Kildare Militia, 25 Jun. 1797 (Frazer MSS 2/48).

<sup>80</sup>F.J. 29 Aug 1797; J. Pollock, Philipstown to ---- 30 Aug. 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/32/89).

jury panel included both Lord Edward Fitzgerald and Valentine Lawless.<sup>81</sup> A number of 'Defenders' were sentenced to execution including William Kennedy tried on 24 August for his part on the attack on Carbery charter school.<sup>82</sup> Kennedy's case allegedly involved serious abuses. The evidence of Stephen Hyland was extracted by Lt. Hempenstall of the Wicklow Militia through violence. Hempenstall acquired the epithet the 'walking gallows' for his barbarity. One of the jurors on refusing to convict the defendant was promptly informed he would be thrown out a window if he did not. A number of gentlemen, including grand jurors presented the solicitor general with a petition on Kennedy's behalf, but he was executed before it reached the Lord Lieutenant.<sup>83</sup>

Pollock one of the crown councillors who attended the Athy assizes wrote a worried letter to Dublin Castle: 'I think there is in that county a most decided and unequivocal determination to subvert the King's government'. Prisoners were 'supported' by Lord Edward Fitzgerald, Valentine Lawless, Thomas Ryan and George Cummins and all the Catholic jurors. The duke of Leinster's behaviour during a short visit was also viewed suspiciously. Cummins he believed was particularly dangerous and organised the United Irish prisoner's fund. Thomas Fitzgerald he described as 'a tanner, distiller and republican' and urged the disbandment of his yeoman corps. The obvious reluctance to prosecute United Irishmen was a reflection of the strength of local organisation. 'The county is to be saved yet,' Pollock concluded, 'but no time is to be lost.'<sup>84</sup>

In Kildare the show of the liberal party at the assizes convinced Pollock of their underlying tendencies. The events must have had a powerful impact on the local community. While Lord Edward and Lawless were United Irishmen, the indirect support of Leinster or Thomas Fitzgerald was also deeply worrying to

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<sup>81</sup>*County [Kildare] at large Summer Assizes 1797* (Carlow, 1797).

<sup>82</sup>see above p. 77.

<sup>83</sup>*The Press* 16 Nov. 1797 contained a full trial report. *F.J.* 29 Aug. 1797; *D.E.P.* 26 Sept. 1797.

<sup>84</sup>J. Pollock, Philipstown to ---- 30 Aug. 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/32/89).

government. Two cases aroused particular attention. Captain Simon Fraser and John Ross of the Inverness Fencibles were found not guilty of murdering an elderly carpenter Christopher Dixon in May. He had been arrested and later killed having 'broken' curfew despite the fact that Cloncurry (the place of arrest) was outside the proclaimed barony of Carbery. Fraser and Ross for some time refused surrender to the local magistrates Thomas Ryan and Valentine Lawless. At the beginning of the assizes Fraser had marched confidently into Athy at the head of his troops. *The Press* published notes on the trials of Fraser/Ross and William Kennedy in the same issue in a blatant attack on the prejudice of the judiciary.<sup>85</sup>

The other case might be described as a 'liberal victory'. A jury divided over the case of what Pollock described as 'two notorious United Irishmen'. One was John O'Brien who worked and lived with the Catholic distiller John Cassidy in Monasterevan. Cassidy prosecuted him for administering the United Irish oath. The jury was ordered to the Queen's County border to be discharged having failed to reach a verdict. According to Pollock, 'Lord Edward and Lawless...headed up the mob, walked back with the refractory jury men and publicly that evening drank the health of the 5 virtuous citizens who would not find their friends guilty'.<sup>86</sup>

If Pollock a government official was so abhorred by the power of the radicals in Kildare at the summer assizes, what must the effect on the local population have been? They demonstrated to the Kildare United Irishmen that they were a powerful body. In a sense they illustrated what Blaris Moor had conversely depicted to the Monaghan Militia. The Ulster United Irishmen failed to prevent the execution of four of their number in May 1797 and alienated the regiment. They were later instrumental in destroying the presses of the *Northern Star*. If Pollock alone is relied on, the judicial process was, at least, seriously undermined. Patrick

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<sup>85</sup>F.J. 14 Oct. 1797 included a full trial report; Fitzpatrick, *The life, times and contemporaries of Lord Cloncurry* p. 137-41; *The Press* 19 Nov. 1797.

<sup>86</sup>J. Pollock, Philipstown to ---- 30 Aug. 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/32/89); O'Kelly, *General history* p. 22.

O'Kelly's reference to the episode is surely significant. Loyalists were placed on the defensive. A visiting judge Robert Day, informed the Attorney General in August:

Gentlemen here [i.e. Philipstown] and in the County of Kildare have converted their houses into garrisons their windows and doors barricaded with bullet proof plank, pierced in various places for spike holes - and notwithstanding the present calm they have no idea of abandoning that defensive system or relaxing their precautions till after the winter.<sup>87</sup>

The evidence of Thomas Reynolds Junior confirms this state of affairs was widespread.<sup>88</sup> Day's 'present calm' did not last long. The months of November and December witnessed a resurgence of violence, particularly in the southern baronies. Indeed gauging the strength of the United Irishmen on this evidence is difficult. Disturbance may be a sign of radical penetration or poor leadership (or both) in a particular locality. A tranquil area could reflect either a disciplined underground movement or ineffective mobilisation.

Reports of disturbances which arrived at Dublin Castle during late 1797 and early 1798 emanated largely from mid and south Kildare. Based on this evidence north Kildare remained relatively tranquil. Most of the attacks were on isolated houses in an attempt to gain arms and ammunition. The long winter nights were an ideal cover for such raids.<sup>89</sup> Murders occurred with increasing frequency. In November John Wolfe reported the savage killing of Patrick Nicolson and his sister. They had been taken from their house by 'a number of savages with their faces blackened and shirts over their coats' (the description is more akin to Whiteboy raids.) The reason for the murder was a mystery. Wolfe suggested the 'deceased man sometime last summer gave offence to our modern reformers for which they burned

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<sup>87</sup>Arthur Wolfe to Edward Cooke 24 Aug. 1797. Eight enclosures, including: Robert Day, Philipstown to Arthur Wolfe 19 Aug. 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/34/14).

<sup>88</sup>Reynolds, *Life* vol. i, p. 195.

<sup>89</sup>Richard Nevill to ---- 2 Nov. 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/33/7).

his house'.<sup>90</sup> The episode demonstrates the link between violence and political considerations.

For Wolfe the only solution was a military one. He favoured proclamation. 'Speedy trial and proclamation,' he wrote, '...nothing can strike greater terror into the common mind.'<sup>91</sup> Even when those responsible were arrested their prosecution was threatened by the safety of witnesses. In December Captain Swayne reported a prosecuting Dragoon Guard feared he would be poisoned.<sup>92</sup> Richard Nevill reported at least six robberies occurred in his neighbourhood during a week in December, 'some of them attended with great barbarism'. A gathering for a boxing match was viewed suspiciously. Such events were utilised by United Irishmen to meet and organise. He also found the *Union Star* was posted up in a canal store at Sallins. The broadsheet's inflammatory rhetoric composed (anonymously) by Watty Cox, urged the execution of informers and magistrates - Kildare figures were occasionally included.<sup>93</sup>

Possibly the most daring and certainly the most profitable raid was an attack on the Athy packet boat carried out in early December. Two cachets of arms were seized from a boat destined for Leighlin Bridge from Philipstown. Lord Downshire at Edenderry commented the event 'has made a deep impression on the minds of the disaffected here'.<sup>94</sup> A. Weldon, an established church minister and prominent south Kildare loyalist, was of the opinion that the attack was launched from or at least planned from Dublin not Athy. He felt the conductor and boatman

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<sup>90</sup>John Wolfe to Edward Cooke 20 Nov. 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/33/82). The above is quoted from an enclosure in Wolfe's hand which he urged should be burned so the 'hand' was not recognised.

<sup>91</sup>John Wolfe to Edward Cooke 20 Nov. 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/33/82).

<sup>92</sup>Capt. Richard L. Swayne to Gen. Eustace 21 Dec. 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/33/172).

<sup>93</sup>Richard Nevill to ---- 10 Dec. 1797. Enclosed: a pamphlet entitled 'To the men of property of the Co. Down' (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/33/139)

<sup>94</sup>Lord Downshire, Edenderry to Edward Cooke 9 Dec. 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/33/135).

were themselves involved.<sup>95</sup> An extensive enquiry failed to uncover the roots of the enquiry or the arms. Patrick O'Kelly claimed the arms were hidden in surrounding bogland. 'Captain Fitzgerald's corps being generally of the United Party, no great display for searching the arms was manifested.'<sup>96</sup> The canals advantages were effectively exploited by the United Irishmen. Canal workers were involved in both the Defenders and United Irishmen in Carbery Barony. In April 1798 it was reported 'improper persons' used it to travel to and from Dublin. It was suggested a magistrates pass should be introduced to prevent this.<sup>97</sup> The effect of the December robbery was undoubtedly alarming for loyalists, Rawson commented in its wake, 'if something is not done for this devoted county the well affected must fly'.<sup>98</sup>

Conservatives were increasingly drawn towards the use of proclamation. Nevill had discussed the idea briefly in early December.<sup>99</sup> During December and January John Wolfe began to accumulate accounts of disturbances in the Athy area with a view to petitioning for proclamation. Rawson was central to this plan. One letter he began, 'I fear I tire you but you know its your own desire'.<sup>100</sup> Proclamation of a large area of southern Kildare took place in February.<sup>101</sup> The letters of magistrates and others reveal not only how disturbed areas of Kildare were, but the growing apprehension of loyalists. The converse of this topic must be addressed. What was the state of the Kildare United Irishmen as they faced into 1798? How many had been sworn and who were the leaders?

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<sup>95</sup>A. Weldon, Athy to John Wolfe 24 Dec. 1797 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>96</sup>R. Abercromby, Royal Hospital to Thomas Pelham 12 Dec. 1797. Enclosed: two letters from Gen. Dundas transmitting two letters with nine depositions from Brigadier General Wilford relative to the Athy packet boat robbery (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/33/147); Patrick O'Kelly, *General history* p. 27.

<sup>97</sup>Thomas Pope, Athy to William Green 10 April 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/36/156).

<sup>98</sup>Thomas J. Rawson to John Wolfe 10 Dec. 1797 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>99</sup>Richard Nevill to ---- 10 Dec. 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/33/139).

<sup>100</sup>Thomas J. Rawson to John Wolfe 10 Dec. 1797 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>101</sup>see below p. 114-6.

Two sources are particularly instructive on the Kildare United Irishmen emanating from one person: Thomas Reynolds. They are his son's history of his life published in 1839 and Reynolds' testimony on oath before the Privy Council taken in May 1798.<sup>102</sup> The son's biography was an apologia designed to clear his father's tarnished reputation. He attempted to illustrate his father's innocent involvement in a politically (not militarily) motivated United Irish society. His ignorance of their ultimate designs and his extensive family connections proved he had not turned informer for personal gain since he had simply not required financial aid. Reynolds had been involved in Catholic agitation during the early 1790s. He had belonged to the Fingall party and seceded from the Catholic Committee with this group of sixty four in 1792. He was however elected to represent a Dublin area at the Catholic Convention of that year.<sup>103</sup> His connections are important. Thomas Fitzgerald of Geraldine was his uncle. He was indirectly related to the Leinsters through his mother Rose. Indeed his son stated, 'her connections extended to almost all the Catholic nobility and to several of the old Protestant families throughout Ireland'. In 1794 he married Harriet Witherington whose sister Matilda married Theobald Wolfe Tone.<sup>104</sup>

Reynolds himself was a silk manufacturer in Dublin but at some point in the later 1790s the duke of Leinster promised to rent him Kilkea Castle and its estate, adjoining Lord Aldborough's residence at Belan. It was at that point resided in by an elderly man named Dixon.<sup>105</sup> Reynolds was sworn into the United Irishmen by Oliver Bond in Dublin in February 1797. His son argues he joined merely from his support for a society whose avowed objectives were Catholic emancipation and

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<sup>102</sup>Reynolds, *Life* ; Thomas Reynolds, Kilkea Castle, County Kildare, information before the Privy Council, 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/3/32/23). This testimony was reproduced in *The report from the secret committee of the house of commons with an appendix* p. 165-74.

<sup>103</sup>Reynolds, *Life* vol. i, p. 181-2.

<sup>104</sup>*ibid.*, vol. i, p. 52-3.

<sup>105</sup>*ibid.*, vol. i, p. 181-2.

parliamentary reform, but heard little of its revolutionary plans which he regarded as 'wild and ridiculous schemes'.<sup>106</sup> In his deposition before the Privy Council he stated '...that there would be no security for my person or property but by my doing so'.<sup>107</sup> Reynolds attitude was non - committal. While he was not an infiltrator, he viewed the United Irish cause in terms of personal benefit not political ideology or revolutionary zeal. His attendance at society meetings at the Brazen Head certainly dispelled his professed innocence concerning the society's motives. Here he learned the conspiracy aimed at: 'overturning the present government, of establishing a republican form of government instead...and of assisting the French in any invasion they may make upon this kingdom to forward their views'.<sup>108</sup>

Reynolds later became treasurer of a simple society and as such attended a baronial meeting, however, 'none but lower persons were present'.<sup>109</sup> Towards the end of 1797 Reynolds received possession of Kilkea Castle and estate and seems to have retired there to make preparations for residence.<sup>110</sup> In November Lord Edward approached him and requested he replace him as Colonel of the Kilkea and Moone Barony temporarily. He was informed the military organisation of Kildare had been completed but Fitzgerald himself wished to lie low for a period. Reynolds seems to have given a 'very reluctant assent' for a number of reasons. Foremost was his connection with the Leinster interest which he perceived had been damaged politically by recent events in Kildare. This was enhanced by his possession of Leinster property. In effect Reynolds viewed the approach as an invitation (albeit a dangerous one) to social prestige in his new home and given the request's origins one he could hardly refuse. Oliver Bond subsequently urged him to

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<sup>106</sup>Reynolds, *Life* vol. i, p. 182.

<sup>107</sup>Thomas Reynolds...information before the Privy Council, 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/3/32/23).

<sup>108</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>109</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>110</sup>Reynolds, *Life* vol. i, p. 183.

accept the post.<sup>111</sup> He was not sworn to the post until the following January when he met the key local activist Matthew Kenna of Birstown. Kenna informed him the baronial committee contained twelve members who commanded 2,300 men.<sup>112</sup>

What was the strength of the United Irishmen in the county? The reports emanating from the county's beleaguered loyalists suggest the organisation was overwhelming the county. The United Irishmen percolated into southern Kildare effectively from May 1797. Lord Edward's pervasive presence was crucial. Patrick O'Kelly, who had been a tenant on Fitzgerald land stated:

An intimacy persisted between numberless families who resided on the Leinster estate and Lord Edward. He was considered and known to be deep in the designs of the leaders of the United cause and was always accessible to the young farmers who were zealous to be deemed instruments in his hands, for carrying on all their plans of insurrection to maturity.<sup>113</sup>

A return of numbers captured from a County Down meeting in early June 1797 puts the Kildare organisation at 12,703.<sup>114</sup> This is the highest figure for the county's association, higher even than the generous returns of 1798. United Irish figures served not only the purpose of assessing the movement's strength but possessed an implicit inspirational factor. The same document stated an incredible 20,000 Westmeath members were sworn.

The revamped United Irish constitution produced in August 1797 created a hierarchical structure. Each simple society was to consist of not more than twelve members, with two elected officers: a treasurer and secretary. The secretaries of ten simple societies composed a lower baronial committee. In turn ten

<sup>111</sup>Reynolds, *Life* vol. i, p. 183-6; Thomas Reynolds...information before the Privy Council, 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/3/32/23).

<sup>112</sup>Reynolds, *Life* vol. i, p. 185-6; Thomas Reynolds...information before the Privy Council, 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/3/32/23).

<sup>113</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 21.

<sup>114</sup>*The report from the secret committee of the house of commons with an appendix* p. 136.

representatives of lower baronial committees formed an upper baronial committee. The representatives of (at least four) upper baronial committees constituted a county committee, which delegated two members to represent the county on the provincial committee.<sup>115</sup>

An undated report produced below details the strength of Kildare by men and arms. The original is held in the Public Record Office HO 100 papers. Its location with papers marked received between January and March 1798 suggest it may have been compiled as early as late 1797. Thomas Reynolds mentions a return of arms was presented at a county committee meeting held on 10 February 1798 at which he was elected treasurer.<sup>116</sup> His new position would have give him access to such documents and he possibly passed this one to William Cope.

#### County of Kildare Returns

Town of	Men	Guns	Pistols	Swords	Pikes	Ballcartridges	Balls	Bayonets	Blunderbusses
Naas	1360	117	108	70	588	1030	3291	45	7
Baronies of									
Offaly	2032	No returns - <u>censured</u>							
Kilkea & Moone	1339	215	44	89	1029	10000	---	123	7
Narragh & Rheban	1646	240	86	57	1050	1000	---	3060	6
Clane	1114	70	100	40	---	---	---	20	7
Connell	1020	No returns - <u>censured</u>							
Ikeathy	880	40	40	50	---	---	---	50	---
Carbery	384	No returns - <u>censured</u>							
Kilcullen	600	50	34	42	600	---	---	50	---

<sup>115</sup>R.B. McDowell and E. Curtis (ed.), *Irish historical documents* (Dublin, 1943, reprinted 1977) p. 238-242.

<sup>116</sup>Thomas Reynolds...information before the Privy Council, 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/3/32/23).

Salt      480      30      10      15      50      ---      3000      ---      2

[Source: P.R.O. HO 100/75/209 (5) County of Kildare Returns n.d.]

This is the only surviving document which breaks Kildare United Irish figures into baronies. Despite its deficiencies it is significant for this reason alone. The total number of United Irishmen in the county was put at 10,855. The figures illustrate the organisational structure of the county. It was divided by barony rather than half barony therefore the divisions in the baronies of Salt, Narragh and Rheban and Offaly were ignored. The rather large figure for the 'town of Naas' must apply to the baronies of North and South Naas as a whole. At over 10,000 the paper strength of the organisation was healthy and credible assuming it refers to a late 1797 or early 1798 date. Kilkea and Moone's figure was actually 1,000 below Kenna's figure.<sup>117</sup> One important regional variation emerges. The two northern baronies of Carbery and Salt seem rather under organised. Carbery's large tracts of bog only partly explain the inconsiderable figure of 384. The force of proclamation conceivably damaged the areas organisation. Salt included the expanding towns of Maynooth, Celbridge and Leixlip and the estates of the liberal Conollys and Leinsters. The figure suggests four lower baronial committees existed. Perhaps the number 480 was based on this knowledge while the lower baronials actually contained more than the 120 they technically should have contained.

Where figures for arms are included they indicate baronies were at least arming. Many did not have an ample quantity of heavier weaponry; guns, pistols and bayonets. Ikeathy for example, was in a very poor state. Pikes however, were an easily manufactured source of armament. The figure of 3,060 bayonets for Narragh and Rheban obviously indicates the arms seized from the canal in December remained in the area. It also supports the view that the return post-dates that attack. When Thomas Reynolds was requested to become Colonel of the Kilkea and Moone Barony he was informed the military organisation of the county had been completed.

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<sup>117</sup>see above p. 102.

O'Kelly stated military organising and weapons manufacturing commenced in the winter of 1797 (which the above return may reflect).<sup>118</sup>

Lord Edward retained a crucial position on the county movement and a functioning and effective leadership had been fashioned by him. Many of the leaders were closely connected to him. George Cummins acted as his agent.<sup>119</sup> Malachi Delany of Ballitore was reported to be 'very great with Lord Edward'.<sup>120</sup> Other key players - Thomas Reynolds, Matthew Kenna or Micheal Reynolds were all similarly positioned. James Smyth, a calico printer at Leixlip, who according to one source had been involved in radical politics in Belfast, forged links with Lord Edward following his election as delegate for Salt in February 1798.<sup>121</sup> R.R. Madden asserted that c. 1798 William Putman McCabe, a northern radical who had become a confidant of Lord Edward, was assigned the task of 'organising Kildare'. There is no mention of his presence in the county in the Rebellion Papers. He may have acted as a liaison between Kildare and Dublin. The evidence is much stronger for his involvement in Wicklow and Wexford.<sup>122</sup> Lord Edward's resignation of the Colonelcy of the Kilkea and Moone Barony to Thomas Reynolds signalled his partial vacation of control in Kildare, although he retained some involvement at a county level.<sup>123</sup> Thomas Boyle reported in March 1798 that he 'is now considered

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<sup>118</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 26.

<sup>119</sup>J. Pollock, Philipstown to ---- 30 Aug. 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/32/89).

<sup>120</sup>Information of B [Thomas Boyle] n.d. (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/18/3).

<sup>121</sup> Information about Lord Edward Fitzgerald headed 'Leixlip Business' n.d., Information about Lord Edward Fitzgerald, Tanner and Bird n.d. (T.C.D. Sirr Papers 869/9 f. 7-8, 92-3); Seamus Cummins, 'Pike heads and the calico printer: Leixlip in 98' in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* xvi, (1985-86) p. 418-431.

<sup>122</sup>Madden, *United Irishmen* 3rd series vol. iii p. 296-360; L.M. Cullen, 'Politics and rebellion: Wicklow in the 1790s' p. 449-51.

<sup>123</sup>Thomas Reynolds...information before the Privy Council, 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/3/32/23).

the head of the party and all delegates that come to Dublin are obliged to go to him to receive instructions'.<sup>124</sup>

Lord Edward continued to actively participate in United Irish affairs in west Kildare. James Molloy of Springfield was Captain in the rebel army in late 1797. He attended two 'sub baronial' meetings in the January and March 1798 in the houses of George Cummins and Lord Edward respectively, in Kildare town. Fitzgerald exercised a prominent role at the meetings encouraging those present. At the meeting in March his position as treasurer appears to have been taken by Roger McGarry.<sup>125</sup>

Reynolds named those who attended his first county committee meeting held at Nineteen Mile House near Kilcullen on 10 February.

Thomas Reynolds	[Kilkea and Moone]
Matthew Kenna	[Kilkea and Moone]
Micheal Reynolds	[Naas]
Mr Flood	[Kilcullen]
Mr Daly	[Kilcullen]
George Cummins	[Offaly]
Two persons from Athy	[Narragh and Rheban]
One person from Mr LaTouche's Yeomanry	[Naas?] <sup>126</sup>

The lack of any delegates from the northern baronies of Salt, Ikeathy, Carbery, Clane or Connell is surprising. Perhaps the geographical distance from Kilcullen was a factor or Lord Edward had been relied on to represent these baronies. Coupled with the evidence in the return above, however, it could reflect an organisational backwardness in the area. Most of the local leaders were young and quite affluent, many were farmers. Others such as Smyth, a calico printer or

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<sup>124</sup>Information of B [Thomas Boyle] 10 March 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/18/3).

<sup>125</sup>Lord Tyrawley, Monasterevan to ---- 8 Jun. 1798. Enclosed: Information of James Molloy of Springfield n.d. [late May/Early June 1798] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/56/191).

<sup>126</sup>Thomas Reynolds...information before the Privy Council, 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/3/32/23).

Cummins an apothecary were skilled artisans. According to Reynolds, Lord Edward had regularly attended county meetings previous to his resignation. On 10 February Reynolds was elected treasurer in his place. George Cummins was elected secretary in the place of Micheal Reynolds. Daly was also elected as a delegate to the Leinster provincial.

The 'treachery' of Thomas Reynolds presented the government with an opportunity not only to uncover the national leaders of the United Irishmen, but also the conspirators in the heavily politicised county of Kildare. Reynolds' son stated his father decided to pass information to government when he learned the full details of the proposed rebellion and its use of assassination.<sup>127</sup> He initially passed information to government via William Cope with whom he was transacting business, as if received from a third party. Documents printed by W.J. Fitzpatrick in *The sham squire* including a statement by William Cope, assert that Reynolds had produced information without this cover from the 25 February, but refused to come forward personally. The evidence indicates Reynolds had become fearful of his own life in the event of revolution.<sup>128</sup> In hindsight Lord Edward's approach to Reynolds was an understandable mistake. It was made from the viewpoint of expediency. Reynolds had neither proved his loyalties as a radical politician nor abilities as the commander of a large underground army.

Information supplied by Thomas Reynolds to William Cope led to the raid on Oliver Bond's house on 12 March and the capture of most of the Leinster provincial. Reynolds spent the previous week collecting the county returns in order to learn the location and date of the meeting. George Cummins was arrested, but overall the arrests were not a serious setback to the Kildare organisation though the possibility of infiltration certainly unnerved some members.<sup>129</sup> Cummins revealed

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<sup>127</sup>Reynolds, *Life* vol. i, p. 186-90.

<sup>128</sup>W.J. Fitzpatrick, *The sham squire and the informers of 1798* (Dublin, third edition, 1895) p. 227-246. For Cope's statement see p. 230-233.

<sup>129</sup>Thomas Reynolds...information before the Privy Council, 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/3/32/23).;

nothing and 'being obstinate in denying evidence he was committed'.<sup>130</sup> Were the leaders of radical politics from the previous years involved in the Kildare United Irishmen? A numbers of such figures were connected to the movement by Thomas Reynolds: John Esmonde, Thomas Fitzgerald, Wogan Browne, Maurice Keatinge, Daniel Caulfield and Col. Lumm.<sup>131</sup>

John Esmonde of Osberstown, a prominent radical activist in the early 1790s, was a United Irishman and had been a member of the early phase of the society. He possibly missed the county meeting held on 10 February. At a meeting held on 18 March he replaced Thomas Reynolds as treasurer.<sup>132</sup> Esmonde seems to have represented the Barony of Clane where he resided. In January 1798 his yard was searched for arms. A number of houses were also searched on his instructions but without success, which is not surprising if he was a United Irishman.<sup>133</sup> Another member of the medical profession Dr. Johnson of Ballitore was apparently a local United Irish leader.<sup>134</sup>

A relatively large body of evidence suggests Thomas Fitzgerald of Geraldine was connected with the United Irishmen. Two confessions stated he was a commander. One asserted he was 'over' another that he and Lord Edward 'were to take their part and to command them'.<sup>135</sup> Colonel Campbell, officer commanding at Athy, claimed he obtained similar information. He linked Fitzgerald with Matthew Kenna.<sup>136</sup> Fitzgerald's house was placed under free quarters in late April, a measure

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Reynolds, *Life* Vol. i, p. 205-7, 212-5.

<sup>130</sup>Examination of George Cummins, 13 March 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/36/9a ).

<sup>131</sup>Thomas Reynolds...information before the Privy Council, 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/3/32/23).

<sup>132</sup>Reynolds, *Life* vol. i, p. 213.

<sup>133</sup>Untitled [account of searches carried out by John Wolfe, 10 Jan. 1798] (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>134</sup>Thomas Reynolds...information before the Privy Council, 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/3/32/23).

<sup>135</sup>Information of James Kelly, Co. Kildare 14 May 1798, Information of John Chandler, Shrowland, Parish of Athy 17 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb papers 620/37/66, 98).

<sup>136</sup>Col. Campbell to Edward Cooke 15 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb papers 620/37/66).

similarly applied to the houses of other wealthy suspects. Papers 'of a suspicious nature' were discovered by Col Campbell. Campbell initially enclosed a few of the uncovered documents in a letter to Castlereagh. The bulk of the discovery survives as the 'Thomas Fitzgerald Papers' in the Rebellion Papers.<sup>137</sup> The nineteen documents contained in the latter collection reveal the involvement of Fitzgerald in Catholic and Kildare politics throughout the decade. They also indicate the importance of convivial and social aspects of late eighteenth century radical circles.

Two of the documents are particularly incriminating; Address of the county committee of Dublin City to their constituents, and an appendix to our glorious revolution (dated 1 Feb. 1798) and an 'Orange Oath'. The first document was printed and included the August 1797 constitution of the United Irishmen and advice to local societies. The second was typical of the type of oath circulated among Catholics to incite fear and anger. It stated: 'I do swear I will be true to king and government and exterminate as far as lies in my power, all the Catholics in the kingdom....I will drink the blood of papists'.<sup>138</sup> During information taken in May Fitzgerald stated the oath was found at Athy and he believed it had originated in Armagh. He also denied any connection with the United Irishmen. Interestingly he admitted advising his nephew, Thomas Reynolds against continuing his dealings with Mr Cope - but on financial grounds.<sup>139</sup> The evidence in favour of Fitzgerald's involvement in the United Irishmen is not conclusive. In March 1798 he reported disturbances in his area. He declared his innocence in July, claiming again that he

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<sup>137</sup>Col. Campbell to Lord Castlereagh 29 Apr. 1798. Enclosed: *A short answer to a brief caution to the Roman Catholics of Ireland by A Liberty Boy* (Dublin, 1792), 'United Irishmen of Dublin 7 June 1793' (N.A.I. Reb papers 620/36/216), Thomas Fitzgerald Papers, 1798 (Reb. Papers 620/42/18).

<sup>138</sup>Thomas Fitzgerald Papers, 1798. An 'Orange Oath', hand-written (N.A.I. Reb papers 620/42/18).

<sup>139</sup>Thomas Fitzgerald Papers, 1798. Information of Thomas Fitzgerald 10 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb papers 620/42/18). For Fitzgerald's account of the interview see: T. Fitzgerald esq....to James Bernard Clinch esq. 20 Dec. 1802 in Madden, *United Irishmen* 3rd series, vol. ii, p. 340-4.

was never involved in any committees.<sup>140</sup> Nonetheless the Yeomen under his captaincy were publicly disarmed in Athy in April.<sup>141</sup>

Thomas Reynolds information before the Privy Council implicated a number of prominent Kildare liberals. At a county committee meeting held in March it was agreed to accept some persons if they came forward

.....as it was irksome to the gentlemen of the county to come forward to societies where they might meet persons of low descriptions

Col. Lumm

Col. Keatinge

Mr. Esmonde

and Mr Wogan Browne

should be informed that if they would accept the commissions of colonel they should be admitted at once into the county meeting without passing thro' the inferior societies.

The mention of Dr Esmonde in this document suggests he was not a United Irish officer until March 1798. He may be mentioned due to his social connections with the other named gentlemen. Thomas Reynolds was later informed Col. Lumm had attended a later county meeting. Col Keatinge agreed to join the Ballitore committee, while Daniel Caulfield of Levetstown had requested to be named Joint Colonel of Kilkea and Moone barony which, according to Reynolds, duly occurred.<sup>142</sup> Two Kilkea and Moone captains Philip and Patrick Germaine denied his involvement in May. However Luke Brannick another captain stated Philip Germaine had proposed

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<sup>140</sup>Thomas Fitzgerald to J. Parnell 23 Mar. 1798, Thomas Fitzgerald to ---- 21 Jul. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/36/59a, 620/37/118 ).

<sup>141</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 41-2

<sup>142</sup>Thomas Reynolds...information before the Privy Council, 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/3/32/23); Reynolds, *Life* vol. i, p. 214.

Caulfield who accepted.<sup>143</sup> Camden had informed Portland on 11 March that the following were the names of the Kildare Colonels: Wogan Browne, Col. Lumm, Col. Keatinge, Valentine Lawless, Mr Pender, Micheal Reynolds, George Cummins and two close relations of the unnamed informant.<sup>144</sup> The list possibly reflects the castle's desire to view the Kildare insurgents as a liberal - radical plot led by a dangerously articulate and affluent group. However the informant's omission of two delegates (probably Thomas Fitzgerald and Lord Edward), on the grounds of his (or her) relationship to them suggest Thomas Reynolds as the informant.

An undated and anonymous account in the Rebellion Papers purports to state a number of Kildare gentlemen were contemplating 'to act with the people' and seems to confirm Reynold's information. The account is rather vague but again Col. Lumm is stated to have come forward.<sup>145</sup> Lumm is one of the most shadowy United Irish figures in Kildare. William Drennan mentions him as Col. Lumm Sampson. Madden mentions him but gives no information on his background or involvement. He seems to have been connected with Lord Edward Fitzgerald. Charles Teeling recorded meeting Lumm in his company, accompanied he believed by two members of the Irish legislature. Lumm embraced Lord Edward with 'the greatest affection'.<sup>146</sup>

Wogan Browne was not directly implicated by information other than that cited above. He was, however, deeply suspected. At the beginning of 1797 he was severely reprimanded by Lord Clare for kicking off a football match. This resulted in a temporary loss of his position as justice of the peace which he held for

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<sup>143</sup>Examination of Patrick Germaine 10 May 1798, Information of Philip Germaine 10 May 1798, Examination of Luke Brannick 10 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/37/48, 620/37/49, 620/37/50)

<sup>144</sup>Camden to Portland 11 March 1798 (P.R.O. HO 100/75/207).

<sup>145</sup>Kildare County gentlemen contemplating co-operation with the people, as meeting to be held, n.d. (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/51/118).

<sup>146</sup>*Drennan letters* p. 274; R.R. Madden, *United Irishmen* 2nd edn., 4 vols. (1858-60) vol. ii, p. 405; Teeling, *History of the Irish rebellion of 1798* p. 81.

three counties.<sup>147</sup> Football matches and other large gatherings were used by United Irishmen as covers for their gatherings. For example, Richard Nevill reported in May 1797 that: 'instead of funerals the meetings [of United Irishmen] on the Curragh are for weddings'.<sup>148</sup> One of Wogan Browne's tenants, William Aylmer of Painstown had joined the United Irishmen by late 1797. Valentine Lawless asserted Aylmer was sworn by William Sampson who often accompanied Lawless to Laughlinstown camp where the Kildare Militia were stationed. Aylmer seems to have been sworn between late 1796 and early 1797. He resigned his Lieutenancy in the Kildare regiment on 12 June 1797.<sup>149</sup> Perhaps he resigned in sympathy with Leinster or in apprehension of John Wolfe's appointment. Teeling contended that he resigned because a 'personal insult was levelled against the duke of Leinster'. His work includes a vivid, if somewhat implausible account of Aylmer's surrender of his sword to the duke.<sup>150</sup> His activities between this date and the outbreak of rebellion remain unclear. He possibly wished to restrain his United Irish links to a minimum.

The involvement of leading county figures in the Kildare United Irishmen was what government feared most. Despite the proto-democratic ideology and structures of the movement it instinctively sought connection with middling (and upper) classes at its leadership level. This is most striking in the Dublin movement. The involvement of liberal-radical politicians in rural Kildare was designed to encourage the participation of the sections of 'lower orders' who remained hesitant. The cult of Lord Edward is the most obvious indication of this attitude. However as Thomas Reynolds recognised many affluent figures had too much to lose in coming forward - the free quarters of April and May 1798 made this patently obvious.

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<sup>147</sup>Cloncurry, *Personal recollections* p. 177-8.

<sup>148</sup>Richard Nevill to --- 21 May 1797 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/30/38).

<sup>149</sup>Cloncurry, *Personal recollections* p. 167; William Sampson, *Memoirs* (New York, 1807) does not mention Aylmer; Tenison Graves, 'Officers of the Kildare Militia 1794-1817' p. 195.

<sup>150</sup>Teeling, *op. cit.*, p. 84-5

Reynolds' *Life* clearly illustrates the disturbed nature of southern Kildare in early 1798. 'All tended to riot and confusion murders and robberies were committed night and day; few men dared to venture from their homes, and these homes were converted into fortresses.'<sup>151</sup> The county return to national committee meeting held on 26 Feb. 1798 was 10,863, a slight increase on the previous return.<sup>152</sup> Coupled with Reynolds' information, the existence of an organised United Irish movement in Kildare, under determined leadership is confirmed. The county was also used as a connection point between Dublin and other counties. For example a society uncovered in Portarlinton corresponded with the capital via Rathangan.<sup>153</sup>

In south Kildare prominent figures were attacked; John Greene, Captain Beaver, Thomas Rawson and Major Allen all suffered.<sup>154</sup> Rawson reported to Wolfe in January that: 'The trade of timber cutting for pike handles has been carried on with great success - not a plantation escaping'. At Grangemellon thirty seven pikes were found, however enough timber for 2,300 more was discovered.<sup>155</sup> In January a sergeant of the Romney Fencibles was apparently murdered at Newbridge. The sergeant and a private had got very drunk in the town. The private reported in Naas the sergeant was attacked but no body or horse was ever found. Reprisals were taken against a local shopkeeper. However a letter to *The Press* suggested the man seized an opportune moment to desert.<sup>156</sup> The most publicised attack was the attempted murder of John Johnson Darrah, a magistrate from Eagle Hill, on 1 March. Darrah was so seriously wounded General Dundas initially reported he had died. He was shot in broad daylight by a man delivering post to his

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<sup>151</sup>Reynolds, *Life* vol. i, p. 195

<sup>152</sup>*The report from the secret committee of the house of commons with an appendix* p. 177.

<sup>153</sup>G. Vignoles to Robert Marshall 11 Feb. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/35/94).

<sup>154</sup>Reynolds *Life* vol. i, p. 195-6; Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 203.

<sup>155</sup>Thomas Rawson to [Wolfe] 6 Jan. 1798 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>156</sup>Capt. Richard L. Swayne to Major General Needham 1 Jan. 1798, Dundas to Abercromby 4 Jan. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/35/1, 620/35/17); *The Press* 13 Jan. 1798.

door. A man was arrested for the attack a few weeks later and confessed to the crime.<sup>157</sup>

During January momentum grew for the use of the Insurrection Act in south Kildare. Rawson wrote in early 1798: I '...agree with you that if the whole county had been proclaimed last September it would have stopped the contagion spreading as it has into Queen's County and Carlow'.<sup>158</sup> John Wolfe remained closely informed of proceedings in the southern baronies, particularly through Rawson who furnished him with a detailed account of disturbances in the area. In the first week of January no fewer than seventeen houses were attacked in the Athy - Stradbally area.<sup>159</sup> Nell Drought of Bellevue also urged Wolfe to encourage a speedy 'resolution'.<sup>160</sup> In mid January a requisition requesting a meeting of justices of the peace was signed by four southern magistrates. Thomas Fitzgerald and James Archibald refused to sign the document.<sup>161</sup> A meeting was arranged to be held in Athy but proclamation remained an uncertainty. As in the case of Carbery the previous year the use of draconian military legislation was opposed by liberal politicians. Rawson delineated the division as he perceived it in a letter to Wolfe:

Against:	For it	Neutral
Thomas Fitzgerald	Rev. A. Weldon	C. Bagot
James Archibald	John Greene	Col. Keatinge
Dom. Wm. O'Reilly	Samuel Yates	Dean Keatinge
Wogan Browne	Major Allen	

<sup>157</sup>Reynolds *Life* vol. i, p. 195; Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 197-8; Dundas to Pelham 2 Feb. 1798 [sic - March], Dundas to Pelham n.d. (N.A.I. S.O.C. 3160/1-2); J. Barrington, Naas to Edward Cooke 22 Mar. 1798, Solicitor general to ---- Naas 22 Mar. 1798 (Reb. Papers 620/36/47, 620/52/120)

<sup>158</sup>Thomas Rawson to John Wolfe n.d. 'Thursday evening' (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>159</sup>*ibid.*, also letters dated 10 Dec. 1797, 24 Dec. 1797 and 6 Jan 1798 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>160</sup>Nell Drought, near Athy to John Wolfe 11 Jan. 1798 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>161</sup>A. Weldon to Col. Wolfe 18 Jan. 1798. Weldon had opposed the use of proclamation the previous October, Weldon to Wolfe 24 Oct. 1797 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

Ambrose O’Ferrall

Captain Swayne

Richard Dease

J.S. Brownlowe

John Taylor

J.J. Darrah

Rawson advised Wolfe that if the measure was to be secured magistrates from the north needed to travel to Athy.<sup>162</sup> Wolfe informed Pelham on 21 January the meeting would take place on the following Thursday [25]. He utilised the information of Rawson and Weldon to state the case in favour of proclamation. He added that the mere threat of the action had produced ‘a complete change’ and stated the baronies of Kilkea and Moone, West and East Narragh and Rheban and ‘perhaps East Offaly’ were to be considered.<sup>163</sup>

Nonetheless Sir Fenton Aylmer was sufficiently worried about the extent of possible proclamation to write to Wolfe on the matter. He argued only those magistrates in a given barony could know what measures would best suit it. It was on this ground he supported the proclamation of Carbery, ‘the measure I detest’. Aylmer was a considerable landowner in the central barony of Connell and he feared its discussion because of the murder of the Romney Fencible sergeant in that area. He seemed to indicate a private plot was in place to extend proclamation as widely as possible - the calling of the meeting for Athy was for example suspicious to Aylmer. He warned:

....that no advantage [should] be taken of the absence of me and others to proclaim Connell. Should it be the wish of any, privately to set on foot by whom it may to proclaim the whole county I alone cry out against it but I hope and trust that no such measure may be attempted.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup>Thomas Rawson to John Wolfe n.d. ‘Sunday morning’ (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>163</sup>[copy of] John Wolfe to Thomas Pelham 21 Jan. 1798 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers). The sentiments are repeated in a letter to Edward Cooke of the same day, John Wolfe to Edward Cooke 21 Jan. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/35/52).

<sup>164</sup>Sir Fenton Aylmer to John Wolfe 23 Jan. 1798 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

Wolfe's reply rejected the existence of any 'secret intention or private management' with respect to the meeting, or any intention to proclaim the whole county. Indeed Wolfe himself had considered Athy an unwise venue.<sup>165</sup>

The meeting may have taken place later than initially arranged. It produced a memorial requesting the proclamation of five baronies: Kilkea and Moone, East and West Narragh and Rheban and East and West Offaly. Of fifteen magistrates present only one made any objection on the grounds the Col. Keatinge and John Taylor had not received notices. This challenge was dismissed. It emerged that 'several magistrates connected with the opposition members of parliament' had met at Keatinge's the previous Sunday and decided not to attend. In all some two to three hundred houses were represented to have been plundered for arms.<sup>166</sup> The baronies were proclaimed on 2 February 1798 and joined a growing territory in Leinster. By this point all of Queen's County (Jan. 1797) and Carlow (Nov. 1797) were already proclaimed. King's County was completely proclaimed on 23 March, while in Wicklow four baronies and two half baronies were proclaimed by 26 March.<sup>167</sup>

The Kildare spring assizes held in March 1798 produced another testing session for loyalists. On 22 March the solicitor general reported that only three capital convictions were secured. While he believed the juries were 'doing well' he nonetheless stated that: 'From the state of things here I think we must have an adjournment at all events'. Most of the local magistrates appear to have spent most of their time on patrol.<sup>168</sup>

Proclamation was the most obvious conservative reaction to the United Irish problem. Mary Duggan has argued the Orange Order played an

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<sup>165</sup>[copy of] John Wolfe to Sir Fenton Aylmer 23 Jan. 1798 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>166</sup>[copy of] John Wolfe to Thomas Pelham 27 Jan. 1798 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>167</sup>An account of the several parts of the kingdom of Ireland that have been proclaimed n.d. (P.R.O. HO 100/77/346-351).

<sup>168</sup>Solicitor General to ---- Naas 22 Mar. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/52/120).

important role in unnerving the movement in Carlow.<sup>169</sup> Given the beleaguered situation of many loyalists in Kildare the weakness of the Orange movement is initially surprising. There was one lodge formed at Monastereven in 1798 though its composition is unclear.<sup>170</sup> A letter in the Rebellion Papers attests the existence of a lodge in Naas in 1798 as well. The group met twice a week in the town and included 'a great many militia men'. It also suggests a group had been formed in Edenderry. One Atkinson, a shopkeeper is named in the letter, but the four signatories gave only their initials. Research carried out by Louis Cullen has shown the letter, which was addressed to William Kane Blackwood, was intercepted by the United Irishmen but later recovered in a raid on the Dublin home of John Hort.<sup>171</sup>

A number of Kildare men joined the Dublin Lodge No. 176 at an early date in 1798. John Montgomery, who acted as Kildare Grand Master and his neighbour Rev. John Keating both lived near Naas. They also encouraged the participation of their Carlow relations the Rochforts and Cornwalls. Two other conservative families provided members for the nascent lodge - the Knipes and Stratfords. Thomas Knipe was an early member, Elliot and Daniel Knipe also appear on an early list. Benjamin O'Neale and John Stratford, Lord Albborough's brothers, also became members.<sup>172</sup> The Orange Order in Kildare remained isolated and never presented the United Irishmen with a serious threat. However the latter movement was not unaware of the propaganda affects of fear of the Orange Order in the county.

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<sup>169</sup>Mary L. Duggan, 'County Carlow 1791-1801 a study in an age of revolution' (M.A. U.C.D. 1969) p. 125-43.

<sup>170</sup>Aiken McClelland, *The formation of the Orange Order* ([Belfast, 1971]) p. 13.

<sup>171</sup>J.H, J.D., C.W. and D.J. to J.W. Kane Blackwood 4 Mar. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/36/1); L.M. Cullen, 'Politics and rebellion: Wicklow in the 1790s' p. 471-2.

<sup>172</sup>Copy of a list of members of the Orange Lodge 176, Dublin City, 1798 (N.L.I. MSS 5398); William Blacker and Robert H. Wallace, *The formation of the Orange Order 1795-98* ed. Cecil Fitzpatrick (Belfast, 1994) p. 117-8; Duggan, 'County Carlow 1791-1801' p. 131-3.

Thomas Rawson's Loyal Athy Infantry, formed in late April, were suspected to be an Orange corps.<sup>173</sup> The idea was implicitly recognised but rejected by Rawson himself. In November he wrote to Wolfe:

I had much objection to any party which could give a handle to the disaffected and as such prevented any Orange society in my corps. I knew them to be steady loyal Protestants and did not imagine anything could increase their zeal. I have done everything in my power to reconcile but all to no purpose with the Roman Catholics every Protestant is an Orange man - and every Orange man looked on as an enemy.<sup>174</sup>

In January 1798 Rawson published a denial of the very existence of orangeism.<sup>175</sup> The Montgomerys, Stratfords and Knipes were all well known ultra conservatives, but none exerted a powerful local influence. The Kildare order's lack of support is not surprising given the county's largely Catholic demographic composition and liberal stance of many Protestants. Neither did Kildare possess a possible basis in the form of a concentrated population of lower class Protestants except perhaps in Naas.

On 30 March 1798 a Privy Council proclamation declared Ireland to be in a state of rebellion and imposed martial law. The county was to be forcibly pacified while stolen or concealed weapons or ammunition were to be recovered. Castlereagh directed the commander in chief of the army, Sir Ralph Abercromby to employ his troops on the disturbed counties of the country, including Kildare.<sup>176</sup> Some arms were surrendered during the last week of March. These included 626 muskets, 52 bayonets, 149 pistols, 122 swords and 12 pikes surrendered to General Wilford in Kildare. The great bulk of rebel armoury remained in their hands.<sup>177</sup> Abercromby's

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<sup>173</sup>Rawson floated the idea to Wolfe in early April, Thomas Rawson to John Wolfe 1 Apr. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/36/109); *D.E.P.* 24 Apr. 1798.

<sup>174</sup>Thomas Rawson to John Wolfe 9 Nov. 1798 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>175</sup>See below p. 130.

<sup>176</sup>*F.J.* 4 Apr. 1798; *Castlereagh correspondence* vol. i, p. 164.

<sup>177</sup>Camden to Portland 5 Apr. 1798 (P.R.O. HO 100/80/173-4).

preferred method of pacification was the use of free quarters. Accordingly 4,000 copies of a proclamation were released in Kildare. (The same notice was also posted up in Queen's and King's Counties). It requested the return of stolen arms within ten days, 'if they do not, they are informed that the troops will be quartered in large bodies to live at free quarters among them, and other very severe means be used to enforce obedience to this notice'.<sup>178</sup> Sir Charles Asgill's last minute appeal to the Queen's County populace to surrender arms issued on 22 April, suggested free quarters had already commenced in Kildare. In the former county, the measure when applied produced swift results - large numbers of arms and ammunition were recovered by a disciplined force.<sup>179</sup>

In Kildare the measure was most forcibly applied to wealthy liberal landowners. William Drennan was aware that free quarters had commenced in Kildare by 24 April. Wogan Browne reputedly had thirty soliders at Castle Browne, '...for as the cabins afford little or nothing for the entertainment of man and horse the castles of the country gentlemen must pay for it without much discrimination'.<sup>180</sup> The policy was applied particularly vigorously under the direction of Col. Colin Campbell from Athy. Thomas Reynolds' son recorded that one marauding party returned to headquarters with, 'a piano forte! a pig, a bundle of house linen, bedding, a bureau, jars of wine and spirits, fitches of bacon, geese, turkeys, fowls, carpets, wearing apparel, kitchen furniture, pier glasses, pictures etc'.<sup>181</sup>

Reynolds paradoxically became a victim of the military rampages. On 25 March he appealed to a congregation at Mageny Bridge to return arms and remain peaceable. The resulting influx of surrendered arms suggested to the

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<sup>178</sup>'Notice to the inhabitants of Kildare' dated Kildare, 3 Apr. 1798 in *Castlereagh correspondence* vol. i, p. 169-70 and P.R.O. HO 100/80/177-8.

<sup>179</sup>*Castlereagh correspondence* vol. i, p. 186-7; Pakenham, *The year of liberty* p. 64-5. Pakenham provides an account of disarming in Kildare see p. 66-75.

<sup>180</sup>*Drennan letters* p. 273.

<sup>181</sup>*Reynolds Life* vol. i, p. 216-7.

government and military that he possessed a suspicious degree of influence. During April rumours circulated that Lord Edward was hidden in the cellars of Kilkea Castle.<sup>182</sup> Reynolds' residence was subsequently billeted with two hundred soldiers and eighty horses, initially under Captain Erskine, later Col. Campbell. The castle was thoroughly searched, nothing was recovered, but it was extensively plundered and later occupied by the troops as a strategic point during the rebellion. Reynolds was arrested in early May and, according to his son, was forced to agree to provide detailed evidence on the United Irishmen. He quickly revealed himself as the person who had supplied the information which led to the Bond's arrests in March. He subsequently provided government with a full statement before the privy council. Reynolds later calculated his total losses at £12,760.<sup>183</sup>

Thomas Fitzgerald of Geraldine suffered similarly. He was forced to quarter ten officers, one hundred and ten troops and fifty horses for twenty nine days beginning on 20 April. As mentioned his corps were ignominiously disarmed in public. He was initially placed under house arrest but later taken to Dublin.<sup>184</sup> After his arrest a number of rebel captains in the Athy area including James Walsh, Patrick Dowling, Terence Toole and Pat Bearns drew up a rescue plan. However Fitzgerald himself dissuaded them from this course of action.<sup>185</sup> An understated estimate of his losses came to £2,000.<sup>186</sup> Those associated with Lord Edward were particularly suspect and were accordingly 'visited with a heavy hand'. Patrick Dunne of Dollardstown, Thomas Dunne of Leinster Lodge and Daniel Caulfield of Levetstown

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<sup>182</sup>Reynolds, *Life* vol. i p. 218-9, 223.

<sup>183</sup>*ibid.*, p. 223-31.

<sup>184</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 41; Thomas Fitzgerald to ---- 21 Jul. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/37/118); T. Fitzgerald esq....to James Bernard Clinch esq. 20 Dec. 1802 in Madden, *United Irishmen* 3rd series vol. ii, p. 340-4; *D.E.P.* 14 May 1798.

<sup>185</sup>Information of Patrick Whelan, 1804 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/50/38/67).

<sup>186</sup>Thomas Fitzgerald to --- 21 Sept 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/40/81).

were all visited by Campbell's Dragoons.<sup>187</sup> Caulfield was arrested in mid May and charged with high treason. He denied any involvement in United Irish activities.<sup>188</sup> A Monasterevan miller was extremely worried his property was to be destroyed as it was on Lord Edward's estate '...which is said will be laid waste'.<sup>189</sup> Drennan reported in early May that Col. Keatinge and Col. Lumm Sampson had been arrested. Madden states the latter was arrested in England and returned to Dublin.<sup>190</sup> Whatever possibility existed of the leading liberal - radical politicians leading a rebellion it now vanished. In that sense the period of free quarters was crucial.

General Lake's succession to the command of the Irish army on 25 April following Abercromby's resignation signalled a shift in military policy - free quarters were dropped in favour of more direct military pressure. Draconian measures were now directly applied to the lower orders. Campbell at Athy again appeared at the forefront of the assault. Flogging was to be used to extract confessions from suspected persons. William Farrell a Carlow United Irishmen described the introduction of the measures in Athy:

Accordingly the triangle [to which victims were tied] was put up in the public street of Athy and work began instantly. There was no ceremony used in choosing victims; the first to hand done well enough....the whole weight of the persecution fell on the unfortunate Catholics. They were stripped naked tied to the triangle and their flesh cut without mercy....one single informer in a town was sufficient to destroy all the United Irishmen in it....<sup>191</sup>

Farrell asserted the flogging produced immediate results - large numbers of arms were produced. Among those specifically targeted were blacksmiths and carpenters

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<sup>187</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 40-1.

<sup>188</sup>*D.E.P.* 14 May 1798; Evidence of Lt. Caulfield n.d. [1798] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/17/34).

<sup>189</sup>E. Kelly, Monasterevan to John Carleton 2 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/37/6).

<sup>190</sup>*Drennan letters* p. 274; Madden, *United Irishmen* 1st series (Dublin, 1842) vol. ii, p. 152.

<sup>191</sup>William Farrell, *The autobiography of William Farrell of Carlow* ed. Roger McHugh (Dublin, 1949) p. 75.

suspected of manufacturing pikes.<sup>192</sup> The innocent naturally suffered with those involved in United Irish activities. Thomas Fitzgerald recorded a man flogged five hundred times who was later found to be innocent. He was particularly scathing of Thomas Rawson's role in the proceedings, designating him 'the offal of a dunghill'.<sup>193</sup>

The tortuous counter revolt appears to have been applied most rigorously in the southern baronies of the county. Campbell writing in mid May acclaimed the success of the measures which had produced arms, ammunitions and confessions. On 15 May he reported the names of captains had been received and added '....a great number of pikes some hundreds....within these two days' had been handed up. Leaders however, for example Matthew Kenna, remained in hiding.<sup>194</sup> By mid May the draconian measures produced positive results in terms of detection and recovery of weapons throughout south Kildare. Some attempt was made by what one source termed 'rebelly [sic] petitioners' to stop the exertions of Capt. Erskine and Cornet Love in Ballitore. This measure appears to have failed. Increasingly numbers of weapons were left anonymously outside the houses of loyalist gentlemen. A source from Baltinglass reported that: '....the sight of the pikes were shocking, from 18 inches to 2 feet long, with two wings about 10 inches long, reversed in a bow for cutting bridle reins....'<sup>195</sup>

Mary Leadbeater recorded the military exertions imposed on the small village of Ballitore. In the aftermath of the proclamation of 30 March a detachment of King's County Militia commanded by a native of the area was placed in the area. They were quickly replaced by the Tyrone regiment 'mostly composed

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<sup>192</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 42; Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater papers* vol ii, p. 216.

<sup>193</sup>T. Fitzgerald esq...to James Bernard Clinch esq. 20 Dec. 1802 in Madden, *United Irishmen* 3rd series vol. ii, p. 340-4.

<sup>194</sup>Campbell to Edward Cooke 14 May 1798, Campbell to --- 15 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/37/67, 620/37/78 ).

<sup>195</sup>Letter from Baltinglass to Edward Cooke 14 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/3/32/5).

of professed Orangemen, wearing the ribbon of their party'. Ballitore and its hinterland was foraged for provisions. Some inhabitants obtained protections from Campbell but the appeals of Col. Keatinge for leniency were ignored and 'great waste was committed and unchecked robbery'. As military violence was increased results were produced; pikes and arms were surrendered and blacksmiths were taken to Athy. Prisoners were also removed to Naas and six Yeomen to Dunlavin. Leadbeater's account reveals the misery this policy wreaked on areas of Kildare. The policy may have produced pacification but it also hardened attitudes further among those who suffered.<sup>196</sup>

The rigorous disarming was applied less forcefully further north. In Monasterevan suspected rebels were arrested among them a publican, a smith and a schoolmaster. The local Yeomanry had transported two leading United Irish figures to Athy in April. At least seven houses were burned. Fifty stands of arms were taken from the canal but 'sent back'. At Kilcullen similar measures were introduced. The Dragoons recovered forty to fifty pikes and received information on suspected rebels.<sup>197</sup> In late April Dundas received detailed information on the United Irishmen in the Kildare-Kilcullen area from a 'man of family and fortune' perhaps someone who feared the prospect of free quarters which had commenced. The information included a detailed report on twenty three 'suspected persons'. The informant was perfectly correct in his statement of United Irish structures. He also stated, 'every man upon the Curragh has a pike; they are hid underground'.<sup>198</sup>

On 11 May Camden reported to Portland that the severe measures adopted at Athy produced beneficial results. Information supplied to General Wilford led to the capture of persons under Reynolds' command in Kilkea and Moone. Great numbers of pikes had been delivered up and were still arriving. 'The

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<sup>196</sup>Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater papers* vol. ii, p. 213-6.

<sup>197</sup>Lewis Morgan, Monasterevan to John Lees 2 May 1798. Enclosed: ---- to John Lees, Kilcullen 9 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/37/8); *Castlereagh correspondence* vol. i, p. 185.

<sup>198</sup>*Castlereagh correspondence* vol. i, p. 188-9.

organisation of the military committee [in Kildare]' he concluded, 'is broken and pursued.'<sup>199</sup> Four days later General Dundas, the midlands commander, wrote complacently to Dublin Castle:

The last few days have furnished me with very affecting scenes - my house filled with the poor deluded people giving up their arms, receiving protections and declaring that moment to be the happiest in their lives. Be assured that the head of the hydra is off - and the County of Kildare will for a long while enjoy profound peace and quiet.<sup>200</sup>

The measures reached the north later in May. Louisa Conolly wrote to William Ogilvie on 21 May describing a familiar scene of burning houses and surrendered pikes. Regiments of a Scottish force had worked their way through the towns of Kilcock, Maynooth, Celbridge and Leixlip obtaining mediocre results in terms of arms. The Conollys themselves busily urged the local populace to cooperate.<sup>201</sup> At Prosperous the level of violence used by Captain Richard Swayne became notorious. One of the rebels who took part in rebel activities in the area, Bernard Duggan, a cotton weaver and native of Armagh, provided R.R. Madden with an account of the events of 1798 and 1803, in 1838.<sup>202</sup> His narrative conflicts with that of Musgrave on certain points of detail. For example, Musgrave states Captain Swayne and a detachment of City of Cork Militia and Ancient Britons arrived in the town on 20 May. He also argues exhortations to produce arms, including one by Dr. John Esmonde, failed miserably.<sup>203</sup> Duggan states Swayne arrived on 22 May and immediately implemented free quarters, arrested twelve men,

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<sup>199</sup>Camden to Portland 11 May 1798 (P.R.O. HO 100/76/170-7).

<sup>200</sup>General Dundas to Edward Cooke 16 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/37/90).

<sup>201</sup>Louisa Conolly to William Ogilvie 21 May 1798 in McDermott (ed.), *The memoirs of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* p. 326.

<sup>202</sup>Bernard Duggan's narrative (T.C.D. Madden Papers 873/30). Duggan's narrative was printed by Madden in *United Irishmen* 3rd. series vol. ii, p. 96-116.

<sup>203</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 234-5.

burned property and tortured suspects, though he admitted pitch capping was not used.<sup>204</sup> 'The country was in a horrid state of alarm and foment,' he wrote, 'for there seemed no safety for the people.'

Martial law was introduced into Leinster to quell disturbed counties. It was in turn applied to the most disturbed areas of County Kildare itself, particularly those baronies which had recently been proclaimed. By mid May the leadership of the Kilkea and Moone barony was decimated. The Corporal, Thomas Reynolds, had turned informer and was later arrested. At the same time a number of prominent Captains were taken up - Luke Brannick, a Yeoman, John Pendred, Philip Germaine, Patrick Germaine and David Fardy. Their county associates were aware of Reynolds' treachery at this point and urged their colleagues to implicate him which they did. In turn these prisoners provided information concerning the lower composition of the barony. Two long lists of names are included with Brannick's testimony. Most of those named were from Castledermot.<sup>205</sup> The measures applied by Campbell at Athy also yielded results in the form of information on United Irish activists.<sup>206</sup>

While Camden was correct to assert the military committee in Kildare was 'pursued' he was mistaken in concluding it was 'broken'. His conclusions were based on the complacent reports of Dundas. A county meeting was convened on 18 March at which Thomas Reynolds read letters he had received from Lord Edward

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<sup>204</sup>Madden, *United Irishmen* 3rd. series vol. ii, p. 97-8. This contradicts Walter (Watty)Cox's account of Swayne, the archetypal pitchcapper, *The Irish Magazine* vol. iii, (1810) p. 49-50.

<sup>205</sup>Examination of Luke Brannick 8 May 1798, Examination of John Pendred n.d. (620/52/75), Examination of Patrick Germaine 10 May 1798 (Reb. Papers 620/37/48), Examination of Philip Germaine 10 May 1798 (Reb. Papers 620/37/49), Examination of Luke Brannick 10 May 1798 (Reb. Papers 620/37/50), Examination of David Fardy 5 May 1798 (Reb. Papers 620/37/25), Copy of information of Philip and Patrick Germaine n.d. (Reb. Papers 620/52/75)

<sup>206</sup>Information of James Kelly, Co. Kildare 14 May 1798, Information of John Chandler, Shrowland, Parish of Athy 17 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb papers 620/37/66, 98).

Fitzgerald three days earlier. Reynolds had in fact met him three times during the previous week. An address urged the members to fill vacancies and remain calm. A report from the provincial committee was also forwarded. The Kildare organisation was deeply worried by the arrests. A member was apparently killed before the meeting, held at Reilly's on the Curragh, and buried nearby.<sup>207</sup> Madden argued Reynolds was already suspected but managed to shift the focus of suspicion onto Felix Rourke of Rathcoole.<sup>208</sup> At the meeting new officers were elected as a precaution. Micheal Reynolds replaced George Cummins as secretary, John Esmonde replaced Reynolds as treasurer. Tom Daly being absent remained an officer. The following day Reynolds met a number of his captains at Athy. He terminated his involvement with the United Irishmen at this point. His son stated Daniel Caulfield was appointed Joint-Colonel with him but this is unclear.<sup>209</sup> His information on the April-May period is either fleeting or non-existent.

Reynolds' Kildare associates quickly learned of his treachery. At a meeting of the Leinster Provincial in the Brazen Head, Dublin, (held at some point after the Bond arrests) Micheal Reynolds proposed he be killed. In early April one of the Sheares brothers met the Kildare committee at Dr. John Esmonde's house at Osberstown and informed them that Reynolds was definitely the informer. He was then requested to attend a meeting to be held on the Curragh at Bells on 19 April. The initial request was made by Kenna and another man in the presence of Thomas Dunne of Leinster Lodge but was refused. The meeting in his absence decided to assassinate him. Matthew Kenna and Micheal Murphy a butcher from Naas were deputised to carry out the attack but failed.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>207</sup>Thomas Reynolds...information before the Privy Council, 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/3/32/23);

Reynolds, *Life* vol. i, p. 212.

<sup>208</sup>Madden, *The United Irishmen* second edn. vol. 1, p. 417.

<sup>209</sup>Reynolds, *Life* vol. 1, p. 213-5.

<sup>210</sup>*ibid.*, p. 220-4; Madden, *op. cit.*, p. 414-5.

The evidence of Kildare during April and May suggests the draconian military measures initiated by government were not applied forcibly to those areas which were tranquil. There are no accounts of the Athy atrocities repeated further north, though important discoveries were undoubtedly made. Some of the county delegates were known to the government but had escaped, particularly Micheal Reynolds. According to Patrick O'Kelly a meeting of Kildare Colonels was held in Dublin in early April to fill vacancies, possibly under the guidance of Lord Edward Fitzgerald. He certainly met a number of Athy Captains around the same time, indicating the continuing perception of his importance.<sup>211</sup> In mid April the Leinster Provincial issued a fourteen point set of instructions, these were effectively intended to prepare the country's United Irishmen for war. They concerned practical measures to be taken both individually and collectively.<sup>212</sup> A paper found on Lord Edward on his arrest further evidences the ongoing military preparations in the county. It listed the military strength of government in each Kildare barony, estimating a total force of 3,819. The forces were most heavily concentrated in the disturbed areas proclaimed in February and the key strategic towns of Kilcullen and Naas.<sup>213</sup>

The April instructions also included a return of men in eight Leinster counties and the city of Dublin. The Kildare organisation was put at 11,910, an increase of over one thousand since the return of February. A return emanating from Sirr the Dublin police chief at the same time seems to have been based on this return.<sup>214</sup> The figure was produced before the violent disarming had commenced in

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<sup>211</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 33, 35.

<sup>212</sup>*The report from the secret committee of the house of commons with an appendix* p. 233-4, Instructions drawn up by the committee of Leinster 19 April 1798. The measures are summarised by Ruan O'Donnell, 'General Joseph Holt and the Rebellion of 1798 in County Wicklow' (M.A., U.C.D. 1991) p. 72-3.

<sup>213</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* appendix xv, p. 61.

<sup>214</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* app. xv p. 61; List of United Irish returns in Leinster received from Sirr, n.d. (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/37/29).

earnest and is quite credible. The United Irishmen in Kildare had recruited members through a plethora of propaganda techniques and the political debates in the county had helped foster a spirit of radicalism. In early 1798, however, the threat of Orange men seems to have made an appearance. Thomas Fitzgerald's possession of an Orange oath is one indication.<sup>215</sup> As early as January Thomas Rawson issued a statement denying their very existence and implying the use of 'Orange fear' as a radical tactic.

Some persons have basely and maliciously endeavoured to agitate the public mind by reports that certain societies called Orangemen have been formed for the extirpation of Roman Catholics: I declare solemnly, that I do not know nor do I believe that any such society exists or ever has been formed in this country.<sup>216</sup>

The extent of the use of this mechanism is unclear but it may have resulted in an increase in United Irish numbers. Meanwhile those who had previously attempted to remain neutral were now driven towards the United Irishmen by repressive measures which seemed to indicate impending destruction.

The strength of the Kildare movement is also reflected in its six Colonels, noted on the April instructions. Only two other Leinster counties had chosen Colonels - Dublin and Meath with three each. An almost identical return of men marked 'a smith at Celbridge' but undated, stated Kildare had twelve Colonels and possibly reflects the situation by late April.<sup>217</sup> The events of April and May undoubtedly disabled some areas but communication was maintained until the outbreak of rebellion. Micheal Reynolds, George Lube and Hugh Ware held 'frequent communications with the executive'.<sup>218</sup> R.R. Madden further evidences

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<sup>215</sup>see above p. 109.

<sup>216</sup>Statement issued by T.J. Rawson, Glasealy, 27 January 1798. Printed in Musgrave, *Rebellions* appendix xv p. 65.

<sup>217</sup>Return of arms, a smith at Celbridge (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/52/105).

<sup>218</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 43.

this assertion. He states Thomas Andoe and George Lube disseminated Dublin's instructions for a rising to Kildare on 20 May.<sup>219</sup>

Given the capricious nature of the Dublin executive in the weeks before the outbreak of rebellion, Lord Edward held a crucial position as the only experienced militarist. Infighting in the executive produced uncertainty and anxiety, particularly given the worsening situation in a strong county like Kildare. T.A. Emmet later cited disarming in the county as an immediate cause of the rising.<sup>220</sup> However the arrest of Lord Edward on 19 May in Dublin affected not only the national hopes of co-ordinated rising but Kildare's aspirations of a Fitzgerald led rebellion. O'Kelly commented: 'From the moment of Lord Edward's tragic arrest, a universal gloom spread through all the ranks of the United Irish in Dublin; the news soon reached the adjoining counties and was speedily spread over the whole kingdom'.<sup>221</sup>

It is difficult to gauge how many arms were surrendered by the rebels before the rebellion started. Gosford at Naas stated in July that previous to the rebellion he recovered 150 pikes and eight to ten firelocks. On the day of the rising he recovered 800 pikes and twenty to thirty firelocks from the defeated rebels.<sup>222</sup> The paper army of 12,000 Kildare United Irishmen were neither completely disorganised nor disheartened. A rising was daily expected by local leaders. When Thomas Reynolds was arrested in early May he betrayed one of the yeomen who was escorting him to Dublin. The man, who served on the county committee, informed Reynolds that his namesake Micheal had received information from Dublin, a rising was to take place in ten days.<sup>223</sup> The violent disarming, combined

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<sup>219</sup>Madden, *United Irishmen* 3rd series vol. ii, p. 101.

<sup>220</sup>*The report from the secret committee of the house of commons with an appendix* p. 320.

<sup>221</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 43.

<sup>222</sup>Gosford to General Craig, Naas 15 Jul. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/39/76).

<sup>223</sup>Thomas Reynolds...information before the Privy Council, 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/3/32/23).

with Thomas Reynolds' information on the Kildare organisation left rebellion as the only practical course for many United men in the county.

## Chapter Five

### The 1798 Rebellion in County Kildare 24 May - 30 May

Chapters five and six will present a coherent account of the 1798 rebellion in Kildare from its outbreak on the morning of 24 May until its official end on 21 July. While the events in Kildare often figured prominently in history, they paled in significance in comparison to the Wexford theatre. Furthermore, at the moment when the Kildare rebellion began to lose momentum that of Wexford exploded - a fact reflected in the written histories.<sup>1</sup> This has tended to obscure the events which occurred in Kildare between late May and the arrival of Wexford and Wicklow forces in the county in July. For the purposes of analysis the rebellion may be divided into two phases. This chapter will deal with the first phase from 24 May to 30 May. The Kildare insurgents achieved their territorial zenith between 24 and 26 May. By the latter date they controlled a large swathe of territory in southern Kildare. This fact temporarily masked their rapid loss of momentum. The United Irish army suffered defeats at Naas, Carlow, Tara and a failed to attack Athy. This resulted in the loss of urban centres captured, a process completed by 1 June. For almost two months the Kildare insurgents posed a serious threat to government

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<sup>1</sup>The most detailed accounts of the Kildare rebellion are provided by Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 233-300, 526-30 and O'Kelly, *General history* p. 57-96, 192-3, 262-8. Other useful nineteenth century accounts include: Gordon, *History of the rebellion in Ireland in the year 1798* p.83-102, 213-4; Rawson, *Statistical survey* p. v-xxiv; Teeling, *The history of the Irish rebellion of 1798* p. 83-6, 93-5, 235-8, 275-83, 289; W.H. Maxwell, *History of the Irish rebellion of 1798* (London, 1903 first published 1845) p. 60-83; Kavenagh, *A popular history of the rebellion of 1798* p. 25-52. For the most recent accounts see: S. O'Muirtille, *Kildare 1798 commemoration* (Kildare, 1948); P. MacSuibhne, *Kildare in '98* (Naas, 1978); T. Pakenham, *The year of liberty* p. 107-36, 158-9, 274-7; McDowell, *Ireland in the age of imperialism and revolution 1760-1801* p. 616-22, 635-6.

within a few miles of Dublin itself. The rebellion engulfed the entire county and involved thousands of men and women.

Lord Edward's arrest seriously undermined prospects of a united county effort. This fact, however, conceals the reality that different parts of the county were to fulfil various functions within the strategy of the United Irish army. Thomas Graham has argued the United Irishmen formulated a basic three part plan which was gradually passed to government from March 1798. The first phase involved the capture of key sites within Dublin. Forces in the surrounding areas; north county Dublin, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow were to bolster this attack by forming a ring around Dublin. Outer counties were to capture the important centres in their own counties.<sup>2</sup>

It remains unclear exactly what areas of Kildare were involved in the second phase of the plan. Undoubtedly the north Kildare rebels were expected to take part in a march on Dublin. Prospective jottings found on Lord Edward's possession on his arrest indicate this was considered:

Suppose R. force divided into three columns. The left of the *Kildare line* to...[assemble at] Cloncurry, or between it and Clonard Bridge; a detachment to be sent to Clonard Bridge, as soon as possible; that *body* [column] to advance by Kilcock, Maynooth, Leixlip and Chapelizod towards Dublin.<sup>3</sup>

Information on the Kildare element of any plan are scant. A more unsatisfactory method of determining the nature of United Irish strategies is to examine what did occur. It is difficult to determine if attacks on Naas, Clane or Kilcullen were part of any semi circular assault on Dublin. More significantly the dearth of large scale rebel activity in north Kildare during the first week of rebellion may be indicate the important role designated to the United Irish forces in that area. The immediate

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas Graham, "'An union of power'?: The United Irish Organisation: 1795-1798' in Dickson, Keogh and Whelan (ed.), *The United Irishmen: radicalism, republicanism and reaction* (Dublin, 1993) p. 251.

<sup>3</sup>*The report from the secret committee of the house of commons with an appendix* p. 146.

reason for the apparent disorganisation was the failure of the Dublin city element. It is tempting therefore to conclude the north Kildare rebels - in close contact with the city - held back for this specific reason.

By 23 May Dublin Castle was aware of impending insurrection in Dublin and surrounding areas.<sup>4</sup> Government forces dealt effectively with the United Irish threat in the capital. The failure of the internal Dublin plan meant phase two of the rebel strategy was rendered ineffective. However this in turn provided the attack on Naas with increased importance within the context of a Kildare rebellion. Micheal Reynolds of Johnstown suddenly became very important. An arrest warrant against him had been issued in April. He was still secretary of the Kildare county committee, and as such technically the leader of the Kildare United Irishmen. More immediately he was the commander of the rebel forces in the vicinity of Naas. His house was burned a few days before the rebellion.<sup>5</sup> According to Patrick O'Kelly he personally sanctioned an attack on the Munster mail coaches on the night of the rising. Their arrival in County Kildare indicated something had gone wrong in Dublin. However the Naas assault also indicates some previous level of mobilisation near the town.

The garrison at Naas was heavily fortified and adequately soldiered. Lord Gosford commanded 150 of his own Armagh Militia, 35 Ancient Britons under Major Whaley, 16 Yeomen under Richard Nevill and 24 cavalry. The garrison also possessed two field guns. At 2:30 on the morning of 24 May an attack commenced under Micheal Reynolds mounted and in his Yeoman's uniform.<sup>6</sup> A captured rebel estimated the force at 1,000. They attacked largely from the Johnstown road to the north of the town and at least three other entrances. They quickly penetrated the

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<sup>4</sup>S. Sproule to J. Lees, received 1/2 past 4/ 23 May [1798] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers, 620/51/118); Graham, "An union of power"? The United Irish Organisation: 1795-1798' p. 253.

<sup>5</sup>(copy) Lord Gosford, Naas to General Lake 24 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers, 620/27/152); Warrant for the arrest of Micheal Reynolds...for 'treasonable practices' signed by Castlereagh 6 May 1798 (T.C.D. Sirr Papers 869/6 f.2).

<sup>6</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 233.

town streets. Their efforts were concentrated on government troops stationed near the gaol. Possibly the rebels intended to liberate prisoners. Troops were engaged for three quarters of an hour, but three surges failed to produce results and the rebels finally dropped their weapons and fled. This was followed by a cavalry charge. At least thirty two men were found dead in the streets and up to one hundred outside. Three men with green cockades were taken and hanged in the town. Government troops suffered only six fatalities. While Gosford expressed satisfaction at the actions of the infantry and cavalry generally, 'as to the Yeomanry,' he wrote, 'I wish we could make a good report of them'.<sup>7</sup> Contrary to Patrick O'Kelly's assertion of indiscipline among the rebels which made defeat inevitable, Reynolds' force was remarkably disciplined in making such a determined strike against a strong force. Reynolds himself escaped drawing some of his force to Blackmore Hill near Blessington.<sup>8</sup>

As Gosford wrote to the commander in chief at eight o'clock in the morning the news of the action at Prosperous and Clane had already arrived. News of Kilkullen arrived as he wrote. The rebel defeat at Naas was crucial. It provided a key base for government as the surrounding area was set ablaze. Victory at Naas would have provided potential rebels with evidence of the strength of their cause. At the same time Naas was attacked, the small garrisons at Prosperous and Clane came under assault. This suggests Reynolds did not act 'solely from himself' as O'Kelly intimates.<sup>9</sup>

While the loyalists at Naas were informed of an intended rising the more isolated garrisons were not. The attack on the small town at Prosperous provided the Kildare rebels with their first victory. Despite the level of violence used by Capt. Swayne immediately before the rebellion Bernard Duggan makes no assertion that the rebellion when it arrived was purely reactive, although twelve men

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<sup>7</sup>(copy) Lord Gosford, Naas to General Lake 24 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers, 620/27/152).

<sup>8</sup>*ibid.*; Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 233-4; O'Kelly, *General history* p. 58-9.

<sup>9</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 58-9.

arrested on 23 May were scheduled for execution the next day. The order to rise came from 'the United men's committee...the people were mostly scattered away from the town, for fear of being arrested, but soon got the word and began to assemble towards evening'.<sup>10</sup> Esmonde and other local leaders persuaded Swayne to order his sentinels not to challenge those approaching the town to facilitate the surrender of rebel weapons, probably in anticipation of the intended rising.<sup>11</sup>

Duggan clearly states Dr. John Esmonde was 'commanding general over the people'.<sup>12</sup> He was accompanied by Phil Mite a Yeoman, and local farmers and artisans, most prominently: Andrew Farrell, John Mahon, Thomas Wylde, Bryan Rourke, Bernard Duggan, Bryan McDermott, Edward Hanlon, Patrick Tobin and Denis Hanlon. Their forces gathered at the canal to the south of the town. Swayne's troops were concentrated in the barracks vacated by the Armagh Militia, a former cotton factory and a number of houses throughout the town. The rebel attack, which possibly commenced before the assault on Naas (Musgrave stated it began at two o'clock) quickly turned into a rout. The rebels rushed the barrack where Captain Swayne slept, killing him and trapping most of the soldiers inside.<sup>13</sup> William Farrell, the Carlow rebel, believed Andrew, his namesake killed Swayne.<sup>14</sup>

Thomas Davis, watching from a nearby house described the scene:

On looking out of his window he perceived a great body of people armed with pikes and fire arms, between whom and the soldiers in the barracks a constant firing was maintained...soon after the examinant saw the barracks on fire and heard the soldiers exclaim "The house is on fire, we shall be burned or suffocated: we can fight no longer!" That soon after the examinant saw the

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<sup>10</sup>Madden, *United Irishmen* 3rd series vol. ii, p. 98.

<sup>11</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 235.

<sup>12</sup>Madden, *op. cit.*, 3rd. series vol. ii, p. 98.

<sup>13</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 234-5.

<sup>14</sup>Farrell, *Carlow in '98 the autobiography of William Farrell of Carlow* . For his account of the battle of Prosperous see p. 223-7.

roof of the said barrack fall in. Examinant saith that the said rebels, whose numbers had increased so much as to fill the streets of Prosperous aforesaid, and to cover the adjacent fields, on the falling in of the roof of the said barrack, gave many shouts which seemed to rend the skies, and made this examinant and his family thrill with horror; and the said rebels exclaimed that the day was their own, and they would then plant the tree of liberty.<sup>15</sup>

The rebels quickly realised the ground floor of the barracks was full of straw which was used to burn the building. Some soldiers were consumed by the flames, others leapt to their death or were received on pike ends attempting to flee. Richard Griffith claimed fifty Militia and twenty Ancient Britons perished - practically the entire garrison based on Musgrave's calculations.<sup>16</sup>

With the battle won Esmonde on the fringes of the town perceived a small military party (the nature of this group is unclear, perhaps a Yeomanry patrol) as a larger army from Dublin and being ill informed of the battle he ordered a general retreat. Many of those in the town soon realised their mistake but Esmonde and his aide-de-camp Phil Mite galloped away.<sup>17</sup> Victory gained, the rebels began to search for arms (and enemies) in the town and the surrounding countryside. Two men were immediately targeted; Mr Brewer, an English cotton manufacturer and Henry Stamer, the local justice of the peace and a large property owner. Both were killed. Musgrave stated that on the death of Brewer, Andrew Farrell declared 'Behold the body of a heretic tyrant'.<sup>18</sup> A number of families in the neighbourhood were terrorised, mainly Protestants. These activities produced some dissension

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<sup>15</sup>Affidavit of Thomas Davis of Prosperous 16 Sept. 1798 (T.C.D. MS 871 Depositions 1798 f. 81).  
Printed in Musgrave, *Rebellions* appendix xv, p. 67-8.

<sup>16</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 234-5; Richard Griffith, Naas to Thomas Pelham 4 Jun. 1798 (B.L., Pelham Papers Add. MS 33,105 f.380-5).

<sup>17</sup>Madden, *United Irishmen* 3rd. series vol. ii, p. 99-100

<sup>18</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 237.

among the rebels but a plea for assistance from their Clane comrades withdrew most of their attention.<sup>19</sup>

While Prosperous rebels were completing a sweeping victory rebels unsuccessfully mounted an attack on neighbouring Clane. An initial attack by 300 men was repulsed, despite the fact that a body of the rebels secreted themselves in the town before the assault was launched. The second offensive was more audacious. It was led by six men in Ancient British uniforms (which suggests some Prosperous rebels were involved) but was foiled by the vigilance of the local commander Captain Jepson of the Armagh Militia.<sup>20</sup> At three o'clock Richard Griffith was awoken and informed of the engagement. The intervention of his Yeomen succeeded in dispersing the insurgent force threatening the town. Soon after five in the morning an assault was launched by the Prosperous rebels, but the garrison at Clane quickly rallied and pursued the assailants to near Prosperous.<sup>21</sup>

As Duggan noted the failure to take Clane was 'but to little effect,' as both the Armagh Militia and Yeomen were ordered to retreat to Naas.<sup>22</sup> As he left Clane Griffith was joined by his First Lieutenant, Esmonde. Phil Mite had already informed Griffith of Esmonde's actions. The latter was arrested when the party arrived in Naas. He was sent to Dublin on 8 June, court martialed and hanged from Carlisle Bridge on 14 June 1798 where he met his fate 'with the greatest fortitude

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<sup>19</sup>*ibid.*, p. 236-9; Information of Jane Davis, Prosperous, wife of Thomas Davis now Cook St. Dublin 20 Oct. 1798, Information of John Williams of the city of Dublin, captain of the late 120th regiment of foot 20 Oct 1798, Information of Mary Eldon, wife of Nicholas Eldon Oct 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/40/174).

<sup>20</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 240.

<sup>21</sup>Richard Griffith, Naas to Thomas Pelham 4 Jun. 1798 (B.L., Pelham Papers Add. MS 33,105 f.380-5 ).

<sup>22</sup>Madden, *United Irishmen* 3rd. series vol. ii, p. 104.

and composure'.<sup>23</sup> Esmonde was a serious loss to the rebels of the Prosperous area as an influential and recognised leader among the local United Irishmen. His behaviour after the battle of Prosperous is confusing. Perhaps he joined his yeomen believing the rebels were defeated or wanted to gather intelligence at Naas without realising he had been identified. The roots of Esmonde's radicalism are apparent in his involvement with Catholic politics and the United Irishmen in the early 1790s. The opposition of Esmonde and Griffith on the battlefield of 1798 evidences the simplicity of equating the liberal cause of the mid 1790s with the radical cause of 1798.

General Dundas at Castlemartin received information on the eve of the rising that the Kilcullen rebels were preparing for assault.<sup>24</sup> Kilcullen Bridge remained tranquil in the morning. However a body of rebels, possibly three hundred were installed in the church yard of Old Kilcullen, on high ground. On marshalling his forces Dundas impetuously ordered his cavalry, consisting of Ninth Dragoons and Romney Fencibles to charge up the stony hill on the rebel position, led by Captains Cooke and Erskine. On the third charge most of the soldiers were swallowed up by the mass of pikes at the summit. Both Cooke and Erskine died, up to two thirds of the privates also perished.<sup>25</sup>

Dundas retreated north to Kilcullen Bridge with a unit of Suffolk Fencibles under Captain Beale. The rebels meanwhile were considerably buoyed by their success and wished to press home their advantage. A selective eye witness report, printed in the *Freeman's Journal*, asserted the ill fated charges had the

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<sup>23</sup>Madden, *United Irishmen* 3rd series vol. ii p. 100-4; Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 242; Richard Griffith, Naas to Thomas Pelham 4 Jun. 1798 (B.L., Pelham Papers Add. MS 33,105 f.380-5 ); N.L.I. L.O. Folder 6 (1798) 27 Official Bulletin, Dublin Castle 13-14 June 1798.

<sup>24</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 258-9.

<sup>25</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 259-60; O'Kelly, *General history* p. 67-8; Rawson, *Statistical survey* p. vii.

desired effect of dislodging the rebels.<sup>26</sup> The growing United Irish force moved north, passing Kilcullen Bridge to the west and took up position to the north, on the Naas road beside a small hill. Dundas marched out to meet them with the small force at his disposal. After an initial exchange of fire the rebels broke and the cavalry completed a victory attended with heavy rebel loss. Both Musgrave and Thomas Rawson stated the rebels lost three hundred men. The rebels regathered on Knockallen to the south but Dundas retreated to Naas shortly afterwards. Kilcullen Bridge was subsequently plundered and the Protestant population forced to flee to Naas.<sup>27</sup>

The battles at Kilcullen anticipated a number of features of the rebellion generally. Dundas was either incompetent or overconfident in his initial assessment of the rebel force. The cavalry charge clearly demonstrated that determined pikemen held a clear advantage in battle in certain conditions, for example on high ground. However the second battle demonstrated the overwhelming advantage of a disciplined military force. Despite the opposition of over 1,000 insurgents the smaller force of Suffolk and Yeomen were victorious. According to Rawson this was because they held fire until within fifteen yards of their enemy.<sup>28</sup> On Dundas' retreat the vicinity of Kilcullen was placed effectively in United Irish control.

From its geographical situation the rebellion in west Wicklow was crucial to the effort of the United Irishmen in east Kildare.<sup>29</sup> A significant assault was mounted on the garrison at Ballymore Eustace on the morning of 24 May. Captain Beevor had received arms and produced protections during the preceding

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<sup>26</sup>F.J. 26 May 1798.

<sup>27</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 260; O'Kelly, *General history* p. 68; Rawson, *Statistical survey* p. viii-x; N.L.I. L.O. Folder 6 (1798) 10 Printed Pamphlet: Gen. Dundas to Castlereagh 25 May 1798.

<sup>28</sup>Rawson, *Statistical survey* p. viii.

<sup>29</sup>For the rebellion in west Wicklow see Ruan O'Donnell, 'The 1798 rebellion in County Wicklow' in Hannigan and Nolan (ed) *Wicklow: history and society* (Dublin, 1994) p. 346-50.

days. Forty of his men remained in the town. The unexpected nature of the attack initially gave the rebels an advantage. Beavor himself narrowly avoided death. But while the assailants began to burn parts of the town the troops started to rally. Under Beavor's command they succeeded in defeating the rebel force.<sup>30</sup> O'Kelly confusingly stated Captain Erskine, on his way fatefully to Kilcullen, discovered the force at Ballymore Eustace was defeated as he passed through en route from Geraldine.<sup>31</sup> By nine o'clock the rebellion on the border had 'gathered momentum'. Hundreds of rebels appeared in the Baltinglass area. An attack was mounted on Stratford - on - Slaney on 24 May was completely repulsed with heavy losses.<sup>32</sup>

Meanwhile at Dunlavin one of the most ruthless actions of the early rebellion occurred. A decision to execute more than thirty five suspected rebels was taken following the arrival of a party of Ancient Britons. Ruan O'Donnell argues the reason for the excess was reprisal (for losses inflicted at Ballymore Eustace) and intimidation rather than panic or fear of attack.<sup>33</sup> Those killed included fourteen members of Col. Keatinge's Narraghmore Yeomen. Those listed by Luke Cullen included two masons, three labourers and a tailor.<sup>34</sup> Even Musgrave in excusing the act called it an 'act of severe and summary justice'.<sup>35</sup> Later in the day an intended attack was rebuffed before it reached the village.<sup>36</sup> The overall failure of the United Irish effort in west Wicklow to establish a base in any one of the border towns did not help the cause of their comrades across the border. However the Wicklow Mountains provided a particularly sheltered camp in case of defeat.

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<sup>30</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 243.

<sup>31</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 67.

<sup>32</sup>O'Donnell, 'The 1798 Rebellion in County Wicklow' p. 347-8.

<sup>33</sup>*ibid.*, p. 349.

<sup>34</sup>Luke Cullen Papers p. 29 (N.L.I. MS 9762).

<sup>35</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 242-3; O'Kelly provides an 'eye witness' account, *General history* p. 265-6.

<sup>36</sup>O'Donnell, 'The 1798 Rebellion in County Wicklow' p. 349.

According to Patrick O'Kelly, Patrick Walsh a respectable landowner from the Narraghmore area brought instructions for insurrection to the United Irishmen of the region on 22 May. Anonymous information received by government described the situation in the district:

About 9 o'clock a.m. on Thursday the 24 May 1798 the rebellion broke out throughout the entire neighbourhood of Dunlavin, Ballitore, Baltinglass, Stratford - on - Slaney, Castledermot etc. and men, women and children joined in procuring arms of all descriptions, they sung horrible songs...never before heard by loyalists, to excite the rebellion.<sup>37</sup>

During the morning Thomas Rawson, at Glasealy, learned of a large gathering outside Narraghmore. However attempts to enable the Protestants of the area to retreat failed. Malachi Delany, a prominent local United Irishmen was briefly taken by Yeomen in the morning but the rebel force which Rawson estimated at 2,000 men and women forced his release. Narraghmore loyalists later swore an attack on Narraghmore took place at 10 o'clock by an estimated 200-500 rebels. Their testimony placed Malachi and Peter Delany at the head of long lists of participants.<sup>38</sup> For two hours nine Protestants defended the courthouse. Musgrave's account even stated the rebels were temporarily beaten off but rallied again. The building was finally set ablaze. Four were butchered fleeing the flames while five others were hanged afterwards.<sup>39</sup> Keatinge's Yeomen provided the rebels with

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<sup>37</sup>Information as to Baltinglass 29 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/37/211A ).

<sup>38</sup>Examinations of Joseph Dale of Fonstown, Joseph Whitaker, James McKeever, John Jeffries, Mary Jeffries, Catherine Lucas, Thomas Corry, William Cope, Darby Kehoe, and Robert Cooke, all of Narraghmore, n.d. (N.A.I. Reb Papers 620/51/58) probably sworn on 26 May 1798, see Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 277.

<sup>39</sup>T. Rawson to John Wolfe 9 Nov. 1798 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers); Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 275-6.

willing activists. James Byrne, James Murphy, Hugh Cullen and John Lawlor all were or became captains. Over forty of the sixty eight members joined the rebels.<sup>40</sup>

Meanwhile Lieutenant Eadie and a unit of Tyrone Militia and Suffolk Fencibles who were stationed at Ballitore were ordered north during the morning. His exact destination is unclear, three sources provide three different destinations: Naas, Calverstown and Kilcullen.<sup>41</sup> Eadie and his force encountered the rebel force in the woods outside Narraghmore, where five loyalists had been hung. A general discharge forced the rebels to flee.<sup>42</sup> At Ballitore the inhabitants, soldiers and rebels were gripped by the prevailing uncertainty. Mary Leadbeater's diary recorded the atmosphere: 'A report that Naas Gaol was broken open - that Dublin was in arms and so forth. All was uncertainty except that something serious had happened, as the mail coach had been stopped'.<sup>43</sup>

Some of the Suffolk Fencibles remained at Shackleton's Mill to defend their barrack and baggage. Following their engagement with Eadie, a large number of the rebel force moved south towards Ballitore. Leadbeater estimated up to 300 headed by Malachi Delany now mounted. The small number of soldiers at the mill attempted to flee, at least two were killed. At Ballitore Delany attempted to retain a semblance of order, and 'showed as much humanity as courage'.<sup>44</sup> During their short campaign the rebels had captured Lieutenant Richard Yeates, a local loyalist and officer in Lord Aldborough's Moone and Talbotstown Yeomen. He was killed in Ballitore, in the house of the 'notorious Walshs' believed Aldborough. He

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<sup>40</sup>List of East Narragh Yeomanry and their roles during the rebellion [in Rawson's hand] n.d. [late 1798] (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>41</sup>Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater papers* vol. i, p. 218; Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 275; T. Rawson to John Wolfe 9 Nov. 1798 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>42</sup>Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater papers* vol. i, p. 218; Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 275-6; T. Rawson to John Wolfe 9 Nov. 1798 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>43</sup>Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater papers* vol. i, p. 218.

<sup>44</sup>Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater papers* vol. i p. 219-20.

was further horrified to learn his coachmen, footman and groom were all sworn United Irishmen.<sup>45</sup>

At Ballitore the numbers of the insurgents began to swell once more, to around 3,000 according to one estimate. Scouts returned information on Eadie's latest movements. The rebels, having provided for the defence of Ballitore marched north towards Red Gap Hill on the road between Ballitore and Kilcullen.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile Rawson had despatched a message to Campbell at Athy for assistance. In consequence two columns were marched out - one commanded by Campbell himself, the other by Major Montresor. The latter column dispersed a small rebel force north west of Narraghmore at Fonstown, before linking with Eadie's group. Eadie's force encountered a rebel army of up to 3,000 at the end of the 'bog road' which linked with the Kilcullen turnpike near Red Gap Hill.<sup>47</sup> Eadie's unit managed to hold position before Montresor arrived. His appearance seems to have unnerved the rebels whose ranks were broken. In the ensuing panic 'some hundreds' were killed. Government lost only a handful of men. The clash became known as the 'battle of the bog road'.<sup>48</sup>

The soldiers retreated, O'Kelly stated, to the courthouse at Narraghmore but Mary Leadbeater believed they retreated to Athy following their victory. The rebels returned to their *ad hoc* base at Ballitore 'worsted'.<sup>49</sup> Their initial advantage and victories at Ballitore and Narraghmore had proved to be neither decisive nor strategically advantageous. For now the government troops were prepared to concede ground. Later during the day the rebel numbers began to

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<sup>45</sup>Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater papers* vol. i, p. 217; Lord Aldborough to William Elliot 27 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/37/182 ); Diary of Edward Stratford, 1798 (N.L.I. MS 19,165) printed in E.M. Richardson, *Long forgotten days (leading to Waterloo)* (London, 1928) chapter xxii.

<sup>46</sup>Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater papers* vol. i, p. 222.

<sup>47</sup>T. Rawson to John Wolfe 9 Nov. 1798 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers); Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 277.

<sup>48</sup>*ibid.* ; O'Kelly, *General history* p. 66-7.

<sup>49</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 66-7; Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater papers* vol. i, p. 222.

increase again. It was decided to attack Castledermot to the south in an attempt to link with the Carlow United Irishmen. Perhaps at this point Delany, Cullen and the other leaders realised Athy had not fallen and possibly realised the exaggerated reports circulating in the morning were false.

The same morning Rev. Christopher Robinson, Chaplain to Lord Aldborough's Yeomen witnessed the effect of the mere news of impending rebellion at Castledermot.

....all was quiet here till about 9 o'clock when...the whole fair dispersed and ran in all directions with their cattle towards their respective homes, news then arrived that the mob had risen in Dublin, Naas, Ballimore [i.e. Ballymore Eustace] etc. and had beaten the King's troops, had possession of cannon, had let out prisoners and were rising everywhere over the kingdom. Robinson's house was attacked. However no general assault was made on the town. He escaped first to Dunlavin, later Baltinglass.<sup>50</sup>

The rebels moved south on the town on the evening of 24 May. The small garrison, commanded by Captain Mince, had all day to prepare for attack. As the rebels attacked they were initially shot at from the windows of houses. When their ranks broke Mince's force pursued and captured some men. Exhaustion after the earlier battles must have seriously weakened the United Irish army. Leadbeater recorded that following the defeat large crowds stopped gathering in Ballitore, but camped on the higher ground to the east of the town.<sup>51</sup> Musgrave believed the 'main object' of the south Kildare rebels was to link with their comrades in Carlow and Queen's County, to attack Carlow town. It is unclear if the rebels in East Narragh and Rheban considered this as part of their plan or simply considered it strategically advantageous to link with a larger force. Perhaps they intended to rouse the United

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<sup>50</sup>Lord Aldborough to William Elliot 5 Jun. 1798. Two enclosures: list of rebels, Rev. C. Robinson, Baltinglass to Lord Aldborough, Dublin 3 Jun. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/51).

<sup>51</sup>Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater papers* vol. i, p. 222-3; Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 278; T. Rawson to John Wolfe 9 Nov. 1798 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers); Rawson, *Statistical survey* p. xxiv

Irishmen of Kilkea and Moone who did not rise. The leadership of this area had been decimated in the weeks before the rebellion - a large number of United Irishmen had been identified in Castledermot itself.

The role of the Keatinge family during the rebellion provides an interesting aside to the history of the period. Bernard Duggan contended Maurice Keatinge's sister actively participated in the rising as a rebel leader. Musgrave related the tale of a 'heroine' who attempted to rally troops against Lt. Eadie but was captured. In one of the lightest moments in his weighty thom he states: '....either admiring her bravery or beauty [he] gave her liberty'. The second edition of his work retains the story but specifies her role as that of a 'mediatrix' between the conflicting parties.<sup>52</sup> English newspapers also linked Miss Keatinge with the rebellion. A Keatinge pedigree implies Maurice Keatinge had no sisters. R.B. McDowell suggests she may have been the daughter of Dean Cadogen Keatinge, Maurice's uncle. Dean Keatinge himself narrowly escaped punishment when he was court martialed at Narraghmore following the army's reassertion of authority in the area. A number of Campbell's soldiers were certain he had commanded some rebels on 24 May. The incident serves to underline the suspicion cast on populist figures.<sup>53</sup>

In west Kildare signs of disaffection and impending assault appeared during 24 May. Outside Rathangan bodies of rebels were reported to be approaching. Thomas Reynolds Jun. believed an assault was mounted on 24 May but this may simply have been one of a number of smaller skirmishes to have taken place between government and rebel forces.<sup>54</sup> A similar situation was witnessed in the vicinity of Monasterevan.<sup>55</sup> At some point on 24 May General Dundas made a crucial decision

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<sup>52</sup>Bernard Duggan's narrative (T.C.D. Madden Papers 873/30); Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. viii, 276.

<sup>53</sup>McDowell, *Ireland in the age of imperialism and revolution* p. 619; 'Pedigree of Keatinge of Narraghmore in the County of Kildare' in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* vii, (1912-14) p. 410; Col. Campbell to Dundas 2 Jun. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/23).

<sup>54</sup>Reynolds, *Life* vol. i, p. 280; Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 251.

<sup>55</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 248-9.

which accelerated the progress of rebellion in Kildare. He decided to order a general retreat of troops to Naas. Hence Clane, Ballitore and Kilcullen had all been evacuated. The decision held most far reaching implications for those larger towns which had still not suffered a major attack - particularly the trio in most immediate danger - Monasterevan, Rathangan and Kildare town.

On the afternoon of the 24 May General Wilford, at Kildare, ordered his troops to Naas to reinforce General Dundas. The messenger, a member of Richard Nevill's Yeoman corps was shot outside the town. Captain Winter at Monasterevan was in consequence also ordered to headquarters. On passing through Kildare he was persuaded, by Dominic William O'Reilly of Kildangan, not to burn the baggage of Wilford's troops which was lodged in the guard house.<sup>56</sup> Following the retreat of government troops, 2,000 rebels according to one estimate, headed by Roger McGarry entered the town. Their 'pikes had crosses painted on' added Musgrave. The abandoned baggage was now seized providing the rebels with better weaponry. The town was plundered, loyalists forced to flee, while those who remained were attacked. A former soldier, George Crawford was killed with his fourteen year old grand daughter. His wife Elizabeth managed to survive, having been left for dead. The motive for the attack was that the family were 'heretics'.<sup>57</sup> The same night the Limerick mail coach was stopped in the town. One of the guards Lieutenant William Giffard was killed.<sup>58</sup> The capture of Kildare town albeit by default, placed an important area near the Curragh in rebel control. It also blocked one important communication route to Dublin. The communication problem in the county was compounded by the rebel occupation of the Kilcullen area. Monasterevan was now effectively cut off from east Kildare and Naas. The arrest of

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<sup>56</sup>*ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>57</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 246; Statement of charges preferred against James Magee by Elizabeth Crawford (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/7/74/36); Petition of Elizabeth Crawford to the committee for relief of suffering loyalists (T.C.D. MS 871 Depositions 1798 f. 57).

<sup>58</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 247.

the leading United Irishmen from the baronies of West and East Offaly, George Cummins and Lord Edward Fitzgerald, possibly explains the hesitancy of the insurgents of the area to attack the important urban centres. McGarry, who assumed control in Kildare town was probably a captain and had been a baronial committee member. James Molloy's evidence suggests he was baronial treasurer in March.<sup>59</sup>

Monasterevan's evacuation made an attack imminent. The town was now protected by eighty five yeomen (recently embodied) commanded by Lieutenant Bagot and Captain Hoystead and a company of South Cork Militia.<sup>60</sup> The government troops witnessed a build up of rebel forces on the 24 May.<sup>61</sup> The United Irish army attacked on the morning of 25 May. Patrick O'Kelly, who stated his account was based on an eye witness report, asserted the principal assailants were from the area south west of the town under the command of Pdraig Berne, a miller from Nurney. The force apparently numbered around 1,500 men.<sup>62</sup> Musgrave, however stated the assailants left Kildare town in the early hours of the morning under McGarry. It is likely a combined force attacked the town, at four o'clock in the morning.<sup>63</sup>

The rebel force was marshalled into at least two columns. One column attempted to enter the town near the canal but was repulsed by Lt. Bagot. Meanwhile Hoystead held a second column of rebels at bay near the church wall in the town. What Musgrave labels a 'third column' which entered the town may simply have been the body repulsed near the canal. The action in the town was for

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<sup>59</sup>Lord Tyrawley, Monasterevan to ---- 8 Jun. 1798. Enclosed: Information of James Molloy of Springfield n.d. (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/56/191).

<sup>60</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 267; Gordon, *History of the rebellion in Ireland in the year 1798* p. 80-1.

<sup>61</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 248-9.

<sup>62</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 267-8.

<sup>63</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 248-9; Major General Asgill to Lake 27 May 1798. Enclosed: Major Latham, Mountmellick to ---- 26 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/37/179 ).

some time 'very serious', but the patience of the infantry finally broke the rebels and the cavalry completed a rout. O'Kelly saw the root of the failure in the inability of the two rebel groups to link.<sup>64</sup> Campbell estimated sixty five rebels killed, while Musgrave named five dead yeomen.<sup>65</sup> The defeated rebels fell back to Kildare town.

By 25 May most of the swathe of Kildare territory between Athy and Naas was under control of or threatened by United Irish forces. Athy was second only to Naas (given the latter's proximity to Dublin) in strategic terms. Rebels at Castledermot were already repulsed but Athy held the real key to the south of the county. No serious threat emerged from Kilkea and Moone. Patrick O'Kelly clearly demonstrates that an attack on Athy was contemplated. On 23 May the rebel commanders 'received regular orders' to assemble in three distinct bodies for an assault:

1. from Geraldine to the west
2. from Cloney and Kilberry to the north
3. from Queen's County to the south

The failure to launch the attack was placed squarely on the shoulders of the colliers of Queen's County by O'Kelly. Having learned of the massive rebel defeat in Carlow (on 25 May) they failed to take part in the projected plan.<sup>66</sup> A number of rebels from East Narragh, under Patrick Dowling, also travelled to participate in the attack. They lay concealed three quarters of a mile from Athy all night. The signal for advance never sounded - it was to be the bell of the packet boat to be captured by Queen's County rebels.<sup>67</sup> An estimated 400 assailants died during the battle for Carlow. It virtually ended any possibility of connections between south Kildare and

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<sup>64</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 248-9; O'Kelly, *General history* p. 267-8; *F.J.* 7 Jun. 1798.

<sup>65</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 249; Printed communiqué...extract from a letter from Col. Campbell to General Dundas, Athy 27 May 1798 (T.C.D. Madden Papers 873/835).

<sup>66</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 70-2.

<sup>67</sup>Examination of Joseph Dale of Fonstown n.d. [c. 26 May 1798] (N.A.I. Reb Papers 620/51/58).

north Carlow rebels in the near future.<sup>68</sup> While the rebels around Athy hesitated the town quickly became a loyalist refuge. Mary Leadbeater recorded, 'the garrison town of Athy was thronged with those who were afraid to remain in the country yet where was safety?'<sup>69</sup> Unlike the commanders at Kildare town or Monasterevan Campbell did not withdraw his forces on 24 May. It seems the original messenger from Dundas was ambushed and murdered. The next day there was no possibility of reaching Naas without precipitating a major battle.

On 25 May Rathangan was in a similar position to Athy. The prominent local, James Spencer, land agent to the duke of Leinster and Yeoman commander persuaded Captain Langton and his company of South Cork Militia to remain. This was despite an order from Wilford to evacuate the garrison to Sallins. Langton finally departed on the afternoon of the 25 May but Spencer chose to remain behind.<sup>70</sup> A rebel attack was not actually mounted until the following morning, possibly due to the setback received at Monasterevan. Rathangan, however, was a much softer target. The same morning Major Latham at Mountmellick despatched a small party with a message, via Rathangan. This body encountered 'five thousand Defenders'.<sup>71</sup> It was this force which attacked Rathangan. They were commanded by John Doorly, described as a 'respectable young farmer'. He was from Lullymore in the Bog of Allen, to the north of Rathangan.<sup>72</sup> The victory was achieved quite easily. Spencer and some Yeomen simply barricaded themselves in a house. On being forced out Spencer was

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<sup>68</sup>For the rebellion in Carlow see Duggan, 'Carlow 1791-1801' chapter vii; P. MacSuibhne, '98 in *Carlow* (Carlow, 1974).

<sup>69</sup>Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater papers* vol. i, p. 244.

<sup>70</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 251-2.

<sup>71</sup>Asgill to Lake 27 May 1798. Enclosed: Latham, Mountmellick to ---- 26 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/37/179 ), Edenderry officers to Castlereagh 27 May 1798 also states 5,000 Defenders were involved in the attack (Reb. Papers 620/18/11/6).

<sup>72</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 85.

murdered. Musgrave asserted Doorly was directly responsible. However O'Kelly claimed: 'Doorly, as it has been acknowledged by some of his bitterest enemies, was not at all present at the murder of Mr Spencer'.<sup>73</sup> The victory at Rathangan sparked a spree of plunder and murder. An account written by anxious Edenderry officers stated twenty six Yeoman privates were killed.<sup>74</sup>

Victory at Rathangan left the rebels in control of a vast sweep of territory south of Naas. However the government's hold on Athy, Monasterevan and Castledermot provided a valuable buffer against a push south, for the moment. There was little to be gained by a push south east into the Wicklow Mountains. United Irish advantage was the direct result of Dundas' extremely defensive policy, not the result of direct rebel activities. Meanwhile the large force at Kildare had failed to overcome a much smaller one at Monasterevan. The 26 May marked the apogee of rebel control in the south of the county. Their basic problem was what to do next, given the partial nature of their success. Athy and Naas were still in government hands and troops were surely on the way from Dublin. Concentrated rebel action in north Kildare was necessary if the capital was seriously to be threatened.

Patrick O'Kelly was obviously confused about events in north Kildare during the first week of the rebellion. He was aware a United Irish force was camped in the Bog of Allen by late May but did not know why William Aylmer was inactive during the period. He concluded that Aylmer and his associates, Hugh Ware and George Lube, initially held back from Mick Reynolds' 'impetuosity' and later initiated a 'second rising' in the area. This is to some extent correct but rather vague.<sup>75</sup> William Aylmer later claimed he did not join the rebellion until 'about a

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<sup>73</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 88; Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 252.

<sup>74</sup> Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 252-4; Reynolds, *Life* vol. ii, p. 281-3; Edenderry officers to Castlereagh 27 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/18/11/6).

<sup>75</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 90.

week after it broke out'.<sup>76</sup> Aylmer and Ware informed Rev Charles Eustace, a son of General Eustace who was held at Timahoe in early June that, they attempted to leave the country on the outbreak of rebellion.

....a man of the name of Wear [sic Ware], desperate, McDermott, the same, those last two told me that about a fortnight ago they set out with the intention of going to America but from the ports being shut would not escape. A William Aylmer...told me also the same.<sup>77</sup>

If the McDermott alluded to was Bryan, his claims may have been an attempt to distance himself from the events of Prosperous. The fact that Aylmer's name is not strongly connected with any rebel activities until early June supports his testimony. This does not mean there was no United Irish activity in north Kildare.

Across the border in south Meath the tiny garrisons of Ratoath, Dunshaughlin and Dunboyne were all attacked on 24 May. Destruction was particularly severe in the latter two. Events in north Kildare were closely linked to those of south Meath.<sup>78</sup> A letter written by W. Wilson, from Maynooth, illustrates the panic of the area. The Lucan mail coach had been robbed and 'dreadful reports' arrived from Naas and elsewhere. Though no attack occurred, he concluded, 'It is hard not to say what may be the case in this and the adjoining country [sic]'.<sup>79</sup> Col. Gordon reported on 26 May three attacks were made the previous day, on Kilcock, Leixlip and Lucan.<sup>80</sup> Micheal Lynam, a gardener from Celbridge was, he claimed, 'seized' by a group of rebels and 'compelled' to take part in the attack on Leixlip. He

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<sup>76</sup>William Dundas to William Wickham 26 Mar 1799. Enclosure: William Cruise to William Dundas 22 Mar. 1799 (P.R.O. HO 100/46/9-11).

<sup>77</sup>Statement of Rev Charles Eustace 7 Jun. [1798] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/51/59).

<sup>78</sup>For the Meath rebellion see: J.G.O. Kerrane, 'The background to the 1798 rebellion in County Meath' (M.A. U.C.D. 1971) p. 110ff; Seamus O'Lionsigh, 'The rebellion of 1798 in Meath' in *Riocht na Midhe* vol. iii-v (1966-71).

<sup>79</sup>W. Wilson, P.O. Maynooth to ---- 24 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/37/142).

<sup>80</sup>Col Gordon to ---- 26 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/37/167).

believed the rebels wished to connect with the group at Tara. They probably intended travelling via Dunboyne. In any case most returned home following their setback.<sup>81</sup> Louisa Conolly was certain a group of 200 rebels who quietly passed through Castletown on the morning of 26 May took part in a planned attack on Leixlip later that day. They possibly intended linking with the United Irishmen in south Meath. Seamus Cummins notes that the United Irishmen in the Leixlip area actually continued to surrender weapons on 25 May.<sup>82</sup>

The battle of Tara which took place on 26 May involved a limited number of north Kildare United Irishmen. The battle like that at Carlow to the south was crucial to the Kildare rebels generally. No significant rising materialised to the west of the county, the roads to the south were blocked and Dublin was relatively peaceful. If connections via south Meath were also broken the Kildare rebels were effectively stranded. Kerrane argues the decision to encamp on Tara rather than march on Dublin was curious. Perhaps even by the evening of 24 May the Meath United Irishmen were aware something had gone seriously wrong in Dublin.<sup>83</sup> The battle of Tara was a complete disaster for the United army.

The battle commenced in the evening around six o'clock. Musgrave estimated 4,000 rebels were encamped on the high ground.<sup>84</sup> However the rebels numerical and strategic advantage was matched by the power of the government troops' field piece which pounded their position. By dusk the rebel force was

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<sup>81</sup>Statement of Rev Charles Eustace 7 Jun. [1798] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/51/59).

<sup>82</sup>Louisa Conolly's 'attempt to keep a journal of the rebellion, too full of misery to continue it.' n.d. [late May 1798] (P.R.O.N.I. Mc Peake Papers T. 3048/B/21); Louisa Conolly to William Ogilvie 1 Jun. 1798 in McDermott (ed.), *The memoirs of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* p. 337; Pakenham, *The year of liberty* p. 133; Seamus Cummins, 'Pike heads and the calico printer Leixlip in '98' p. 422-3.

<sup>83</sup>Kerrane, 'Meath' p. 112.

<sup>84</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 296.

dispersed with about three hundred fatalities.<sup>85</sup> Charles Teeling attributed defeat to the lack of competent officers at the battle. He somewhat erroneously stated: 'Many returned to their homes, the most determined remained in arms and proceeded to join the ranks of the brave and persevering Aylmer in Kildare'.<sup>86</sup> While some United men may have encamped in the vast bogs of north Kildare in the aftermath of the Tara defeat, probably linking with Prosperous rebels, Aylmer was not there. The defeat at Tara effectively crushed large scale, open rebellion in South Meath

The 26 May certainly marked the zenith of United Irish fortunes within Kildare itself, but the rebellion which had achieved short term objectives was now at a standstill.<sup>87</sup> The rebellion was in fact stalled without a Dublin offensive. Only one large area of the county's border remained crossable - that into north Wicklow - in itself strategically useless and in fact quite dangerous given the rebel reverses suffered in the area on the first day of rebellion. By 26 May the various rebel forces in Kildare had gathered into strategically placed camps, usually on hills, in inaccessible areas, or both. Richard Musgrave believed six camps were formed during the first week of rebellion: at Knockallen, a hill outside Kilcullen; Barnhill, outside Kildare town; Hodgestown, south of Timahoe; Hortland, north east of Timahoe; Red Gap Hill, in the vicinity of Ballitore and Timahoe in the Bog of Allen.<sup>88</sup> The rebel camp at Blackmore Hill, inside County Wicklow was populated by Kildare rebels, including those defeated at Naas. Musgrave later asserted that camps at Timahoe, Mucklin and Drihid in the Bog of Allen were established by the 30 May but ascertaining their exact origins is difficult.<sup>89</sup> Pat Delemar of Prosperous

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<sup>85</sup>Kerrane, 'Meath' p. 133; O'Lionsigh, 'Rebellion in Meath' p. 40-5; Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 296-7; Lambert to ---- 27 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/37/180).

<sup>86</sup>Teeling, *History of the Irish rebellion of 1798* p. 94-5.

<sup>87</sup>Pakenham's map of the 'midlands front' on the 26 May clearly illustrates the short term success of the United Irishmen in Kildare, *The year of liberty* p. 132.

<sup>88</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 261.

<sup>89</sup>*ibid.*, p. 268.

was taken from the town in late May, forced to take the United Irish oath and held at the rebel camp at Timahoe for ten days. Those he named as commanders were leaders of the rising at Prosperous, including Andrew Farrell. At the time of his escape on 6 June, an estimated 1,000 people were encamped at Timahoe.<sup>90</sup> Delemar was court martialled and sentenced to death in May 1801 having been taken a 'rebel in arms' in that month.<sup>91</sup> John Mitchel, another prisoner, also escaped from the camp on 6 June. He claimed to have been forced to the camp in the first days of rebellion.<sup>92</sup>

On 27 May the Kilcullen rebels encamped at Knockallen made overtures to General Dundas suing for peace. One source states Joseph Perkins, a rebel leader, travelled to Naas to negotiate. He may have offered the surrender through Thomas Kelly, a local magistrate.<sup>93</sup> The rebels initially attempted to bargain but they were forced to offer an unconditional surrender.<sup>94</sup> The following morning Patrick O'Kelly (author of *General history*) arrived at Knockallen from Athy. He informed the camp of the poor situation of the rebels in the Athy area. O'Kelly, according to himself was appointed Colonel so as to take part in negotiations for surrender.<sup>95</sup> Thomas Rawson believed the camp felt threatened by a march north by Col. Campbell. Perhaps O'Kelly's journey north was connected with this development.<sup>96</sup> On 28 May O'Kelly and two United Irish officers, Patrick and John

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<sup>90</sup>Examination of Pat Delemar, Prosperous 8 Jun. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/95).

<sup>91</sup>Court martial of Pat Delemar at Leixlip 11 May 1801 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/10/107/4).

<sup>92</sup>Information of John Mitchell of Dublin, Barber 8 June 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/93).

<sup>93</sup>Thomas Munkittrick to Edward Cooke 5 Jun. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/58); [J. Jones], *An impartial narrative of the most important engagements which took place between his majesty's forces and the rebels during the Irish rebellion, 1798* (3rd edn., 2 parts, Dublin, 1799) part ii, p. 128-37.

<sup>94</sup>Beresford to Lord Auckland 28 May 1798 in Lord Auckland, *The journal and correspondence of William Lord Auckland* ed. Bishop of Bath and Wells (4 vols., London, 1861-2) vol. iii, p. 430-1.

<sup>95</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 73-77.

<sup>96</sup>Rawson, *Statistical survey* p. ix.

Finerty of Kilrush met Dundas. The local parish priest, Fr. Andoe, Thomas Kelly and Captain Annesley of the Ballysax Horse also attended negotiations and encouraged peace. By the time General Lake arrived from Dublin Dundas had concluded a peace with the rebels. Dundas, according to O'Kelly was prepared to accept the surrender on the hill but Lake wished to draw the rebel forces to the lower ground where a force was concealed at Castlemartin avenue. A large quantity of arms was apparently handed in: 'The pikes and arms of every description being given up, the heap could be compared in size to the Royal Exchange'.<sup>97</sup>

Neither Musgrave nor Gordon mention O'Kelly's role in the proceedings.<sup>98</sup> It is impossible to authenticate the veracity of O'Kelly's account but it would have been a curious story to fabricate. His claim to have been 'in his 17th year' certainly appears to have been bogus and was possibly an attempt to excuse his United Irish activities through immaturity. The combined evidence of cemetery records and an obituary notice in the *Freeman's Journal* suggests he was between 22 and 25 in 1798.<sup>99</sup> Accepting The surrender of thousands of rebels without punishment was an unpopular move among loyalists. Dundas reputation was seriously questioned in parliament.<sup>100</sup> Camden writing to Portland on 29 May was clearly uneasy about the surrender. He believed it had been 'indiscreetly carried on' and failed to be 'advantageous' to government.<sup>101</sup> In Kildare loyalists were worried by Dundas' actions. Richard Griffith believed it was 'a foolish capitulation....my decided opinion is now the sword is drawn nothing but extreme severity will cure the

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<sup>97</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 77-8; Beresford to Lord Auckland 30 May 1798 in *Auckland correspondence* vol. iii, p. 432-6.

<sup>98</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 261-2; Gordon, *History of the rebellion* p. 99.

<sup>99</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. ii; F.S. Bourke, 'Patrick O'Kelly - An historian of the rebellion of 1798' in *The Irish Booklover* vol. xxviii (Apr. 1941-May 1942) p. 37-9. Bourke suggests his mistake was made in haste; *F.J.* 19 Jul. 1858.

<sup>100</sup>Teeling *History of the Irish rebellion of 1798* p. 237

<sup>101</sup>Camden to [Portland] 29 May 1798 (P.R.O. HO 100/80/339-342).

evil'. Nine years later Rawson still believed the surrender was pointless since useless weapons were handed in and three quarters of the body immediately joined their comrades in Wexford.<sup>102</sup>

The dispersal of rebels at Kilcullen relieved the blockade on communication between Naas and the south of the county. However the rebel encampment around Kildare town left the south of the county cut off. General Lake urged the route should be reopened by force.<sup>103</sup> At the same time the Knockallen surrender was concluded rebels at Kildare attempted to sue for peace with Dundas. On the morning of 29 May it appears a surrender was agreed. Dundas deputed Wilford to receive it.<sup>104</sup> On the same morning Major General Sir James Duff arrived in Kildare from Limerick, worried by the breakdown of communication with Dublin. Whether the rebel force evacuated Kildare town in consequence of his approach or because they intended it in any case is unclear. His force consisted of 140 Dragoons, 350 infantry and seven artillery pieces. At seven o'clock, that morning, he sat down to write to Lake from Monasterevan. He planned to surround Kildare town and 'make a dreadful example of the rebels'. He had been in contact with Asgill but not Dundas and was probably not aware of the impending surrender.

Patrick O'Kelly believed one 'Cooper of Ballymannny' advised the rebel force to assemble at Gibbet Rath on the Curragh where Duff, it was hoped, would accept their submission. Meanwhile Roger McGarry deserted the people. According to O'Kelly, Duff subsequently disarmed the group and ordered them to kneel and beg pardon. This being complied with, Duff ordered his troops to 'charge and spare no rebel'. This resulted in the death of 325 people.<sup>105</sup> At two o'clock Duff

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<sup>102</sup>Richard Griffith, Naas to Thomas Pelham 4 Jun. 1798 (B.L., Pelham Papers Add. MS 33,105 f.380-5 ); Rawson, *Statistical survey* p. ix.

<sup>103</sup>Camden to [Portland] 29 May 1798 (P.R.O. HO 100/80/339-342).

<sup>104</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 262. He suggests the rebels at Barnhill sued for peace at the same time as Knockallen i.e. 27 May.

<sup>105</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 81-2.

added to his letter to Asgill, describing what happened:

My Dear General, (I have witnessed a melancholy scene). We found the rebels retiring from this town on our arrival armed. We followed them with the dragoons. I sent some of the Yeomen to tell them on laying down their arms they should not be hurt. Unfortunately some of them fired on the troops, from that moment they were attacked on all sides, nothing could stop the rage of the troops. I believe from two to three hundred of the rebels were killed. [They intended we were told, to lay down their arms to General Dundas]. We have three men killed and several wounded. I am too fatigued to enlarge.<sup>106</sup>

Gordon believed the soldiers acted on the defiant discharge of a muzzle (upwards) by one of the rebels.<sup>107</sup> The massacre at Gibbet Rath swiftly ended Dundas' policy of large scale pardon. Duff's actions are difficult to explain. One possible contributing factor was revenge. During the rebel occupation of Kildare town the mails from Limerick were plundered and Duff's nephew piked to death.<sup>108</sup> The massacre did serve to quell open rebellion in the area and reopen lines communication with Munster.

While the Kildare rebellion was to a large extent stalled by 26 May, one rebel achievement provided a serious threat - that at Rathangan. On 27 May officers at Edenderry, a few miles north west of Rathangan, wrote a worried letter to Castlereagh expressing their need for reinforcements. Refugees from Rathangan and the intervening village of Clonbulloge all fled to Edenderry. Neither Major Latham at Philipstown nor the Castle were able to spare any troops. The officers concluded ominously: '...without [reinforcements]...this country and a number of his majesties

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<sup>106</sup>Duff to [Lake] 29 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/37/211). The sentence in square brackets is crossed out.

<sup>107</sup>Gordon, *History of the rebellion* p. 100. Musgrave's account is close to Duff's, *Rebellions* p. 262.

<sup>108</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 84.

loyal subjects will inevitably be destroyed'.<sup>109</sup> The threat of incursion into Queen's or King's Counties produced a response from government forces on 28 May. Lt. Col. Mahon was despatched from Tullamore to prevent any attack occurring. He initially pursued rebels into the town of Rathangan killing 'sixteen to twenty'. However he was forced to retreat outside to wait for reinforcements. He was subsequently joined by a regiment from Edenderry and a Yeomanry force. The second attack was equally unsuccessful coming under assault from the windows of the town. Lt Malone was taken prisoner.<sup>110</sup> During these initial attacks the government troops lost twenty men. R. Marshall believed this provided evidence of the ineffectiveness of cavalry charging pikemen. Not only did it result in a heavy repulse, but dead horses were subsequently used as barricades. 'You need not mention this disaster,' he concluded a letter to Brigadier General Knox. 'We did not make any bulletin of it.'<sup>111</sup>

Later in the morning Lt. Col. Longfield and a force of North Cork Militia and Dragoons arrived at Rathangan. He found the streets barricaded but unlike Mahon possessed two battalion guns. The second discharge of these weapons and subsequent cavalry charge dispersed the rebels. His comments on the rebel dead are interesting: '...I saw 14 or 15, and what I consider of particular consequence is that all of those I saw dead are of the better kind of people....' He later discovered up to sixty rebels were killed.<sup>112</sup> Many must have ventured north into the Bog of Allen.

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<sup>109</sup>Capt John Wakely, Lt. Thomas James, 2nd Lt. Shaw Cartland and two others to Castlereagh, Edenderry 27 May 1798. Enclosed: Major Latham to Capt. Wakely n.d., Major Latham to Capt Wakely 25 May 1798, Castlereagh to [Camden?] n.d. [c 26 May 1798], Camden to ---- 27 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/18/11/6).

<sup>110</sup>Lt. Col. Dunne, Tullamore to General Lake 29 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/37/209); Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 255-6.

<sup>111</sup>R. Marshall to Brig. Gen. Knox 30 May 1798 (N.L.I. MS 56 Gen. Lake Correspondence 1796-9).

<sup>112</sup>Lt Col. Longfield, Rathangan to General Dundas 29 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/37/208); Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 256-7. A letter written on 7 June states Longfield was an officer in the North Cork Militia, Longfield to Duff 7 Jun. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/56/192).

Doorly's house at Lullymore was burned and he now joined the United Irishmen encamped at Timahoe.<sup>113</sup> The recapture of Rathangan firmly ended any hopes of extending rebellion west.

The rebel force in West Narragh and Rheban, which was modestly successful, moved in the same direction as their Kilcullen counterparts on 26 May. They attempted to sue for peace with Col. Campbell. While he was willing to consider 'favourable terms', divisions and delays rapidly reduced the prospect of a peaceful resolution. When six hostages were demanded to guarantee arms no one could decide who to send.<sup>114</sup> On the morning of 29 May Campbell with almost all his force left Athy with the express aim of forcibly pacifying the West Narragh area. Keatinge's house at Narraghmore, which may have been used by rebels, was destroyed by a discharge of cannon. At three o'clock in the morning Ninth Dragoons entered the village of Ballitore with orders to fire on anyone with 'coloured clothes'. However the rebel force had evacuated the area on the approach of the troops.<sup>115</sup>

During the next few hours the village was at the mercy of the troops. Houses were burned, smashed and plundered. Dr. Johnson, possibly a United Irish leader in the area, who played a rather vacillating role during the early fighting, not fully committed to either side, suffered the ultimate penalty. He was accused of leading a rebel force and despite the support of Captain Sandys was shot. The destruction extended north. Timolin was burned after Ballitore and Narraghmore and Crookstown suffered similarly.<sup>116</sup> Hugh Cullen, father of the future Cardinal, Paul Cullen, was arrested in late May or early June. According to M.J. Curran, Hugh narrowly escaped death at the Gibbet Rath massacre on the Curragh. Through the

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<sup>113</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 89.

<sup>114</sup>Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater papers* vol. i, p. 227-8.

<sup>115</sup>*ibid.*, vol. i, p. 228-30; Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 278; T. Rawson to J. Wolfe 9 Nov. 1798, [Rawson] to ---- n.d. [probably late 1798] (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>116</sup>Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater papers* vol. i, p. 230-5, 240. On Dr. Johnson's United Irish connections see above p. 108.

intervention of a Ballitore neighbour, Ephriam Boake, his court martial was indefinitely suspended. His brother Paul was executed as a rebel in 1798. Works dealing primarily with his famous son downplay the active role of Hugh Cullen in 1798. It appears likely he was a leading United Irishman in his locality. He was released from prison towards the end of 1798.<sup>117</sup>

On 30 May a large rebel force assembled at Blackmore Hill was dispersed by troops under the command of Major General Duff. Once again cannon was put to particularly effective use by government forces and proved decisive.<sup>118</sup> On the same day an intended surrender scheduled to take place between Athy and Ballitore almost fell to pieces in the aftermath of the Gibbet Rath disaster. However the rebels were pressed to take part in the surrender which was concluded. It probably took place on the Moat of Ardsnull and seems to be that referred to by Col. Campbell in a letter dated 2 June, which indicates 300 rebels participated. Others came forward individually in Athy. Campbell's protection extended 'to the crime of being a United Irishman only'.<sup>119</sup> On the morning of 2 June an attempt appears to have been launched by United Irishmen to attack Athy. According to Campbell two columns approached the town from the bog road. Campbell in turn split his troops in pursuit of the rebels. His left column encountered one group near Bert where he estimated one hundred were killed; a number lowered only by the impenetrability of the bog.<sup>120</sup> When Campbell's troops were finally moved to Kilcullen around 10 June

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<sup>117</sup>Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater papers* vol. i, p. 246-7; M.J. Curran, 'Hugh Cullen and the Gibbet Rath massacre' and 'Cardinal Cullen: biographical matters' in *Reportorium Novum* i, no. 1 (1955) p. 213-27, 242-4; Desmond Bowen, *Paul Cardinal Cullen and the shaping of modern Irish Catholicism* (Dublin, 1983) p. 2-4.

<sup>118</sup>E. Linde to Mrs Linde 1 Jun. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/15); Cooke to ---- 1 Jun. 1798 (P.R.O. HO 100/81/3-5); Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 263.

<sup>119</sup>Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater papers* vol. i, p. 240-1; Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 279; Col Campbell to Gen. Dundas 2 Jun. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/23).

<sup>120</sup>Col Campbell to Gen. Dundas 2 Jun. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/23).

to counter the growing threat in north Kildare, no actual attacks were mounted on the garrison under the defence of Rawson's Yeomen.<sup>121</sup>

By 30 May the strategic victories of the Kildare United Irishmen were all retaken with the exception of Prosperous. The county south of an invisible line drawn between Rathangan and Naas was now in government hands. Many of the defeated rebels did not return home, some travelled north to the Bog of Allen, others to the Wicklow Mountains. As the collapse in Kildare occurred from the 26-27 May, the Wexford rebellion suddenly exploded into action. This later became important to the rebels who remained in arms in Kildare and Wicklow. The first week of rebellion resulted in large scale fighting, suffering and destruction. The focus noticeably shifted around the 30 May. The early phase of the struggle focused on the capture of urban areas, in line with the original United Irish strategy. As those centres were recaptured it became clear their occupation could not be maintained for long periods without the support of a successful rebellion outside Kildare. While the rebels of north Kildare intermittently attacked and plundered towns they did not attempt to occupy them. The rebels made increased use of the most obvious natural advantage in the county: the Bog of Allen.

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<sup>121</sup> Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 279.

## Chapter Six

### The 1798 rebellion in County Kildare 1 June - 21 July

The second phase of the Kildare rebellion may be delineated between early June and 21 July and centred on northern camps, particularly at Timahoe. It was characterised by what Teeling labelled, 'a species of fugitive warfare'.<sup>1</sup> William Aylmer and his comrades entered the conflict at this juncture. The key turning point occurred at the rebel defeat at Ovidstown on 19 June. From early July the remaining rebels in Kildare attempted to negotiate terms with Dublin Castle following Cornwallis' efforts to encourage surrender. Channels of communication opened around 4 July. During the month the introduction, briefly, of rather less cautious Wexford and Wicklow rebels into the county temporarily derailed the process. But their defeat and departure enabled the Kildare forces to conclude a surrender by 21 July.

Prosperous remained in rebel hands in early June while the hinterland of Naas appears to have been particularly disturbed. Thomas Conolly, reported his wife Louisa, was sickened by the destruction inflicted on the region between Sallins and Kilcullen during the first week of rebellion.<sup>2</sup> Richard Griffith wrote to Pelham on 23 June:

We have been shut up in Naas ever since I wrote to you [4 June], standing on the defensive and allowing the insurgents to possess the whole county of Kildare, except a few towns. The consequence has been terrible the rebels have plundered and defaced the whole country.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>C.H. Teeling, *The history of the Irish rebellion of 1798* p. 95.

<sup>2</sup>Louisa Conolly to William Ogilvie 1 Jun. 1798 in McDermott (ed.), *The memoirs of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* p. 337.

<sup>3</sup>Richard Griffith to Thomas Pelham 23 Jun. 1798 (B.L. Pelham Papers Add. MS 33,105 f.445-8).

On 30 May United Irishmen in the barony of Carbery, which had been seriously disturbed in 1797, finally rose. A large force, as many as 2,000, attacked and burned the charter school at Castlecarbery which was abandoned by Stephen Sparks and his students.<sup>4</sup>

Patrick O'Kelly described what he believed occurred at this juncture:

The men of Kilcock, Maynooth and the north eastern boundaries of the county of Kildare, being now called upon by young Aylmer of Painstown, George Luby of Ovidstown and Hugh Ware of Maynooth [Ware was from Rathcoffey] to rise a second rising in the county was brought about by the people.<sup>5</sup>

What occurred was not a second rising. Many of those now drawn to camps in the Bog of Allen, principally Timahoe, had fought during the previous week. However a recognised leadership now emerged in the north which encouraged large scale participation in the rebellion. William Aylmer had not only been an officer in the Kildare Militia but hailed from a respectable Catholic family of the area which accorded him 'an extensive influence among the United corps of that part of the county...'<sup>6</sup> According to the family biographer he was born in 1772. However Aylmer himself gave his date of birth as 1778 when he enlisted in the Austrian army in 1800. His military ability is evidenced by a successful career in the Austrian army in the early nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> George Lube had been particularly active, from the evidence available, in the Kildare United Irishmen before 24 May. Hugh Ware, born in 1772, was a professional land surveyor, a knowledge especially useful to the rebels when combined with their detailed knowledge of local geography. He later had a highly

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<sup>4</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 266-7.

<sup>5</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 90.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.*, p. 90; For a short biographical sketch see: Martin Tierney, 'William Aylmer 1772-1820' in *The Irish Sword* vi (1963-4) p. 103-7.

<sup>7</sup>Sir F.J. Aylmer, *The Aylmers of Ireland* p. 214; Richard Aylmer, 'The imperial service of William Aylmer 1800-1814' unpublished paper (1996); Dr. Aylmer kindly provided me with a copy of William Aylmer's enlistment in the Austrian army.

successful career in the French army. Miles Byrne, the Wicklow rebel, who fought under his command described him as 'the bravest of the brave'.<sup>8</sup> All three were young men of respectable backgrounds.

Timahoe was particularly suited to maintaining a rebel base. It was situated in the bog of Allen on an area of dry ground. In July 1803 Fenton Aylmer commented on the strategic importance of Timahoe if a rising occurred in its locality: '...it is most advantageously situated and they always have as in the last rebellion a safe retreat across the bog and from the hill the most commanding view of everything stirring in the country'.<sup>9</sup> By early June Aylmer and Lube were both based at Timahoe and began roaming the hinterland. On 1 June Aylmer 'was positively seen' leading a rebel force into the town of Kilcock. Sir Fenton Aylmer, who informed the Castle of this development also implicated William's brother Robert, who was also seen at the Timahoe camp. Robert was in Dublin by 4 June. Up to ten Kilcock residents were forced to the camp but subsequently escaped. Fenton Aylmer expressed reservations about their usefulness in obtaining prosecutions due to fear of reprisals. Another Aylmer connection, 'Barnwall', a brother-in-law was arrested at Trim around the same time. It was hoped this 'may break the whole business'.<sup>10</sup> Richard Musgrave indicated rebels at Timahoe were prepared to surrender around 29 May and attempted to treat with Fenton Aylmer.<sup>11</sup> By early June however a campaign of 'fugitive warfare' began in earnest. On 4 June the Timahoe insurgents launched an attack on the small garrison at Kilcock. Sir Fenton Aylmer was forced to retreat from the town hoping to rally nearby troops. However many of his force simply deserted. Following the occupation of the village, Courtown, the seat of Micheal Aylmer was burned to the ground. Fenton Aylmer's seat at Donadea narrowly escaped destruction. The rebels were

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<sup>8</sup>*The Times* 26 Mar. 1846; Miles Byrne, *The memoirs of Miles Byrne, edited by his widow* (Shannon, 1972 first published 1863) p. 175-7.

<sup>9</sup>Fenton Aylmer, Harrogate, Yorkshire to Marsden 29 Jul. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/64/21).

<sup>10</sup>Fenton Aylmer, Kilcock to ---- 4 June 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/44).

<sup>11</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 270-1.

diverted by information that their own friends had lodged valuables in it, according to Aylmer. Perhaps even at this point William Aylmer and the other leaders were careful not to alienate potentially useful connections.<sup>12</sup>

Even before the attack on Kilcock was launched a plan of operations against the north Kildare rebels appears to have existed. On the morning of 4 June General Champagne sent a reconnoitre party to Timahoe which discovered the area 'posted strong' despite rumours it was deserted. In his letter dated 4 June Fenton Aylmer noted: 'The plan of operations commences tomorrow at 8 o'clock'.<sup>13</sup> The date of Champagne's attack is unclear. Oliver Barker at Clonard who participated in the move on Drihid to the west of Timahoe dates his account 6 June. Musgrave however states the assault occurred on 8 June. Champagne secured extra troops at Edenderry. His force included the Limerick Militia, Coolestown Yeomen, Canal Legion, Clonard Cavalry and Ballyna Cavalry. The bog was surrounded and the camp attacked and dispersed. Barker believed a simultaneous attack took place from Kilcock on Timahoe.<sup>14</sup> This was nothing more than a temporary victory. Numerous attacks on the rebel strongholds occurred throughout June and July ultimately to no real effect. Two of those who commanded Kildare troops Thomas Tyrell and Ambrose O'Ferrall believed the growing problem was not indigenous to the Barony of Carbery: '....to the best of our belief and information not more than seven or eight of this barony have voluntarily joined the rebels'. The claim supported a request for reinforcements to quell the area.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 271-2; Copy of a petition from Micheal Aylmer of Courtown, Co. Kildare, for compensation for losses suffered in the rebellion of 1798 (N.L.I. MS 8281).

<sup>13</sup>Fenton Aylmer, Kilcock to ---- 4 June 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/44).

<sup>14</sup>Oliver Barker, Clonard to John Lees 6 Jun. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/73); Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 268-9; [J. Jones], *An impartial narrative* part i, p. 9-10.

<sup>15</sup>Thomas Tyrell, Ambrose O'Ferrall to ---- Clonard, 14 Jun. 1798. Enclosed: Statement from John Walker and Charles Lanaghan n.d. [c. 7-14 June 1798] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/145).

The direct action on Timahoe failed to prevent the continuance of assaults in north Kildare. On the afternoon of 10 June, the town of Maynooth, which was garrisoned by a small contingent of the duke of Leinster's Yeomen under Thomas Long and Richard Cane was attacked by 500 rebels under William Aylmer. Desertion among the yeomen forced the defending force to retreat. Some of the Yeomen taken prisoner remained at the rebel camp as volunteers. On 13 June the town was attacked and plundered again. Lt. Cane subsequently retreated to Leixlip having insufficient troops to garrison Maynooth.<sup>16</sup> The rebel base or bases in the Bog of Allen developed as launching pads not only for attacks on lightly garrisoned towns but also on the surrounding countryside. Musgrave described rebel activity as follows:

...for some time they continued to plunder the houses of all the Protestants in the neighbourhood, and carried off all the horses and cattle they could find; and even intercepted the supplies of oxen and sheep which were going from remote counties to the capital.<sup>17</sup>

The activities of the United Irish army encamped at Timahoe seemingly remained static and localised and compared unfavourably to the action of the Wexford rebellion. While the south east was inflamed during June, in Kildare only one battle was fought, at Ovidstown. Nevertheless the significance of the north Kildare rebellion has been understated. The insurgents were not confined to the small area of dry land at Timahoe. The Bog of Allen provided a natural buffer zone which allowed rebels to launch attacks over a wide area. The aforementioned attacks on Kilcock and Maynooth were carried out with a certain level of impunity. Furthermore the insurgents threatened a crucial route into Dublin from the west. Indeed the camps very existence threatened the capital itself given the disturbed nature of north Wicklow and of course Wexford.

At the time of Pat Delemar's escape from Timahoe on 6 June the camp numbered approximately 1,000 people, though personnel were continually in a state of

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<sup>16</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 283-4.

<sup>17</sup>*ibid.*, p. 268.

flux. The only source of information on what occurred at the camp during the first weeks of July must be extracted from statements of escaped prisoners. Bernard Duggan, the Prosperous rebel had very little to say about activities during the rebellion, after the battle of Prosperous.<sup>18</sup> None of the leaders at Timahoe later published memoirs or autobiographical material. In early June General Eustace's son ventured into north Kildare assuming the area was tranquil following the surrender at Kilcullen. He learned from local residents at Celbridge 'all from thence to Robertstown was laid desolate'. He was later intercepted by a rebel outpost at Healysbridge.<sup>19</sup> The plunder of neighbouring areas was of course essential to the maintenance of a large force in the Timahoe area. Oliver Barker expressed incredulity at '....the way they lived. Horses, cows, sheep etc. were found after them....'<sup>20</sup>

On 4 July Sir Fenton Aylmer provided Dublin Castle with the earliest extant list of leaders of the Kildare rebels:

1. William Aylmer of Painstown
2. Hugh Ware of Rathcoffey
3. George Lube of Corcoranstown
4. [Joseph] Cormick, brother-in-law to Mr Lube, a young man
5. Bryan McDermott of Hayestown
6. Gary Wilde of Prosperous
7. Thomas Hyland of Kilbride
8. James Dunn of Staplestown
9. Edward Moghern - Patrick Wiliss, Dairyman [?]
10. Wm Fitzgerald of Timahoe
11. Farrell of Woods, a son of Daniel Farrell  
a man of the nickname Roupera Vouda
12. X Doorly of Rathangan and Lullymore

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<sup>18</sup>Madden, *United Irishmen* 3rd. series vol. ii, p. 105.

<sup>19</sup>Statement of Rev Charles Eustace 7 Jun. [1798] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/51/59).

<sup>20</sup>Oliver Barker, Clonard to John Lees 6 Jun. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/73).

13. John Reilly, shoemaker, Kilcock

14. Tobin...of Prosperous<sup>21</sup>

The list illustrates the composition of the leadership at Timahoe which included United Irishmen from Prosperous, north east Kildare and further afield, most noticeably Doorly. William Aylmer was certainly the recognised leader at this point. One account describes his dress as follows: 'a scarlet uniform with a green sash or scarf over his shoulder' another added a 'helmet, military boots, sword and pistols'. Doorly and Lube were also in uniform.<sup>22</sup>

The leadership at Timahoe appears to have exerted positive influence in terms of discipline. John Mitchel observed: 'The men of each barony were together under Sergeants, officers or Corporals'. While neither Mitchel nor Charles Eustace were harmed despite being Protestants others were killed. These included an army invalid and a tenant of Sir Fenton Aylmer. Mitchel himself narrowly avoided death. As a barber he proved useful to the camp and was actually tipped a shilling by William Aylmer for his services. Charles Eustace (and a number of Kildare magistrates) petitioned government for the release of Bryan McDermott in 1800, one of his captors. He believed McDermott was 'no more than a mere boy' in 1798.<sup>23</sup> Robert Weeks another prisoner believed Aylmer and Kiernan, 'a gentleman farmer' exerted most influence and had complete control of financial matters. Weeks was initially prevented from escaping by Patrick O'Connor a lawyer from Straffan. This is a small indication that the social composition of the camp was wider than often assumed. A number of ex

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<sup>21</sup>List of County Kildare leaders of rebels 4 Jul. 1798 [in the hand of Sir Fenton Aylmer] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/39/18).

<sup>22</sup>Examination of Belle Martin, Co. Meath 23 Jun. 1798, Examination of John Laffan 4 Jul. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/222, 620/39/19).

<sup>23</sup>Statement of Charles Eustace 4 Aug. 1800 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/9/100/18)

Yeomen appear to have been quite influential in the camp.<sup>24</sup> One source indicates William Aylmer's leadership was less than inspirational. An anonymous Dublin source, closely linked to north east Kildare both before and during the rebellion was informed in mid June: '....that Mr Aylmer had been censured in the camp for not coming to an engagement one night when they were attacked by the army, this was overlooked as he was tipsey [sic]'. Valentine Lawless believed William's death in South America was connected 'to an ancient love for rum'.<sup>25</sup> The same source separately states that some members of the camp were 'of the opinion that Mr Aylmer was not acting honest this dispute is lettered'.<sup>26</sup> It is difficult to determine the nature of then dissension in the camp. It may reflect the differing aspirations of the various baronies or even counties which constituted the camp.

In early June Belle Martin, a noted informer was hired as a housemaid at Charles Aylmer's house at Painstown. She had prosecuted members of a republican club in Belfast in 1796 and spent the period August 1796 to May 1798 under government protection at Dublin Castle. It is difficult to see why the Kildare rebels did not recognise or suspect her. Based on her statement (made on 23 June), and her assertion that she was hired three weeks previously, she may have arrived at Painstown as early as 2 June. Her evidence shows William Aylmer used Painstown as a personal base during the rebellion. He normally arrived home at 4 a.m., rested until 3 p.m. when he would march out with his force. A chapel near Painstown was utilised

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<sup>24</sup>Information of Robert Weeks, Co. Kildare by A. Knox [probably late June 1798] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/51/65), Examination of John Laffan 4 Jul. 1798 (Reb. Papers 620/39/19), Information of John Mitchel of Dublin, Barber 8 June 1798 (Reb. Papers 620/38/93).

<sup>25</sup>Information about Lord Edward Fitzgerald headed 'Leixlip business' n.d. [probably mid June 1798] (T.C.D. Sirr Papers 869/9 f. 7-8); Lord Cloncurry, *Personal reflections* p. 168. The assertion was later corrected by Gerald, William's brother, Gerald Aylmer to Lord Cloncurry Painstown 8 Oct. 1849 in W.J. Fitzpatrick, *The life, times and contemporaries of Lord Cloncurry* p. 539-40.

<sup>26</sup>Information about Lord Edward Fitzgerald n.d [probably June or July 1798] (T.C.D. Sirr Papers 869/9 f. 10-11).

as a rebel headquarters for food and weaponry.<sup>27</sup> Martin undoubtedly kept government well informed of the activities of the north Kildare rebels and indicates their fear of the group. It is possible she was despatched following Fenton Aylmer's letter of 4 June which questioned the possibility of prosecuting the rebel leadership.

The apparent stasis of the Timahoe area rebels is based on their isolation and lack of any coherent strategy beyond intermittent pillage. The leaders in the area undoubtedly looked to Dublin for guidance. Belle Martin noted '....that the concourse of Dublin people who come and go backwards and forwards is very great'. These included the Dublin brewer and United Irishmen Edward Sweetman who stayed at Painstown for three days.<sup>28</sup> Robert Aylmer, William's brother was in Dublin in early June.<sup>29</sup> Malachi Delany's brother Peter was in the capital during the later rebellion and passed information to his brother who Thomas Boyle believed was in Wexford in June. Boyle also informed government that Aylmer and Micheal Reynolds were in contact with 'the Dublin party' via intermediaries: Demsey a smith from Kildare working in Dublin or John Smyth who was messenger to rebels at Fingal.<sup>30</sup> The important communication with the capital suggests an attack on Dublin was the ultimate aspiration of the rebels in its vicinity. In mid June Peter Broc, a Clane Yeoman who participated in the rising in Prosperous was observed conversing with a Dublin Yeoman on the possibility of attacking the capital. It is also interesting he was arrested days before John Esmonde's execution.<sup>31</sup> Indeed Charles Eustace was informed he was held as a hostage for Esmonde. He was compelled to write to Lord Mayo explaining his situation. Esmonde himself later asked his former comrades to

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<sup>27</sup>Examination of Belle Martin, Co. Meath 23 Jun. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/222).

<sup>28</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>29</sup>Fenton Aylmer, Kilcock to ---- 4 June 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/44).

<sup>30</sup>B information n.d. [Jun. 1798], Info of B n.d. [c. 10 Jul. 1798], Info of B Wed. 27 [Jun. 1798] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/18/3).

<sup>31</sup>Court martial of Peter Broc 10 Jul. 1798 (T.C.D. MS 872 Proceedings of courts martial, 1798 f. 45-56).

desist 'as he feared they might injure him'.<sup>32</sup> Dublin United Irishmen continued to hope the rebels of the surrounding counties would participate in an assault on the capital.<sup>33</sup>

Attempts also appear to have been made to make contact with rebels or former rebels in County Meath. During June Aylmer's attempts to do so failed to produce results. On the day Belle Martin made her statement she was given a letter by William Aylmer to deliver to Rev Richard Meighan of Moynavaly in County Meath. She was instructed to verbally request the priest to delay his congregation at mass next day, until Aylmer arrived, presumably for possible recruitment, to which Meighan agreed. The car in which she travelled was also loaded with gunpowder hidden under hay. This she claimed was examined by the priest. Martin later failed to identify the priest at an 'identity parade'.<sup>34</sup> The contacts with United Irishmen in Dublin and Meath illustrate the fact that north Kildare rebels viewed themselves as part of a wider struggle. They hoped to strengthen their position viz a viz an attack on the capital. In the meantime the rich lands of north Kildare provided ready made targets. Castlereagh wrote in mid June: 'In Kildare the rebellion has degenerated into a plundering banditti. They have left the gentlemen and rich farmers neither furniture or stock of any kind'.<sup>35</sup> The battle of Ovidstown destroyed ongoing rebel preparations for any assault.

While Timahoe became the effective centre of rebel activity in the county in June some other areas continued to remain disturbed. In early June almost the whole of Kildare town was destroyed following an attempt to destroy 'his majesty's troops, the inhabitants almost to a man having left the place'. The chapel

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<sup>32</sup>Statement of Rev Charles Eustace 7 Jun. [1798] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/51/59).

<sup>33</sup>Information of William McConkery 6 June 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/67).

<sup>34</sup>Examination of Belle Martin, Co. Meath 23 Jun. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/222); Richard Hayes, 'Priests in the independence movement of '98' in *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 5th ser., lxvi, (1945) p. 266-7.

<sup>35</sup>Castlereagh to Pelham 16 Jun. 1798 in J.T. Gilbert (ed.), *Documents relating to Ireland 1795-1804* (Dublin, 1893) p. 140.

was probably burned at this point.<sup>36</sup> The immediate vicinity and town of Naas remained calm during June despite the threat to the north west. In July houses were set alight in the neighbourhood.<sup>37</sup> The countryside was traversed only with great difficulty. One traveller narrowly avoided capture by rebels at Maynooth and was later stopped by suspicious militiamen outside Kildare, his destination.<sup>38</sup>

In Monasterevan in the aftermath of the breakdown of rebellion in the baronies of West and East Offaly, Lord Tyrawley busied himself examining rebels. On 11 June he arrested Fr. Edward Prendegast who was tried by Court Martial and subsequently executed. Tyrawley wrote to Cooke in Dublin:

The execution of this man has had a good effect. It was clearly proved that he was at one of the rebel camps encouraging the people with a pistol in his hand and that he gave them absolution tho' [sic] they confessed to him that they were United Irishmen. I am glad to be able to add that the other priests in this neighbourhood refused absolution to such people as were U.I. I think the people are heartily sick of rebellion and that it will be very difficult to make them rise again.<sup>39</sup>

The local parish priest, Charles Doran was paid by Tyrawley for his loyal role in 'preventing the country people from joining the rebels'.<sup>40</sup> The death of Prendegast is the best documented case of clerical involvement during the Kildare rebellion. An

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<sup>36</sup>Duff, Monasterevan to Hewitt 8 Jun. 1798. Enclosed Col. Thurles, Monasterevan to Duff 8 Jun. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/88). Walter Cox dated the burning of the chapel to 4 June, *The Irish Magazine* vol. i, (1808) p. 25.

<sup>37</sup>Gosford to Cooke 9 Jul. 1798, Gosford to Cooke 15 Jul. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/39/42, 620/39/76).

<sup>38</sup>----- Kildare Markethouse to John Russell, Dublin Jul. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/39/31).

<sup>39</sup>Tyrawley to Cooke 13 Jun. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/56/192); Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 249-50.

<sup>40</sup>List of persons receiving money owing to sufferings in the rebellion n.d. [1798 or after] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/52/9).

anecdote in Cox's *Irish Magazine* recorded that a Carmelite, Reeny was flogged so hard in Kilcullen he later died, but it is unclear if this occurred during the rebellion itself.<sup>41</sup>

In general Kildare provides less examples of 'rebel priests' than Wexford. Not even Predegast was reported to be a commander. Priests may have provided important channels of communication between north Kildare rebels and Dublin. A local priest informed the rebels that 'all Connaught was in arms'.<sup>42</sup> Rev Andrew Ennis, P.P. of Maynooth and Rev. Boyce, P.P. of Celbridge were both suspected of carrying correspondence to and from Dublin.<sup>43</sup> Belle Martin also implicated Ennis and a priest or student from Maynooth College named Pat Reilly, who were at least aware of William Aylmer's activities.<sup>44</sup> Daire Keogh has overturned the accepted wisdom on the priests of '98 as drunks, rogues or renegades. He argues they were often connected to leading rebel families or suffering congregations.<sup>45</sup> Predegast was possibly executed as an example to dissuade the local populace from mounting a second offensive. The involvement of other Kildare clergy was relatively minor.

In the aftermath of the rebellion, Patrick Duignan, an ultra loyalist attacked Maynooth College for the role of thirty six students who he claimed joined the rebellion. At least seventeen it was asserted were expelled for their rebellious activities. His denunciations were directly countered by the president of the college Rev. Peter Flood whose term of office extended through the troublesome years from 1798 to 1803. An investigation in May 1798 revealed eight students had become United Irishmen in the period 1793-96. Two others refused to talk and all ten were expelled

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<sup>41</sup>*The Irish Magazine* vol. viii, (1815) p. 248.

<sup>42</sup>Statement of Rev Charles Eustace 7 Jun. [1798] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/51/59).

<sup>43</sup>Mr Keogh, Eccles St. to ---- n.d. [1798] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/51/255); Hayes, 'Priests in the independence movement of '98' p. 261, 264.

<sup>44</sup>Examination of Belle Martin, Co. Meath 23 Jun. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/222).

<sup>45</sup>Daire Keogh, *The French Disease* chapter 8.

on 12 May - before the rebellion.<sup>46</sup> One of those expelled, Francis Hearn, later studied at St. Patrick's College, Carlow. He was executed for rebel activities in his native Waterford in October 1799. It is not surprising that a rebellion, carried on so successfully in north Kildare would reflect suspicion on the nascent institution. Patrick Corish comments that: 'The connection between Maynooth students and the 1798 insurgents was...very indirect, but that did not stop the Dublin papers'.<sup>47</sup>

Through the first weeks of June Prosperous remained in the hands of the insurgents. On 19 June two separate forces attacked the rebel stronghold. A body of Fifth Dragoons under Captain Pack, despatched from Rathangan, engaged about one hundred rebels outside Prosperous. Most were dressed in Yeomen's uniforms. The rebels were defeated with the loss of twenty to thirty men. Later on the same day a force totalling around two hundred was despatched from Naas under Lt. Col. Stewart: 'I perceived the rebels posted on a hill on the left a large flag was flying on a staff which was pulled down on perceiving our strength and fled into Prosperous and the bog in the rear of it'. Pursuant to orders Stewart was unable to pursue the defeated rebels. On a banner was written: 'Prosperous strength exists in Union and Liberty'.<sup>48</sup> At this point Prosperous probably served as one of a number of outposts which provided easy access to the bog in case of attack.

On the same day probably the largest battle of the rebellion in Kildare was fought at Ovidstown Hill near Hortland House, north west of Timahoe. The rebel force was large but apparently unprepared for battle. The presence of thousands of insurgents in north Kildare may indicate hopes for an assault on the capital. On 20 June Thomas Boyle reported large numbers of men convening on Blackmore Hill

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<sup>46</sup>Patrick. Duignan, *A fair representation of the present political state of Ireland* (London, 1799) p. 216-20; Peter Flood, *A letter from the Rev. Peter Flood D.D....relative to a pamphlet entitled 'A fair...'* by Patrick Duignan L.L.D. etc. (Dublin, 1800) p. 3-8.

<sup>47</sup>Patrick Corish, *Maynooth College 1795-1995* (Dublin, 1995) p. 19-21.

<sup>48</sup>Lt. Col. Stewart, Naas to Lord ---- 19 Jun. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/182); Cornwallis to Portland 21 Jun. 1798 (Reb. Papers 620/18/9/1 [and P.R.O. HO 100/81/49-50]).

under Micheal Reynolds and expressly stated plans for a rising in and attack on Dublin still existed. He also believed another camp was to be establish at Tara. Sproule later outlined a plan of attack which existed to be launched from positions in outer County Dublin.<sup>49</sup> Reynolds may have been in contact with Aylmer's force. His Naas comrade Micheal Murphy was definitely in Prosperous by mid June.<sup>50</sup> It is quite possible plans were underway for an attack on Dublin from the surrounding countryside. In the days before Ovidstown Dublin United Irishmen travelled to the rebel camps in the Bog of Allen. Edward Whiteman, an apprentice from near Chapelizod travelled to Straffan with four others on the night of 18 June. They spent some time in the stables of Joseph Henry where they were joined by twenty men from Lucan and Henry's servant who brought them to the Hortland area.<sup>51</sup>

Lt. Col. Irvine, commander of a garrison at Trim received information on 18 June that a large body of men were assembling near Kilcock. He gathered a large force in the town determined to attack, consisting of 400 men: Fourth dragoons, Duke of York's Fencible Cavalry, four infantry units, three Yeoman corps and two battalion guns.<sup>52</sup> The government forces were encountered by an enormous rebel force who retreated on their approach and lined at the bottom of Ovidstown Hill in the townland of Corcoranstown, the home of George Lube. The approach of troops caused a panic at the camp when it was called to arms. Edward Whiteman was informed 5,000-6,000 rebels were present; army commanders estimated 3,000 insurgents. Up to 500 rebels were mounted and included Maynooth and Naas Yeoman. The rebel commanders included Aylmer, Lube, Ware, Doorly, Kiernan and

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<sup>49</sup>Info. of B 20 Jun. [1798] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/18/3), Capt. H. Morison to Lord Rossmore 20 Jun. 1798 (Reb. Papers 620/38/192), S. Sproule to John Lees 25 Jun. 1798 (Reb. Papers 620/38/232).

<sup>50</sup>Gosford to Capt. ---- Naas 11 Jul. 1798. Enclosure: Information of Joseph Lyons 9 Jul. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/39/52).

<sup>51</sup>Information of Edward Whiteman 20 Jun. [1798 not 1797] (N.A.I. S.O.C. 3089).

<sup>52</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 285-6; O'Kelly, *General history* p. 92-5.

Walsh. Many of the men wore green cockades and white and green flags were also displayed.<sup>53</sup>

The rebel infantry appear to have led the attack, those with muskets firing from behind hedges. However this initial assault made no impact.<sup>54</sup> Edward Whiteman witnessed the breakdown of the rebel forces; once more the power of heavy weaponry was demonstrated: 'As soon as the cannon of the army began to fire the pike men ran away, about ten minutes after the attack began, they took off their coats and threw away their pikes'.<sup>55</sup> The rebel officers in command were unable to rally their force and fiasco rapidly devolved into rout. O'Kelly blamed the pikemen for defeat and estimated 200 dead, a figure in agreement with army estimates.<sup>56</sup>

Whiteman's testimony expressly stated 'none of the men were drunk, [they] were allowed porter which they had taken from Kilcock, the night before, as he had heard'.<sup>57</sup> This conflicts with strong local tradition which states many of the men were drunk on the day of the attack from drink stolen (or possibly even received) from Hortland House. The surprise element on the part of the government troops was crucial in the defeat, as was the use of cannon. The ill preparedness of the rebels possibly indicates they intended massing for something larger - an attack on Dublin. Ovidstown ended the possibility of an attack on the capital in the immediate future. Brigadier General Grose was, however, mistaken in his assumption 'the engagement

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<sup>53</sup>Information of Edward Whiteman 20 Jun. [1798] (N.A.I. S.O.C. 3089); Brig. Gen. Grose, Kilcock to ---- 20 Jun. 1798 (Reb. Papers 620/38/193); O'Kelly, *General history* p. 93.

<sup>54</sup>Information of Edward Whiteman 20 Jun. [1798] (N.A.I. S.O.C. 3089); Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 285; O'Kelly, *General history* p. 94.

<sup>55</sup>Information of Edward Whiteman 20 Jun. [1798] (N.A.I. S.O.C. 3089) see also George Holdcroft, Kill to --- 21 Jun. 1798 (Reb. Papers 620/38/205).

<sup>56</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 94; Brig. Gen. Grose, Kilcock to ---- 20 Jun. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/193).

<sup>57</sup>Information of Edward Whiteman 20 Jun. [1798] (N.A.I. S.O.C. 3089).

has done away with that attack you had designed we should make at Tippahoe' [i.e. Timahoe].<sup>58</sup>

Most of the rebels had little choice but to return to the bogs where they continued to a military problem for Dublin Castle. Richard Griffith reported on 30 June 'the rebels...continue to plunder with impunity'. Belle Martin's testimony also demonstrates continued rebel activity in the days after Ovidstown. Her departure from Painstown may reflect the Castle's thinking that the rebels in north Kildare were now broken.<sup>59</sup> Following the battle of Ovidstown, Doorly travelled south to the Athy area, possibly as an emissary, to encourage a second rising. He met a number of Captains who agreed upon an attack on Stradbally. This however collapsed when the original area commander retracted his initial orders hours before the attack was due to commence.<sup>60</sup> In the aftermath of Ovidstown relations with the Dublin United Irishmen became strained. While Aylmer found his Dublin comrades were prevented from assisting the Kildare rebels: 'He therefore requires his friends to assemble in such numbers as they think will be able to make their way good to join him and by so doing - they will be forgiven for their past neglect'. Otherwise they were to be considered 'as enemies to the cause'. This evidence suggests Aylmer continued to see Dublin as the crucial focus of his army.<sup>61</sup>

By late June the government of the recently appointed Lord Lieutenant Cornwallis began to initiate a change in the Castle's policy towards rebellion. On 29 June an offer of terms of surrender was made whereby rebels would acknowledge their guilt, promise good behaviour and take the oath of allegiance and in turn receive

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<sup>58</sup>Brig. Gen. Grose, Kilcock to ---- 20 Jun. 1798 (Reb. Papers 620/38/193).

<sup>59</sup>Richard Griffith to Thomas Pelham 30 Jun. 1798 (B.L., Pelham Papers Add. MS 33,105 f.453-4); Examination of Belle Martin, Co. Meath 23 Jun. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/222).

<sup>60</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 91.

<sup>61</sup> --- to Alex Worthington 25 Jun. 1798, Information received from B (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/38/233).

protection.<sup>62</sup> While Cornwallis' offer was not acted upon it appears to have indicated to the Kildare leaders the possibility of concluding an acceptable surrender. On 4 July Fenton Aylmer wrote to Lord Castlereagh informing him Kildare magistrates were to meet to discuss an offer of surrender from the rebels. Charles Aylmer of Painstown intended attending and meeting the rebels the following day to 'settle' with them. The letter illustrates the awkward situation Fenton Aylmer found himself in; by his own admission he 'would much rather attack....'<sup>63</sup>

Castlereagh's reply was based on the recent proclamation. Kildare's rebel leaders must be prepared to sign a full confession, persuade their followers to surrender, give up their arms and swear allegiance. They could hope to have their lives spared 'on condition of transportation'. However absolutely no pardon was to be offered to Doorly for whose capture a reward of £100 was offered. The fate of Doorly is somewhat mysterious. O'Kelly believed he travelled to Westmeath after Athy and was executed. Thomas Boyle however believed John Doorly's nephew William was hanged at Mullingar while John himself was in Dublin after the rising, planning to gather a force. A third source asserted Doorly was in a Longford jail three years after the rebellion and was subsequently hanged.<sup>64</sup> A man calling himself, alternately, Doris, Dalton and Doorly was arrested in Longford in August 1801 for United Irish activities and murder. His captors believed he was John Doorly. The man later claimed he had used the name Doorly to enhance his reputation locally.<sup>65</sup>

The Kildare rebels appear to have stalled on Castlereagh's offer because they felt it necessary to receive official assurances. Charles Aylmer had an

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<sup>62</sup>Pakenham, *The year of liberty* p. 271; *F.J.* 5 Jul. 1798.

<sup>63</sup>Sir Fenton Aylmer to ---- 4 Jul. 1798 enclosed: (copy) reply of Lord Castlereagh 5 Jul. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/39/23). original reply (Reb. Papers 620/3/49/1); *F.J.* 17 Jul. 1798.

<sup>64</sup>O'Kelly, *General history* p. 91; B to ---- n.d. [late 1798?] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/18/3); W.H. Maxwell, *History of the Irish rebellion* p. 68.

<sup>65</sup>Thomas Newcomen to Edward Cooke Aug. 1801, enclosed: Samuel Barker to Thomas Newcomen 23 Aug. 1801 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/60/64).

influential friend in the marquis of Buckingham who also intervened. According to him a surrender offered through himself to Cornwallis on 5 July failed to take place due to lack of trust. Neither a letter from the Lord Lieutenant nor Buckinghamshire was considered appropriate.<sup>66</sup> On the same day Fenton Aylmer and Micheal Aylmer (of Courtown) were ambushed returning from Naas, outside Clane near Castle Browne. An advanced guard of four men were 'violently attacked' at least three died. 'The whole fields,' he wrote, 'down to Castle Browne were covered with the villains....' Aylmer prudently decided to retreat to Sallins where he requested reinforcements.<sup>67</sup> Both the *Freeman's Journal* and Musgrave stated William Aylmer was in command of the insurgent force, but Fenton Aylmer makes no mention of his presence.<sup>68</sup>

In consequence forces commanded by Capt. Beare and Major Johnston were despatched from Naas. The latter returned the following day with twenty prisoners taken at Castle Browne. These included one Costello of the Clane Yeomanry and Patrick Byrne, steward to Wogan Browne. Johnston reported: Byrne '....acknowledges having entertained Mr William Aylmer at Mr Browne's house knowing him to be a chief of the rebels. He says the prisoners were engaged in Mr Browne's work and could answer for this having no arms'.<sup>69</sup> Joseph Lyons, who was forcibly taken to a rebel camp in the Prosperous area made a statement asserting Patrick Byrne was a prominent rebel in that area.<sup>70</sup> The rebel attack illustrates the

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<sup>66</sup>Marquis of Buckinghamshire to Lord Grenville 23 Jul. 1798 in H.M.C., *Report on the MSS of J.B. Fortescue preserved at Droghmore* (London, 1905) vol. iv p. 264-5.

<sup>67</sup>Lt. Gen. Craig to ---- Dublin, 6 Jul. 1798, enclosed: Gosford to Lake, Naas 4 Jul. 1798, Fenton Aylmer, Sallins to Gosford n.d. [5 Jul. 1798] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/39/26).

<sup>68</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 272; *F.J.* 17 Jul. 1798.

<sup>69</sup>Lt. Gen. Craig to ---- Dublin, 6 Jul. 1798, enclosed: Gosford to Lake, Naas 4 Jul. 1798, Fenton Aylmer, Sallins to Gosford n.d. [5 Jul. 1798] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/39/26).

<sup>70</sup>Gosford to Capt. ---- Naas 11 Jul. 1798, enclosure: Information of Joseph Lyons 9 Jul.. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/39/52).

continuing effectiveness of the United Irish army in their fugitive campaign. It undoubtedly stalled the negotiation process temporarily. Gosford went so far as to comment: 'I do think every house in Clane should be destroyed, it harbours a host of villains'.<sup>71</sup> Richard Griffith believed the offer of terms of surrender by Cornwallis was harmful. Large areas of north Kildare, outside the garrisons, remained under threat of attack, while the rebels were merely 'emboldened by our weakness'.<sup>72</sup>

Despite numerous assaults on their camps and the disastrous collapse at Ovidstown, hundreds if not thousands of rebels continued to wage a guerrilla war in north Kildare. While negotiations stalled the position of the Kildare rebels was suddenly altered by the arrival of Wexford and Wicklow armies in the county between 8 and 10 July. The winding erratic mission of the south eastern rebels to enflame the people in the counties surrounding Dublin has been the subject of relatively detailed research recently. Ruan O'Donnell and Daniel Gahan have examined the events from the perspective of the Wicklow and Wexford rebellions respectively.<sup>73</sup> By its nature the subsequent activities of a combined army were carried on through the impulse of the fresh arrivals. Their arrival gave fresh momentum to the rebels in north Kildare and their aims were more far reaching, and indeed unrealistic, than those of Aylmer and his comrades.

On the night of 8 July Wexford and Wicklow insurgents crossed the border into Kildare near Blessington. They followed a twisting route north travelling via Kilcullen and Newbridge and studiously avoiding Naas. They encountered Kildare

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<sup>71</sup>Lt. Gen. Craig to ---- Dublin, 6 Jul. 1798, enclosed: Gosford to Lake, Naas 4 Jul. 1798, Fenton Aylmer, Sallins to Gosford n.d. [5 Jul. 1798] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/39/26).

<sup>72</sup>Richard Griffith, Naas to Thomas Pelham 11 Jul. 1798 (B.L., Pelham Papers Add. MS 33,105 f. 4-8).

<sup>73</sup>Ruan O'Donnell, 'General Joseph Holt and the rebellion of 1798 in County Wicklow' (M.A. U.C.D. 1991) p. 183-90; *idem.*, 'The rebellion of 1798 in County Wicklow' p. 364-5; Daniel Gahan, *The People's Rising, Wexford 1798* (Dublin, 1995) p. 278-97.

rebels at Robertstown.<sup>74</sup> At Kill a mail coach was attacked and destroyed while near Newbridge a quantity of gunpowder was captured. The rebel force moved further north from Robertstown to the rebel base at Prosperous. Perceiving a government force on their rear, they drew up on a hill near the town but conflict was avoided when the soldiers drew off.<sup>75</sup> By 10 July John Wolfe was aware that a large body (he estimated 1,200 to 1,500 men) had crossed from Whelp Rock to Kildare.<sup>76</sup> The massing of rebels in north Kildare encouraged fresh desertions from government forces. A group of Fourth Dragoons left their post at Santry intending to join 'Captain Doorly' in Kildare.<sup>77</sup> However fifteen rebels surrendered to Thomas Conolly at Castletown between 8 and 12 July. Most claimed they were forced to participate in the rebellion.<sup>78</sup>

The plans of the combined rebel force were unclear to government troops. Samuel Sproule believed the north Kildare and Dublin rebels planned to make a 'desperate attack' on Naas.<sup>79</sup> Daniel Gahan argues the ultimate design of the Wexford-Wicklow group was to connect with the Ulster United Irishmen, whose rebellion was now crushed. Within this context it is difficult to explain why Clonard to the north was targeted. Fr. Mogue Kearns one of the Wexford leaders had been a curate in the parish. Perhaps he expected to recover arms and ammunition or simply favoured the move from personal motivations.<sup>80</sup> Felix Rourke stated the combined force 'proceeded...with the determination of marching thro' [sic] the different counties

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<sup>74</sup>O'Donnell, 'Rebellion' p. 364; Gahan, *People's rising* p. 282-3, 286.

<sup>75</sup>Gahan, *People's rising* p. 283; Felix Rourke to Mary Finaghy 27 Jul. 1798 in Madden, *United Irishmen* 2nd edn. vol. iv, p. 547.

<sup>76</sup>John Wolfe to Edward Cooke 10 Jul. [1798] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/52/47).

<sup>77</sup>Court martial of Patrick Gorman, Carlow 14 May 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/5/58/22).

<sup>78</sup>Names and descriptions of those persons who surrendered themselves to the Rt. Hon. Thomas Conolly 8-12 July 1798 (N.A.I. Frazer Mss 1/24)

<sup>79</sup>S. Sproule to J. Lees 10 Jul. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/39/44).

<sup>80</sup>Gahan, *People's rising* p. 284.

in order to raise them'.<sup>81</sup> It is possible some leaders wished to strike west not north. The author of *An impartial narrative* believed Aylmer suggested attacking Clonard with a view to pushing towards Athlone. On 16 July 'a man who was in the camp' informed John Wolfe the 'executive' intended making an attempt on Athlone.<sup>82</sup> Above all Clonard presented a soft target to the large rebel force. From the viewpoint of the Kildare insurgents it also offered easy return access to the bogs.

The rebel force possibly numbering 3,000 men arrived at Clonard on the afternoon of 11 July. The garrison was defended by only twenty seven Yeomen under Lt. Thomas Tyrrell. The attack was led by 'one Farrell', possibly Andrew, with three hundred men. Rourke and his Dublin contingent also took part in this initial assault which was accompanied by burning part of the town. Rourke was incorrect when he asserted the defenders suffered 'considerable loss'. However the timely arrival of fifty infantry and fifty cavalry from Mullingar and Edenderry probably saved the garrison. After six hours of combat those rebels who succeeded in penetrating the town were expelled. The rebels lost an estimated sixty men.<sup>83</sup> The defeated force fell back to the house of Lord Harberton at Newbury, near Castlecarbery. The house was plundered as were others in the neighbourhood. Up to 1,000 encamped at nearby Carbery.<sup>84</sup>

On the evening of 11 July Lt. Col. Gough at Philipstown received information from Major Ormsby that an attack on the town was expected. The

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<sup>81</sup>Felix Rourke to Mary Finaghy 27 Jul. 1798 in Madden, *United Irishmen* 2nd edn. vol. iv, p. 547.

<sup>82</sup>*An impartial narrative* p. 3-4, 12; John Wolfe to Edward Cooke 16 Jul. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/39/93); O'Kelly, *General history* p. 192-3.

<sup>83</sup>*An impartial narrative* p. 12-20; Felix Rourke to Mary Finaghy 27 Jul. 1798 in Madden, *United Irishmen* 2nd edn. vol. iv, p.547; Cornwallis to Portland 15 Jul. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/39/80); Cooke to Wickham 12 Jul. 1798 (P.R.O. HO 100/81/243).

<sup>84</sup>Lord Harberton to ---- 14 Jul. 1798, enclosed: B.F., Newbury to Viscount Harberton 14 Jul. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/4/33/1).

following morning Gough with a force of ninety men moved west to Carbery Hill where he discovered the rebels had travelled east. He followed the path of United Irish army, finally encountering the combined army, numbering 4,000 on Knockderg Hill near Johnstown. Gough was under the impression they were drawn up for battle: '...forming such a line as really astonished me, with many standards flying and everything prepared to give me battle....' A 'desperate attack' up the hill resulted in confusion among the rebels and their complete dispersion. Gough's men recovered a large quantity of bullocks, horses, linen, whiskey, wine, flour, gunpowder and 'numberless small things'. The rebels had just been preparing for dinner not combat.<sup>85</sup>

Gough believed the rebels to be commanded by Aylmer, Doorly, Lube and Mogue Kearns and Fitzgerald of Wexford. 'This country is in wretched situation' he added.<sup>86</sup> The evacuation of the camp and second military defeat in two days resulted in the separation of the combined army. The majority of Kildare men under Aylmer and including Edward Fitzgerald returned to their strongholds in the Bog of Allen.<sup>87</sup> The ensuing Meath expedition was a complete disaster. The rebels were continuously harassed by soldiers and failed to rouse local support.

The disastrous sojourn of the combined United Irish army in north Kildare undoubtedly confirmed Aylmer and his comrades of the necessity of concluding a surrender. Military victory was impossible, there was still no sign of the French and while the Bog of Allen provided a natural defence, it was not impenetrable nor was the warm summer going to last indefinitely. While their Wexford and Wicklow comrades marched further north channels of communication were reopened

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<sup>85</sup>Col. Vereker, Rathangan to Castlereagh 21 Jul. 1798, enclosed: Lt. Col. Gough to Col. Vereker 14 Jul. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/4/36/1); *F.J.* Jul. 1798.

<sup>86</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>87</sup>Felix Rourke to Mary Finaghy 27 Jul. 1798 in Madden, *United Irishmen* 2nd edn. vol. iv, p. 547; O'Donnell 'General Joseph Holt' p. 186; Information of Bartholemew Connolly and Edward McLaughlin 14 Jul. 1798, Confession of Oliver Nelson 15 Jul. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/39/73,75).

between government and the Kildare rebels. Once more the collateral branches of William Aylmer's family - the Aylmers of Donadea and Courtown - provided middlemen. A copy of correspondence between the rebels and these go betweens was forwarded to Castlereagh on 16 July. The detail of this flow of letters reveals the difficulties of dealing with rebels in arms.<sup>88</sup>

On 15 July Micheal Aylmer received a letter from the 'officers of the barony anxious to restore it to its lost peace and tranquillity'. They were prepared to accept exile to 'their choice of country'. Significantly the letter also contained an apologia stating the leaders - Aylmer, Ware, Lube and Cormick - attempted to escape to America when the rebellion began but were forced to return 'in their own defence to join their respective places'. They attempted at all times to prevent the destruction of property and expressed sorrow for the desolation of Courtown. Fenton Aylmer replied the same day, sending what he described as a 'memorandum' referring to a letter of Lord Castlereagh dated 12 July. This suggests government may have attempted to maintain contact during the campaign of the combined army. This letter accepted exile not transportation was to be the punishment. It also requested surrender within forty eight hours [i.e. by 14 Jul.] which had elapsed however 'every interest' was to be used 'to protect the time'. Otherwise the conditions outlined by Castlereagh on 5 July still applied. The hill of Ballygordon was suggested as a suitable surrender point.

The rebels replied later on the same day. They wished to know if America could be arranged as a place of exile. They also expressed reservations about Fenton Aylmer's proposed method of surrender (i.e. en masse) given the experience of their comrades on the Curragh. Fenton Aylmer's reply the next day was non-committal. He informed the Kildare leaders the correspondence was forwarded to

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<sup>88</sup>Sir Fenton Aylmer to Castlereagh, Maynooth 16 Jul. 1798, four original enclosures: [Kildare rebels] to [Micheal] Aylmer 15 Jul. 1798, [Fenton Aylmer] to [Kildare rebels], Maynooth 15 Jul. 1798, [Kildare rebels] to Sir Fenton Aylmer 15 Jul. 1798, [Fenton Aylmer] to [Kildare rebels], Maynooth 16 Jul. 1798, also enclosed: Note from the Lord Lieutenant relative to affairs at Naas n.d. [c. 17-21 Jul. 1798] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/4/36/2).

Dublin where the place of banishment would be decided. A note written by Cornwallis, possibly in reply to Aylmer's letter (16 Jul.) indicated General Lake was willing to accept the 'unconditional surrender' of the rebels.<sup>89</sup>

Around the same time Buckinghamshire was allowed to write a letter to Charles Aylmer of Painstown to help arrange the surrender. He claimed a reply was received from William Aylmer and Edward Fitzgerald which resulted in surrender. The influence of a prominent figure like Buckinghamshire, undoubtedly provided the rebel leaders with the security they required.<sup>90</sup> The negotiations ran into difficulty during the 17-18 July. Cornwallis received two despatches from General Wilford who met Aylmer and Fitzgerald at Sallins.<sup>91</sup> At this meeting an armistice, including all those rebels in arms, was agreed which provoked an angry response from Castlereagh. He expressed disapprobation at Wilford for entering into treaty with rebels who had for almost two weeks 'trifled with government'. The armistice was to be revoked immediately and twenty four hours allowed for submission. In the event of non-compliance rewards were to be offered for the apprehension of Aylmer (£1,000) and the other leaders (£300). Cornwallis also expressed anger at Wilford's conduct in a letter to William Pitt on 20 July, conduct which 'rendered more difficult' the surrender.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>Sir Fenton Aylmer to Castlereagh, Maynooth 16 Jul. 1798, four original enclosures: [Kildare rebels] to [Micheal] Aylmer 15 Jul. 1798, [Fenton Aylmer] to [Kildare rebels], Maynooth 15 Jul. 1798, [Kildare rebels] to Sir Fenton Aylmer 15 Jul. 1798, [Fenton Aylmer] to [Kildare rebels], Maynooth 16 Jul. 1798, also enclosed: Note from the Lord Lieutenant relative to affairs at Naas n.d. [c. 17-21 Jul. 1798] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/4/36/2).

<sup>90</sup>Marquis of Buckinghamshire to Lord Grenville 23 Jul. 1798 in *Fortescue MSS* vol. iv p. 264-5.

<sup>91</sup>Marquis of Cornwallis, *Correspondence of Charles, first marquis of Cornwallis* ed. Charles Ross (3 vols., London, 1859) vol. ii, p. 366-7. Wilford confirmed Buckinghamshire's intervention.

<sup>92</sup>Castlereagh to Wilford 19 Jul. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/3/47/4); Cornwallis to Pitt 20 Jul. 1798 in *Cornwallis correspondence* vol. ii, p. 368.

The determined attitude of government must have been instrumental in finally producing a surrender - though it did not occur until 21 July. At two o'clock a body of 120 rebels surrendered headed by Aylmer and Fitzgerald. Edward Cooke wrote to William Wickham:

After some little mismanagement the heads of the Wexford and Kildare rebels submitted this day. Fifteen of them have been dirtying my parlour this evening. I have not yet talked to them. Aylmer the Kildare leader seems to be a silly ignorant, obstinate lad. The surrender was on the condition the lives of the leaders should be saved.<sup>93</sup>

The fifteen who surrendered were escorted to Dublin from Montgomery Mills by Col. Handfield. They were: William Aylmer, Edward Fitzgerald, Joseph Cormick, George Lube, Andrew Farrell, Hugh Ware, Denis Farrell, Pat Mooney, Richard Daly, James Tiernan, Thomas Andoe, Micheal Quigly, Pat Hanlon, Peter Cockran and Bryan McDermott.<sup>94</sup> Buckinghamshire refused to have any dealings with leaders after their surrender. He reported 5,000 pikes and firelocks with all the rebel provisions were handed in.<sup>95</sup> The government's patience with the rebels is best explained by their determination to quell the rebellion, best achieved by removing the recognised leaders from the conflict. The intricacies of the surrender clearly demonstrate Dublin Castle's conflict of interests, with one eye on the loyalist population, another on the restoration of tranquillity. Government clearly believed what occurred was a 'surrender' not a 'treaty'.

Those who travelled north were not so lucky. Anthony Perry and Fr. Mogue Kearns returned too late to participate in the surrender. They were taken in Kildare and hanged in Edenderry.<sup>96</sup> On 7 August Felix Rourke and three Dublin comrades surrendered to Dundas at Kilcullen, escaping the ultimate fate of Perry and

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<sup>93</sup>Edward Cooke to William Wickham 21 Jul. 1798 (P.R.O. HO 100/77/268-9).

<sup>94</sup>*F.J.* 24 Jul. 1798; Gilbert (ed), *Documents relating to Ireland* p. 19.

<sup>95</sup>Marquis of Buckinghamshire to Lord Grenville 23 Jul. 1798 in *Fortescue MSS* vol. iv p. 264-5.

<sup>96</sup>Gahan, *People's rising* p. 297.

Kearns.<sup>97</sup> Others managed to return to the Wicklow mountains where they continued to plague the government in the years after 1798. While the surrender of 21 July was successful in terminating overt rebellion in Kildare the county was tormented by 'different bands of rebels and robbers' for months afterwards. The problem was particularly acute in north Kildare. Louisa Conolly knew the problem would be significant but hoped 'when all are joined against them, that they cannot long be screened'.<sup>98</sup>

The rebellion had a devastating effect on Kildare as a whole but the Leinster family, and their local and national position was particularly damaged. The duke of Leinster himself (as well as John Philpot Curran and Henry Grattan) was briefly arrested in the company of Valentine Lawless in late April.<sup>99</sup> On 4 June Lord Edward had died in prison of wounds inflicted during his arrest.<sup>100</sup> The most extraordinary reaction was that of Lady Lucy. She composed a letter to 'the Irish Nation'. The piece exhorted the people of Ireland to rise in the example of her dead brother, to attain 'happiness, freedom, glory'. She also wrote to Thomas Paine informing him of Edward's death. Not surprisingly the former letter was never posted.<sup>101</sup> The extent of the rebellion in Kildare reflected badly on Leinster. Cornwallis blamed the 'fostering hand of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, and the countenance which it received from his weak brother Leinster....'<sup>102</sup> Buckinghamshire was even more scathing in his criticism:

There is no doubt from their general language [i.e. the Kildare rebels] that

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<sup>97</sup>Dundas to Castlereagh 8 Aug. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/39/58).

<sup>98</sup>Thomas Tyrrell to John Wolfe n.d. [late 1798] (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers); Louisa Conolly to Castlereagh 25 Jul. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/3/51/2).

<sup>99</sup>Cloncurry, *Personal recollections* p. 67.

<sup>100</sup>Stella Tillyard, *Aristocrats* p. 388-97.

<sup>101</sup>*ibid.*, p. 393; Lady Lucy Fitzgerald to the Irish Nation n.d., Lady Lucy Fitzgerald to Thomas Paine n.d. [both June 1798] in Campbell, *Edward and Pamela Fitzgerald* p. 183-5.

<sup>102</sup>Cornwallis to Maj. Gen. Ross 13 Jul. 1798 in *Cornwallis correspondence* vol. ii, p. 363.

many of the demagogues in parliament have been very deeply dipped with them. The duke of Leinster is now very openly talked of; and it is certain that all the most active in this rising in Kildare have, within these few months, received from him very valuable leases upon his estate, or are in other respects dependant upon him. Still I do not think it is the wish of government to press that inquiry as far as it ought against him and others.<sup>103</sup>

Not only had Lord Edward been implicated with the United Irishmen but Thomas Reynolds had also implicated (to a much lesser degree) his wife Pamela.<sup>104</sup> Government decided to confiscate Lord Edward's property by means of an act of attainder. In late July it was 'thought expedient' to add the names of Cornelius Grogan and Bagnell Harvey to the bill 'that the measure may not appear personal to the Leinster family'.<sup>105</sup> The duke of Leinster protested when informed of the measure. He asserted Pamela's innocence and pointed out Edward had not received a trial and was 'no fugitive' when arrested. Cornwallis' reply clearly stated the legislation would proceed. He declared Lord Edward was 'not only a fugitive but the most criminal of fugitives'.<sup>106</sup> The death of his brother and the rebellion undermined the political position of the duke of Leinster. He was an object of suspicion not only in Ireland but in England. Kildare of which he owned one third was ravaged by the combat - his town at Kildare in particular lay in ruins. Lady Louisa Conolly wrote on 18 June, 'The County of Kildare where his whole estate is, is in a manner laid waste - and no chance that I can foresee of his getting in his half years rents: he is worse off than any of us, and I do not know what he can do'. Compensation received for the disenfranchisement

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<sup>103</sup>Marquis of Buckinghamshire to Lord Grenville 23 Jul. 1798 in *Fortescue MSS* vol. iv p. 264-5.

<sup>104</sup>Information of Thomas Reynolds before the Privy Council.. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/3/32/23), Particulars of evidence to shew [sic] that Lord Edward Fitzgerald has been actively engaged in the treasons carried on in this country. n.d. (620/3/31/3).

<sup>105</sup>Castlereagh to Wickham 31 Jul. 1798 in *Cornwallis correspondence* vol. ii, p. 379.

<sup>106</sup>Leinster to Cornwallis, Brompton, 6 Aug. 1798, Cornwallis to Leinster 11 Aug 1798 in *ibid.*, p. 384-5.

of his boroughs of Athy and Kildare following the act of union was used directly to clear debts on his property.<sup>107</sup>

Damage had been inflicted over a wide area during the two month conflict. Three hundred and ninety one suffering loyalists from Kildare claimed £97,070 from the commission appointed to reimburse them. Only Wexford, Wicklow and Mayo produced higher petitions.<sup>108</sup> Richard Musgrave endeavoured to cast the rebellion in Kildare as elsewhere, as a sectarian rising. While his narrative abounds in tales of the individual sufferings of Protestants, Kildare afforded him no Scullabogue or Wexford Bridge. Rathangan provided the best example of rebel victory turned religious pogrom. Meanwhile three chapels were destroyed, at Kildare, Athy and Stradbally, during May and June.<sup>109</sup> However the minimal role of the Catholic clergy may be one indication of the limited religious motivation. The best documented sectarian murders, particularly those of Brewer, Stamer and Spencer, are better explained in terms of loss of authority and discipline in the United Irish force allowing the expression of sectarian and agrarian forces to be unleashed. Lady Louisa Conolly believed: 'This business is too deep for such a political head as mine to judge of, but I still think that it does not proceed from a religious cause....'<sup>110</sup>

Patrick O'Kelly's reactive rebellion forced on a suffering people by an undisciplined soldiery is no more convincing than Musgrave's account. Captain Swayne's barbarity at Prosperous is well documented but it does not explain why a ferocious rising occurred in that area while the long suffering region around Athy hesitated and failed. The subsequent historians of Kildare's rebellion, notably O'Muirtile, MacSuibhne and Pakenham, reflect the bias of Musgrave and O'Kelly in their own work. It is significant that the two baronies where the United Irishmen were most seriously damaged before the rebellion, Kilkea and Moone and West Narragh

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<sup>107</sup>G.C. Bolton, *The passing of the Irish act of union* p. 183.

<sup>108</sup>*Commons journal of Ireland* vol. xix pt. 1 (1800) p. cciv-ccxxvii, cccxcviii.

<sup>109</sup>*The Irish Magazine* vol. i, (1808) p. 25.

<sup>110</sup>Louisa Conolly to duke of Richmond 18 Jun. 1798 (P.R.O.N.I. McPeake Papers T. 3048/B/27).

and Rheban witnessed the most ineffectual rebel activity in the county. The rebellion in Kildare was United Irish in its origins, timing and leadership. For its duration the rising, which became linked as a whole to 'General William Aylmer' threatened to implement the original strategy by attacking the capital.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>*William Aylmer and the men of Kildare* (London, n.d.).

## Chapter Seven

### Rebels and robbers 1798-1803

This chapter will examine the situation in Kildare from the end of the 1798 rebellion until 'Emmet's rebellion' of July 1803, a period largely neglected by historians in comparison with the voluminous research conducted on the preceding decade. The question of United Irish organisation and survival after 1798 will be addressed. The union with Great Britain stimulated debate in the upper echelons of Irish political society but it remained a largely constitutional question outside the ambit of popular politics and hence will be examined only briefly. The period under discussion ended in Emmet's conspiracy. While the man himself has received much attention 'his' rebellion has not.<sup>1</sup> Kildare provides the only example of actual rebel activity in the vicinity of Dublin during the 1803 rising and the origin and progress of these events require discussion.

The surrender of the Kildare leaders on 21 July 1798 did not mark the end of overt rebellion in the rest of the country. During late August and early September 1,000 French troops under General Jean Humbert conducted an audacious but ultimately ill fated invasion from Killala, County Mayo. Despite a sympathetic rising in areas where the French operated and a victory over government forces at Castlebar, Humbert was forced to surrender at Ballinamuck on 8 September.<sup>2</sup> Some effort was made to encourage renewed rebel activity in Kildare on the arrival of their overdue allies. William Putnam McCabe, with the financial assistance of Philip

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<sup>1</sup>see F.S. Bourke, 'The rebellion of 1803: an essay in bibliography' *Bibliographical society of Ireland publications* vol. v, no. 1, (1933)

<sup>2</sup>Elliot, *Partners in revolution* p. 214-40.

Long, a Dublin merchant, unsuccessfully attempted to encourage a second rising, narrowly avoiding capture himself.<sup>3</sup>

The most successful and famous rebel activity of the period was sustained in the Wicklow mountains under Joseph Holt and Micheal Dwyer. The surrender of the leading Kildare rebels in July ensured no such campaign would be conducted under a high profile rebel from the leadership core of the Timahoe camp. This was reinforced by the fact that the surrender emptied the Bog of Allen, which provided most favourable conditions for a prolonged campaign, of its rebel army. Some noted rebel leaders did escape arrest and appear to have remained in the Wicklow-Kildare border area in the post-rebellion period, most notably Malachi Delany, Micheal Reynolds and Matthew Kenna.

Even before the end of overt rebellion in Kildare lawlessness, plunder and robbery became acceptable and indeed crucial to survival among elements of the United Irish army. Disorder became a recurring feature of the Kildare landscape during the autumn and winter of 1798. The situation was commonly connected to ex-rebels. Sometimes they were considered as 'United Irish' and often as mere highwaymen and robbers with no political import. The unleashing of lawlessness in the aftermath of rebellion is a feature Kildare shared with the other major centres of conflict, for example Wexford. In that county the rebellion quickly gave way to a 'white terror' typified by men such as Hunter Gowan and his 'Black Mob'. This was matched by the formation of small guerrilla style rebel groups during the autumn/winter of 1798.<sup>4</sup> The available evidence suggests no such white terror gripped Kildare in late July - August. This is largely explained by the fact that such a reaction already occurred during June in the areas of the county where open rebellion quickly dissipated. This is illustrated in the execution of Fr. Edward Prendegast at

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<sup>3</sup>Statement of Micheal Quigly 30 Jun. 1805 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/14/187/11); Madden, *United Irishmen* 3rd ser. vol. ii, p. 108-9.

<sup>4</sup>Daniel Gahan, 'The "Black Mob" and the "Babes in the Wood": Wexford in the wake of the rebellion 1798-1806' in *Journal of the Wexford Historical Society* vol. 13, (1990-1) p. 92-110.

Monasterevan or Col. Campbell's destructive pacification of south Kildare. The county appears to have enjoyed a measure of tranquillity during August. This situation was encouraged by General Dundas' continued leniency. He reduced many of the death sentences passed in his district to transportation.<sup>5</sup>

Sectarianism of a sort attended the months after the rebellion in Kildare. In August the surface calm was threatened by a plot to massacre the Protestants of Athy. Thomas Rawson having uncovered the conspiracy sent information to Dublin Castle which provided reinforcements in the form of the Fermanagh Militia. Around the same time the Catholic chapel in the town was burned. Information later sworn by Timothy Sullivan, of the South Cork Militia suggested leading radicals and United Irishmen had urged him to swear against a soldier and two yeomen for the attack in order to encourage disaffection. Among those implicated were James Noud, Fr. Patrick Kelly and Thomas Fitzgerald of Geraldine recently released from prison. The same information and that of a prisoner suggests the United Irishmen in the Athy region continued to meet in committee, were actively engaged in arming or rearming and expected a French invasion in the two years following 1798.<sup>6</sup> Thomas Fitzgerald intimated that the United Irish organisation was strong in the autumn of 1798, centred in particular on a 'Captain Doorly' and based in the collieries outside Athy. 'If the French [i.e. Humbert's invasion force] had gained any considerable advantage,' he wrote on 10 September, 'a rising was to have taken place between this Sunday and next.'<sup>7</sup> The collieries in the vicinity of Athy appear to have been an important base for some rebel groups. J. Weldon wrote in late October, 'I really believe a permanent banditti mean to establish themselves in the colliery hills of the Queen's Co'.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Dundas to Castlereagh 8 Aug. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/39/158).

<sup>6</sup>Musgrave, *Rebellions* appendix xv, p. 64-5.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas Fitzgerald to Sir John Parnell 10 Sept. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/46/34).

<sup>8</sup>Sir John Parnell to Castlereagh 21 Oct. 1798, enclosed: J. Weldon to Parnell 21 Oct. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/40/180).

The situation in south Kildare grew worrying for government during the autumn and winter of 1798. The reports of frightened loyalists reflects their insecurity as much as the existence of plots or intended massacres. In late September the house of Thomas Rawson at Glasealy outside Athy was destroyed by a rebel group of sixteen men under Matthew Kenna and James Murphy. According to one of the participants the group launched the attack from the Glen of Imaal in the Wicklow Mountains. Some of the participants, for example one 'Antrim John', were known to be associated with Holt and Dwyer. The party also murdered four local Protestants during the assault which Musgrave portrays as sectarian. Perhaps revenge was a greater motivating factor.<sup>9</sup> William Goldwin writing to Rawson around the same time stated: 'We are threatened to be attacked (every day) the poor loyalists of Narraghmore and Calverstown are all flying this moment to Athy and the bridge. They are all to be destroyed this night; the villains gave them notice to quit'.<sup>10</sup>

The uncertainty of the situation created an atmosphere which heightened criminal activity, often associated (at least in the minds of loyalists) with continuing rebel activities. The Cork mail coach was a frequent target in the area south of Kilcullen. The robbers were based in the Wicklow Mountains close to the Kildare border. Those who headed a gang which struck in September at Red Gap had military titles - Colonel MacMahon, Captain Neale and Captain Walsh - formerly an attorney, a doctor and a maltster. Samuel Reilly taken prisoner from the coach recorded a perilous journey into the neighbouring mountains with the gang who appear to have been unconnected with either Holt or Dwyer. Dundas believed

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<sup>9</sup>S. Morgan to J. Lees 26 Sept. [1798] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/40/107), Thomas Rawson to Littlehales 18 Nov. 1800, enclosed: Information of James Cranny, Athy Jail n.d (Reb. Papers 620/58/81); Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 280-1; Charles Dickson, *The life of Micheal Dwyer with some account of his companions* (Dublin, 1944) p. 327-9.

<sup>10</sup>William Goodwin, Kilcullen to Captain Rawson 26 Sept. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/40/112).

the robbers were 'then on Blackmore Hill' in the same month.<sup>11</sup> Maurice Keatinge's comments on the situation are interesting:

The Cork mail coach has twice been robbed on the border of my estates....I do not absolutely know that it is by the people but I know so far as this that there is a connection between the inhabitants of that country and the robbers who are all both passive and active more or less concerned in the general system of depredation.

He concluded the area could only be 'governed by a military force' and expressly stated that the moral economy which had existed ten years previously between gentlemen and the lower orders had collapsed irretrievably under the 'system'.<sup>12</sup>

North Kildare exhibited the same disturbing features during late 1798. In September an informant writing under the pen name 'A County Kildare Farmer' reported the deplorable state of the Kilcock district. This was Rev. Christopher Robinson who sent seven surviving letters to Dublin Castle in May and June. As an ultra loyalist Camden's departure deprived him of a sympathetic audience hence his anonymity.<sup>13</sup> A group of six or seven men, including yeoman deserters were 'constantly galloping thro' [sic] this country, plundering and making use of every means in their power to rise the country once more and again involve us in misery'. The group lived off the local inhabitants and had been involved in mail coach robbery. The writer also implicated the gang in the murder of Mr Brown who had retired to Leixlip a short time previously for fear of his life.<sup>14</sup> Violent death became a common occurrence in the unruly situation. In October six members of a notorious

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<sup>11</sup>'Journal of Mr Samuel Reilly...September 1798' in *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society* vol. ii, ser. 2, (1896) p. 428-442; Dundas to Castlereagh 19 Sept. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/40/75).

<sup>12</sup>Col. Keatinge to ---- 9 Oct. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/40/143).

<sup>13</sup>see L.M. Cullen, 'Politics and rebellion: Wicklow in the 1790s' p. 466-7.

<sup>14</sup>A County Kildare Farmer to Cornwallis 18 Sept. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/40/69); Musgrave, *Rebellions* p. 284.

gang of 'rebels and robbers' were killed in an ambush by government forces.<sup>15</sup> Intimidation prevented adequate prosecution of those arrested. In the same month a Mr Cooley, an intended crown evidence at the next assizes, was killed with his eighty year old mother.<sup>16</sup> No common leaders emerge from the information sent to Dublin Castle suggesting that the various gangs were working independently. In this atmosphere rebellion and robbery had overlapped.

The activities of one rebel group are accessible through information supplied by a former member in late 1803. In September 1798 the North Cork Militia marched from Blessington to Ballinamuck, County Longford. John Nagle, a private in the force deserted near the Wood of Allen in Kildare following an argument with a superior officer. He subsequently met five men headed by Micheal Doorly. They asked Nagle to join their group and brought him to Lullymore. On his arrival:

Micheal Doorly took a prayer book out of his pocket and swore him: 'to do as they would do, and not to deceive them, and not to part from them till the last drop of his blood would be spilt, unless he should be forced or that they themselves should be forced to quit from each other and be steady and determined and to free his country and liberty for ever.

His hair was cropped and he was cheered by the crowd gathered in the area.<sup>17</sup> Lullymore provided the ideal situation for a rebel base positioned as it was (like Timahoe) on a dry island surrounded by bog land, to the north of Rathangan. John Doorly, Micheal's brother led the rebel attack on and occupation of Rathangan in

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<sup>15</sup>Thomas Tyrrell, Clonard to ---- 21 Oct. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/40/172).

<sup>16</sup>T. Conolly, Castletown to T. Kemmis 27 Oct. 1798 (N.A.I. Frazer MSS 1/41), Micheal Aylmer to [Marsden] 8 Jan. 1799 (Reb. Papers 620/46/7).

<sup>17</sup>Information of James Nagle 19 Dec. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/11/138/48). Published by P. MacSuibhne, *Kildare in '98* p. 227-240. He dates the initial events to autumn 1799. Also Information of James Nagle 29 Oct. 1803 (Reb. Papers 620/50/27).

May 1798. A Doorly was reported active in south Kildare in September 1798 whom Thomas Fitzgerald believed to be 'a brother to the general of that name'.<sup>18</sup>

Marianne Elliot recognised the importance of figures such as Doorly during the period between 1798 and 1803. She comments however: '....there were few signs that Doorly [sic] was creating anything other than a personal mafia, vaguely identified with the United Irish cause'.<sup>19</sup> Robbery was a central activity of Doorly's gang. Members were successfully prosecuted for house and highway robbery. Sectarianism also played a role in the group's identity. It appears from Nagle's testimony that only Catholics were admitted to the group. However they were more than a symptom of the pervading lawlessness of the post rebellion months. Nagle lived at 'old Doorly's' where he spent his time 'sometimes digging potatoes, sometimes casting bullets, sometimes exercising the men who assembled at Lullymore'. It is clear that the group actively expected another rising. The core of those involved were the extended Doorly family. Nagle himself married locally to Esther Malone of the Wood of Allen. He left the area after nine months and enlisted in the army, serving in both England and later Egypt.<sup>20</sup>

Both Daniel Gahan and Thomas Bartlett have applied the notion of 'social banditry' to the gangs who emerged in the wake of the rebellion in Wexford and Wicklow.<sup>21</sup> The idea was initially articulated by Eric Hobsbawm in *Primitive*

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<sup>18</sup>Critchey to Sir John Parnell 11 Sept 1798, enclosed: J. Belling to ---- n.d. (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/40/36), Thomas Fitzgerald to Parnell 10 Sept 1798 (Reb. Papers 620/40/34 ).

<sup>19</sup>Elliot, *Partners in revolution* p. 245.

<sup>20</sup>Information of James Nagle 19 Dec. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/11/138/48 ).

<sup>21</sup>Daniel Gahan, 'The "Black Mob" and the "Babes in the Wood": Wexford in the wake of the rebellion 1798-1806' p. 108-9; Thomas Bartlett, "'The masters of the mountains": The insurgent careers of Joseph Holt and Micheal Dwyer, County Wicklow 1798-1803' in Hannigan and Nolan (ed.), *Wicklow: history and society* (Dublin, 1994) p. 390-5.

*rebels* and *Bandits*.<sup>22</sup> What made banditry 'social' for Hobsbawm was the 'relation between the ordinary peasant and the rebel'. He therefore viewed the social bandit as 'peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even as leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired helped or supported'. Robin Hood was the archetypal social bandit.<sup>23</sup>

Since 1795 the disaffected in Kildare were continually described as 'banditti' by magistrates and military officers. The rebel groups of the post rebellion period fit some of the traits of the Hobsbawm model. Maurice Keatinge certainly identified a 'relationship' in existence between the peasant and rebel. This was not always one of unqualified respect. One of the gangs which operated in north east Kildare took their free board and lodging for granted. If they were not satisfied 'they instantly threaten to burn our cabins and sometimes to shoot us and put a cock'd pistol to our breast'.<sup>24</sup> However social banditry for Hobsbawm was not a social movement but largely peopled by traditionalists or perhaps reformers. In Kildare the relationship which existed between the lower orders and the 'rebels' was politically informed. The position among the people of the rebel gangs was based on their political opposition to government (however tenuous that had become). For Hobsbawm the link between politics and banditry was less direct. Banditry provided a channel of social agitation to traditional agrarian societies. This was forcefully articulated in times of 'pauperisation and economic crisis'. Hence social banditry was a 'pre-political phenomenon'.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive rebels: studies in archaic forms of social movement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (2nd edn. New York, 1959); *idem, Bandits* (2nd edn. London, 1972).

<sup>23</sup>Hobsbawm, *Bandits* p. 17, 41.

<sup>24</sup>A County Kildare Farmer to Cornwallis 18 Sept. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/40/69).

<sup>25</sup>Hobsbawm, *Bandits* p. 23-4.

The leading loyalists of the county realised the need for direct action if the county was to be pacified. On 23 October John Wolfe who recently returned from the west of the country with the Kildare Militia sent a circular letter to Micheal Aylmer, Thomas Tyrrell, John Cassidy, Thomas Rawson and Theobald Wolfe, requesting information on the state of the country. He revealed the government was prepared to take strong measures and requested specific information on ex-rebels, Yeomanry deserters and possible military stations.<sup>26</sup> The reports received suggested the 'rebels' were actively engaged in preparations for another rising. A group was reported to have taken position on Eagle Hill where they were cutting trees in broad daylight. Theobald Wolfe's report was particularly alarming: '....the system of terror which prevailed before the rebellion is in operation at this moment. The mass of the people is so corrupted as to be ripe for any enormity'. Another correspondent Edward Richardson, while conceding the poor situation of the county, realised that a second rising depended on 'certain circumstances' - on Holt's party gaining ground or more importantly French assistance.<sup>27</sup> The need for pacification was rendered necessary not just by the state of the country but by the analogies to be drawn with the years before the outbreak of May 1798 and the perceived inefficiency of the magistracy in that period. Rebel activities were becoming increasingly more impudent. In Ballitore a rebel force 'paraded in the daytime, their leader in the street dismissed them with all the military forms - billeted them on the town and at night marched out and burned the house of loyal gentlemen....' Mary Leadbeater recorded the continued activities of rebels based in the Wicklow Mountains in late 1798 and

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<sup>26</sup>(copy) John Wolfe to Micheal Aylmer, Thomas Tyrrell, John Cassidy, Thomas Rawson and Theobald Wolfe 23 Oct. 1798 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>27</sup> John Johnston Darrah to John Wolfe 28 Nov. 1798, Edward Richardson to John Wolfe 29 Oct. 1798, Theobald Wolfe to John Wolfe 5 Nov., 18 Nov. 1798 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

1799 in south Kildare. In all Wolfe estimated that one hundred prominent rebels were at large in the county.<sup>28</sup>

The cornerstone of Wolfe's plan of pacification was the establishment of over thirty military stations around the county. However it was realised the co-operation of the magistrates (given their local knowledge) with the military was fundamental to the success of the project. These two it was urged should investigate criminal behaviour with a renewed sense of urgency. This involved lists of suspects being compiled, searches for arms and domicillary visits. Wolfe concluded optimistically 'the County of Kildare will be at peace in three months'.<sup>29</sup> Letters sent from Littlehales, Cornwallis' military secretary, stressed the importance of military action under the presence or 'positive instruction' of a magistrate.<sup>30</sup> No doubt government was mindful of the patchy support of Kildare magistrates during the months before the rebellion, for military action.

It is difficult to ascertain what effect direct action had in Kildare. During the winter government constantly received reports of an alarmist nature, hence Cornwallis' comment in December that in the suspect counties of Kildare, Carlow, Wicklow and Wexford 'there is every appearance, as I am informed, of an intended insurrection'.<sup>31</sup> A gang who operated in the Kilcock, Maynooth, Celbridge area attempted to solicit a surrender through Micheal Aylmer in early 1799. However he noted, 'the system of terror is so successfully practised that unless in case of desertion it is almost impossible to procure a prosecutor'. This was illustrated

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<sup>28</sup>(Draft) John Wolfe to Castlereagh Nov. 1798 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers); Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater papers* vol. i, p. 250-8, 266-87.

<sup>29</sup>Two lists of military stations [Nov. 1798] (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>30</sup>Littlehales to Dundas 29 Dec. 1798, Littlehales to Wolfe 29 Dec. 1798, Memorial of directions to be sent to the troops stationed in Kildare County for the purpose of restoring the county to quiet n.d. [late 1798] (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>31</sup>Cornwallis to Portland 21 Dec. 1798 in *Castlereagh correspondence* vol. iii, p. 20-1.

by the case of one Kelly a principal leader near Cappagh Hill.<sup>32</sup> Rev. Franson at Kilcock received a similar offer of surrender, probably from the same gang, in the same month.<sup>33</sup> Based on the reports arriving at Dublin Castle Kildare appears to have tranquillised to some degree during 1799. After January and February the number of alarming reports decline significantly.<sup>34</sup> The increased vigilance of the military and magistrates may have informed James Nagle's decision to leave Lullymore during 1799. Other factors were also significant. Joseph Holt's surrender in November 1798 must have affected the morale of rebel pockets in south Kildare. More fundamentally the failure of the French, the disorganisation of the United Irishmen and the hardship of life in the mountains, bogs and collieries may have persuaded many to desert the rebels whose existence was the result of uncertainty in the post rebellion period. The downturn in the number of reports to Dublin Castle also reflects the increased security felt by loyalists in the countryside as they emerged from the winter without any serious attempted rising.

This does not mean disturbance ceased completely. North Kildare was troubled by men who quickly became notorious to local magistrates. Some were captured or killed.<sup>35</sup> Others remained at large notably John Kilfoyle, Thomas Tallant, Thomas Rook and Andrew Flood. Thomas Conolly believed the gang 'have been publicly harboured by all the farmers and some of the gentlemen farmers'.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Micheal Aylmer, Kilcock to [Marsden] 8 Jan. 1799 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/46/7).

<sup>33</sup>Gen. Craig to Littlehales 26 Jan. 1799, enclosed Rev Franson, Kilcock to Craig 25 Jan. 1799 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/56/195).

<sup>34</sup>John Wolfe, Tarbart Batteries to Cooke 13 Jan. 1799 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/46/11).

<sup>35</sup>Micheal Aylmer to Maj. Gen. Sandys 16 Apr. 1799 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/56/7), Micheal and Fenton Aylmer to Maj. Gen. Sandys 17 Apr. 1799 (Reb. Papers 620/56/8), William Brady, Leixlip to ----12 Apr. 1799 (Reb. Papers 620/56/27).

<sup>36</sup>Thomas Conolly to ---- 21 May 1799, Thomas Conolly to Marsden 17 Sept. 1799, enclosed Thomas Conolly to ---- 20 Sept. 1799 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/56/63, 73)

The return of known robbers or rebels was a particular worry to magistrates.<sup>37</sup> During the summer John Wolfe noted circulating reports of the approach of a large group of Orangemen for the purpose of Catholic massacre. The reports caused such consternation that the villagers of the Kill, Johnstown area vacated their houses and slept in the fields.<sup>38</sup> Intimidation and terror continued to fuel the activities of all shades of the spectrum in Kildare. While reports of robbery and murder continued to appear in 1799 they were more intermittent in nature. They became more common as the nights began to lengthen during the autumn and winter.

The union debate which occurred during 1799 and 1800 served to destabilise the existing establishment divisions in Kildare. The Fitzgerald family itself was split. The duke was a firm opponent of the measure, while his brother Lord Robert (M.P. for Ardfert) supported it. The duke's borough influence was reduced to one anti-union seat, that of James Fitzgerald M.P. for Kildare town. The other representative Col Henniker voted for the measure as did William and Richard Hare who had purchased the borough of Athy.<sup>39</sup> The pro-union faction in the county included liberals - Col. Keatinge, Thomas Conolly, Fenton Aylmer, Richard Griffith and Lord Cloncurry and loyalists - earl of Mayo, marquis of Drogheda, Richard Nevill and John Cassidy.<sup>40</sup> For some the decision lay in the realm of practicality not constitutional politics. Col. Keatinge, viewed with suspicion since the rebellion, attempted to solicit government support in the next election and a return to his Kildare powerbase in return for his pro-union stance. He believed 'the interest of the friends of government who support the union in the County of Kildare is considerable. It is principally the marquis of Drogheda and the clergy'.<sup>41</sup> Lord

<sup>37</sup>Thomas Tyrrell, Clonard to W. Ridgeway 22 Sept. 1799 (N.A.I. S.O.C. 1018/17).

<sup>38</sup>John Wolfe to Cooke n.d. [6 Aug. 1799?] (N.A.I. S.O.C. 3379).

<sup>39</sup>John Roche Ardill, *The closing of the Irish parliament* (Dublin, 1907) p. 91-101.

<sup>40</sup>Richard Nevill to ---- 4 Apr. 1800 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/58/31); (copy) Thomas Conolly to John Montgomery 21 Apr. 1800 (T.C.D. Conolly Papers 3974-84/1322).

<sup>41</sup>Maurice Keatinge, Cheshire to ---- 23 Jun. [1799], 30 Sept. 1799 (N.A.I. O.P. 73/4).

Cloncurry's overriding concern was the welfare of his son. Valentine Lawless was re-arrested on 14 April 1799 and spent the following twenty three months in prison. Lawless himself believed this to be the result of his publicly aired anti-union stance. His father died before union was passed, in autumn 1799.<sup>42</sup>

The anti-union group in the county was similarly composed of strange bed fellows. Not only the duke but the weight of the LaTouche family in Kildare opposed the measure. The key anti-unionist at a local level was John Wolfe who was dismissed as a commissioner of the revenue for his stance. He was the prime organiser of anti-union meetings in the county. The Wolfe Papers contain over one hundred letters relating to such meetings in 1799 and 1800. Their existence suggest some popular involvement in the issue. However Castlereagh was probably correct in his assertion that: 'The clamour out of doors is principally to be apprehended as furnishing the members within with a plausible pretext for acting in conformity with their own private feelings'.<sup>43</sup>

At the 1802 election the Fitzgerald's re-asserted their political strength following their abstention from the 1797 election. However, the act of union had effectively destroyed the family's political strength nationally. The disappearance of borough seats in Kildare curtailed Leinster family power to just one county seat. One of the two county seats was filled by Lord Robert Fitzgerald (a unionist). The other was taken by Robert LaTouche. Until the 1830 election these two families continued to divide Kildare's parliamentary representation between them. John Wolfe mounted a strong campaign during 1801-2 but again failed to break the stranglehold of these stronger families. Maurice Keatinge's perceived

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<sup>42</sup>Cloncurry, *Personal recollections* p. 85; Fitzpatrick, *The life and times of Lord Cloncurry* p. 224-242 ; *Thoughts on the projected union between Great Britain and Ireland* (Dublin, 1797) published in Cloncurry, *op. cit.*, p. 490-510.

<sup>43</sup>Letters relating to anti-union meetings in Kildare 1799-1800 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers ); Castlereagh to Portland 5 Jan. 1799 in *Cornwallis Correspondence* vol. iii, p. 31; Ardill, *The closing of the Irish parliament* p. 91-101.

involvement in 1798 effectively ended his hopes of political influence in Kildare which had hitherto rested on the dominance of the Leinster family.<sup>44</sup>

The apparently autonomous nature of the rebel groups which operated in Kildare in late 1798 and 1799 provide evidence of the collapse which occurred in United Irish organisation in the wake of the rebellion. They illustrate however that popular resistance to government and indeed support for the United Irishmen continued to exist. The United Irishmen as an organisation survived after the rebellion. In October 1798 the informer Samuel Sproule reported the 'executive' had met and 'came to a resolution that all should be over and not to act without the French or till the English troops are recalled'.<sup>45</sup> Doorly's group provides a good example of the remnants of radicalism loosely gathered under the United Irish umbrella. A new organisational structure slowly emerged during 1798 and 1799. A paper entitled 'A plan for the organisation of United Irishmen' outlined the failures of the pre-1798 movement. The publicity attracted by its proceedings, robbery of arms and the 'glare and pomp of surrounding nobility' all detracted from their activities. The new organisation encouraged discipline and political education. The organisational plan was to be as simple as possible; lower societies would meet only once to elect a sergeant; sergeants to choose a captain and captains to choose a colonel. County, provincial and national committees were to be similarly appointed. The officers were to hold their posts indefinitely. Thus when the rising was organised information would be passed down the command chain only when necessary.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Brian Walker (ed) *Parliamentary election results 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978) N.H.I. ancilliary publications vol. ii p. 220; Letters relating to John Wolfe's election campaign 1801-2 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>45</sup>Sproule to Lees 19 Oct. 1798 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/40/172).

<sup>46</sup>Plan for the organisation of United Irishmen 1799? (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/8/72/2); Elliot, *Partners in revolution* p. 247-8.

The second element in the revolutionary equation was the securing of French assistance. It was to this end that most United Irish efforts were most strongly directed after 1798. In this context the native organisation was 'an action force designed to implement a specific plan'.<sup>47</sup> If this plan of organisation was effected in Kildare, it fulfilled its purpose exceptionally well since government was unaware of any developed countywide organisation. What appears more probable is that United Irish leaders in the capital maintained some contact with the pockets of residual support in the county.

The early years of the nineteenth century provided the longest period of protracted calm County Kildare had witnessed since before the Defender disturbances of 1795. John Walsh believed the persistent robberies and assassinations had been the result of a vast number of unregistered arms concealed in the countryside. During the early summer of 1800 he successfully broke a 'knot of villains and robbers' in the Kilcock area through an informer Owen Murphy.<sup>48</sup> Mail coach robbery continued to hold an inherent political quality at least in the eyes of loyalists. On 15 April 1801 a mail coach was robbed between Monasterevan and Kildare town and one of the passengers murdered. One of the gang was heard to remark to a passenger named Fitzgerald, 'there was no better name in Ireland'.<sup>49</sup>

The attempted murder of Thomas Little and his family near Timahoe in February 1802 caused particular consternation among the county establishment. A local tenant family, the Farrells, were suspected of involvement. Indeed Fenton Aylmer believed the group were beneath most of the disturbances in the area. The attempted assassination underlined the threat posed by 'the most secret system this long time going on and they are so strongly leagued and connected in that place that nothing else [but rewards] can be looked to with any hopes of success'. Aylmer

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<sup>47</sup>Elliot, *Partners in revolution* p. 243-81, 249.

<sup>48</sup>John Walsh, Kilcock to Cooke 9 May, 12 Jun. 1800 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/58/112,113).

<sup>49</sup> Examination of Corporal William Prior 16 Apr. 1801, Micheal Blood to ---- 20 Apr. 1801 (N.A.I. S.O.C. 1020/21-22).

suggested to the duke of Leinster that a county meeting be assembled to address the issue 'which we could have all hoped was wearing away'. Aylmer himself conducted an extensive investigation.<sup>50</sup> A county meeting was held on 8 March. It was chaired by the duke and collected a subscription which was to offer rewards for information. The accompanying proclamation suggested the attack was the result of specifically agrarian grievances. Little's property had earlier been destroyed at the commencement of his tenantry on Lord Courtown's land. He was reimbursed by the grand jury. The attack on Little and the subsequent response evidences the gentlemen's fear of the unleashing of agrarian violence and their unity in the face of a perceived threat from the 'lower orders'.<sup>51</sup>

On the whole however the county produced fewer signs of subversion than it had done in the aftermath of the rebellion. By early 1802 most of those who surrendered at Sallins on 21 July 1798 had been released. Fenton Aylmer was confident enough to recommend the release of Hugh Ware, Bryan McDermott and John Reilly. He had previously hesitated only because of the ongoing war with France which had ceased.<sup>52</sup> A few reports of French emissaries in the county reached government in these years. Daniel Collison, son of the post master at Maynooth, reported a Frenchman was in the town in March 1801. A collection was raised for him and intelligence collected which it was believed he was to take to France. Thomas Conolly later reported the arrest of a man answering his description in Celbridge. The man claimed to have come from England, and to north Kildare simply for the air.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Duke of Leinster to Littlehales 18 Mar. 1802, enclosure: Sir Fenton Aylmer to duke of Leinster n.d. 28 Feb. 1802 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/61/5). John Wolfe to ---- 29 Apr. 1802, John Wolfe to ---- 15 Mar. 1802 (S.O.C. 1021/9, 11)

<sup>51</sup>Duke of Leinster to ---- 9 Mar. 1802 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/62/44), Richard Nevill to Marsden 23 Apr. 1802 (Reb. Papers 620/63/2).

<sup>52</sup>Sir Fenton Aylmer to Marsden 2 Feb. 1802 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/61/4).

<sup>53</sup>Daniel Collison, Maynooth to Ald. James 9 Mar. 1801 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/59/92).

Information received at Dublin castle in January 1801 stated Col. Lunn [i.e. Lumm] and a Mr Collogan of Danaughtown (a relative of Thomas Fitzgerald of Geraldine) were to command the Kildare rebels in the event of a French invasion. One Kelly, a land agent to the duke of Leinster was also believed to be involved. The same information shows a French spy had already been arrested at Monasterevan.<sup>54</sup> In the same year John Walsh perceived 'that conspiracies are again forming in this county and its environs'. The disaffected continued to hold arms and meetings for the purpose of fostering rebellion, he believed. Walsh traced the disaffection to the rebellion of 1798. However he carefully noted: 'With respect to open treason there remains not the smallest vestige that I can discover. Every man who is not a robber offers his assistance to the civil powers'. Nonetheless the leading rebels were 'well prepared' though their treason was concealed. Walsh's information demonstrates the continuation of disaffection and its important associations with robbery and banditry in this period.<sup>55</sup>

A soldier stationed at Naas in 1802 believed that while loyalty was 'apparently predominant' disaffection continued to exist in both Naas and Athy. It was fuelled by the prospects of a French invasion as well as the actions of a 'foolish soldiery' and the existence of Orangemen.<sup>56</sup> During the summer of 1802 Oliver Nelson of Rathangan reported the loyal inhabitants of the town nightly 'expect the rising of the disaffected'. Loyalists were fleeing to Dublin while there was insufficient protection against the attack.<sup>57</sup> Rathangan suffered particularly harshly during a two day occupation of the town in May 1798. The Church of Ireland bishop, Charles Lindsay reported as late as 1804 that since 1798 the church was made 'a kind of citadel....As yet the remembrance of the treason committed by the

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<sup>54</sup>Alderman James 25 Jan. 1801 (N.A.I. S.O.C. 3440).

<sup>55</sup>John Walsh, Kilcock to Lord Lieutenant 18 Jul. 1801, enclosed: 'Parish of Raddinstown' address, John Walsh, Dungannon to Maj. Gen. Barnet 10 Apr. 1801 (N.A.I. S.O.C. 1020/23).

<sup>56</sup>Mr Pollock to ---- 17 Jun. 1802, enclosed: Information of O.B. 14 Jun. 1802 and four other letters.

<sup>57</sup>N.A.I. S.O.C. 1021/3 Oliver Nelson to ---- 27 Jun. 1802 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/63/11).

rebels was too fresh to be overruled by reason and decency'.<sup>58</sup> The observation illustrates loyalist thinking in the post rebellion years was continually informed by the memory of 1798. However this should not be stated without reservation, with regard to Kildare. The period between 1798 and 1803 witnessed an outpouring of literature in Wexford on the rebellion. No similar operation occurred in Kildare. In a sense the works concerned pre-rebellion divisions and post-rebellion propaganda as much as the rebellion itself. In this context Kildare paled in significance to Wexford. Yet the Kildare rebellion remained a potent symbol to the loyalist population of the destruction which might reoccur if vigilance was lowered.

The crucial point about the period 1798 to 1802 is that political radicalism continued to persist among the lower orders, i.e. those who had filled the lower structures of the pre-rebellion United Irishmen. Micheal Doorly's gang at Lullymore provides the best documented example of such a continuity. James Nagle returned to Ireland in late 1801 and having worked in a number of jobs he returned to Lullymore around November 1802. 'Doorly told him there was to be a turn out again and that there were to be meeting there (in Lullymore) both by night and by day'. Nagle actively drilled between four and five hundred men one or two nights a week at Lullymore. Micheal Doorly was considered a Colonel and wore a uniform. Other commanders included Matthew Donnellan a farmer who headed a group from Clane. Those in Doorly's company alone included men from Rathangan, Prosperous and Clane. Some attended from Carlow and King's County. It is not clear at exactly what point such a relatively extensive force was active at Lullymore but it appears from Nagle's testimony that a conspiracy was initiated in late 1802 if not before.<sup>59</sup>

The release of the United Irish state prisoners in June 1802, in the wake of the Peace of Amiens, added strength to United Irish negotiations in France.

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<sup>58</sup>Raymond Refausse (ed.), 'The visitation notebook of Charles Lindsay, Bishop of Kildare 1804-1808' in *Kildare Arch. Soc. Jn.* xvii, (1987-91) p. 133.

<sup>59</sup>Information of James Nagle 19 Dec. 1803, 29 Oct. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/11/138/48, 620/50/27).

While many settled into a life of 'temporary normality' in their adopted home they expected the organisation of an invasion force on the outbreak of war. Robert Emmet's return to Ireland from France in 1802 did not signal the beginning of the native conspiracy. Similarly the mission of William Henry Hamilton in January and February 1803 was essentially an intelligence gathering operation. He returned to France with an optimistic account concerning the possibility of a French assisted rising.<sup>60</sup> In Kildare Richard Griffith perceived the capacity for a second rising continued to haunt loyalists in early 1803. He wrote to Thomas Pelham:

But your Lordship has not seen Paddy since the rebellion. He is an altered being. The bare possibility of a general open resistance did not before occur to him - but though foiled and beaten he now thinks he might have succeeded and he now looks for another opportunity to try his strength with the assistance of France.<sup>61</sup>

The evidence for such a viewpoint was not particularly strong. In the same month Daniel Collison did report the occurrence of seditious meetings in the Maynooth-Moyglare area.<sup>62</sup>

It was in March 1803 that the United Irish conspiracy of that year began in earnest. In Dublin a number of buildings were purchased, particularly in Patrick Street, Thomas Street and Marshallsea Lane, which served as depots for weaponry. On 5 March the key Kildare conspirator, Micheal Quigly, arrived in Dublin from France. A bricklayer (or mason) from Rathcoffey, Quigly had been one of the fifteen rebel officers to surrender on 21 July 1798. Following his liberation in July 1802 he travelled to France where he took employment. In early February 1803 he was approached by William Putnam McCabe to go to Ireland 'to assist in exciting another insurrection'. It appears likely Quigly was chosen both for his obvious readiness to undertake the task and the connections he held with the disaffected in

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<sup>60</sup>Elliot, *Partners in revolution* p. 278, 27

<sup>61</sup>Richard Griffith to Thomas Pelham 19 Feb. 1803 (B.L. Pelham Papers Add. MSS 33,110 f. 246-9).

<sup>62</sup>Daniel Collison to Aldermen James 6 Feb. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/64/145).

the crucial county of Kildare. On 7 March Hamilton who returned from France with him, introduced Quigly to Emmet at Corbertt's Hotel on Capel Street. Emmet questioned him on the possibility of mobilising a Kildare force for a rising in Dublin. Quigly (who had not visited Kildare in five years) estimated one thousand men could be mustered on at least two days notice even from the farthest parts of the county. Following the meeting Quigly was given fifteen guineas and sent to Kildare to establish contact with the interested parties in the county. He was accompanied, on Emmet's approval, by Kildaremen Thomas Wylde, his brother-in-law, John Mahon and Bryan McDermott.<sup>63</sup>

Quigly's journey to Kildare took him all over the north of the county. Essentially he made contact with veterans of '98 and those known to be interested in participating in a fresh rebellion. His mission was quickly made known to Dublin Castle through reports from Sir Fenton Aylmer and Lt. Col. Micheal Aylmer. At Naas he assured the people he met 'that the French had prepared a large armament for the invasion of Ireland - and that they ought to be soon expected'. Meanwhile at Timahoe and Prosperous they were 'joyfully received and promised general support'. Quigly was also reported to have visited Hayestown (the home of Bryan McDermott) and Sallins. Pat Heffernan had reported to Fenton Aylmer that the lower orders were meeting since February, their grievances largely based on economic issues. However Quigly's mission certainly reactivated an interest in a rebellion. On 13 March a crowd of several hundred gathered in the Timahoe area in suspicious circumstances. Fenton Aylmer wrote in the same month: 'From the informations received within a day or two the peasantry of the County Kildare in general are determined to rise when they hear of a French invasion and join the

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<sup>63</sup>General statement from Micheal Quigly's various examinations, letters etc. n.d. (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/11/135), Statement of Micheal Quigly 30 Jun. 1805 (Reb. Papers 620/14/187/11), R. Musgrave to W.C. Flint 14 Sept. 1803 (Reb. Papers 620/11/130/38). See Helen Landreth's account of Quigly's arrival and Kildare mission in *The pursuit of Robert Emmet* p. 135-41.

enemy....'<sup>64</sup> Quigly's journey lasted only a few days and he returned to Dublin on 10 March with optimistic reports of the Kildare situation. According to his own testimony he spent the next four months in Thomas Street. Major Sirr believed he 'left Kildare as Sir Fenton Aylmer was in a search for him'. He had no idea of Quigly's whereabouts in April but believed he may have been staying with relations of the United Irishman James Smyth in Leixlip.<sup>65</sup>

Hugh Ware was also reported active in north Kildare in March with Quigly and his associates. He was at Clane on St. Patrick's Day. In early April he was apparently seen travelling through Clonard towards Longford. After the July rebellion Admiral Pakenham at Leixlip received information that 'Wier' [possibly Ware] had been sent to France and already departed.<sup>66</sup> His obituary notice of 1846 makes no mention of his presence in Ireland following his release from Kilmainham in 1802. In the following year he was appointed a lieutenant in the Irish Legion of the French army. Reports of Wylde, Mahon, MacDermott and sometimes (mistakenly) Quigly continued to circulate during March and April.<sup>67</sup>

Quigly's mission never attempted to re-establish a United Irish organisation on the basis of the pre-1798 model. He simply visited known rebels who in turn informed those in the locality of the intended rising. A number of Kildaremen were brought to the Thomas and Patrick Street depots where preparations were underway. These included: Edward Condon, Bernard Duggan, James Flood, John and William Parrott, one Dunn, Nicholas Stafford, Thomas

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<sup>64</sup>Fenton Aylmer to ---- [Mar.] 1803, Fenton Aylmer to ---- 20 Mar. 1803, enclosed: Fenton Aylmer to ---- n.d. [Mar. 1803] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/64/2, 7).

<sup>65</sup>General statement from Micheal Quigly's various examinations, letters etc. n.d. (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/11/135), Major Sirr to ---- Apr. 1803 (Reb. Papers 620/67/59 ).

<sup>66</sup>Adm. Pakenham to Marsden [after 23 Jul.] 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/66/122).

<sup>67</sup>Lt. Col. Aylmer to Fenton Aylmer , Dublin 22 Mar. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/64/8), Col. John Aylmer to ---- 9 Apr. 1803 (Reb. Papers 620/64/13), W. Bagot, Monasterevan to ---- 7 Apr 1803 (Reb. Papers 620/64/76);*The Times* 27 Mar. 1846.

Wylde, John Mahon, Henry Howley, John Burke, Richard Eustace and Christy Nowlan.<sup>68</sup> Increased activity in Kildare did create a renewed sense of interest in radical circles. In the ensuing months reports reached Dublin which suggested some sort of 'organising' if not 'organisation' was being carried out in the county. The fact that no official structure was reconstituted meant that despite Quigly's publicised visit to Kildare only patchy reports of radical activity in Kildare between March and July reached government. This was compounded by the fact that preparations were concentrated in the depots in the capital.

In March renewed reports of disaffection emerged from the Naas area. French agents and native emissaries were apparently active and meetings were taking place.<sup>69</sup> Information received after the July rising suggested United Irishmen were meeting in the Naas area in preparation for a rising in the months before July. Two active rebels, James and Martin Duff, were engaged in exercising men under their command in June. Some of this information indicates a definite military command structure was established. According to Peter Hamilton, one Flood of Kilcullen was the 'only man that gave orders to the United sergeants'.<sup>70</sup> Rebel activity was also evident in west Kildare. James Gorman, a limeburner and John Byrne, a whitesmith both from the Kildare town area who were active in 1798 were both swearing in their locality. Numbers in the renewed organisation (magistrates continued to conceive of disaffection in the 1798 model) were rising, particularly in Kildare town itself. Sylvester Kelly and George Rankin were also active organisers. John Cassidy believed Rankin 'possibly secretary to the Kildare rebels' was involved in mail coach robbery and the burning of Kildangan chapel - a measure

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<sup>68</sup>Bernard Duggan's narrative (T.C.D. Madden Papers 873/30); Information of John Fleming 3 Sept. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/11/138/13).

<sup>69</sup>(copy) Maj. Gen. Trench to Gen. Payne, Naas 17 Mar. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/66/135).

<sup>70</sup>Depositions and informations, Naas 1803 p. 53-65 (R.I.A. MS 12 M 8).

intended to encourage the people to rise.<sup>71</sup> Lord Tyrawley reported, however that 'from all I hear or observe I have no difficulty in saying that they appear more quiet and industrious than at any period since I have lived in this part of Ireland [i.e. Monasterevan]'. His opinion was based on the failed mission of Kelly, Rankin and Murtagh to the parish of Kildangan. Their suggestion to the local populace that the 'union should be reconstituted' was met with hostility and threats. Perhaps the United Irishmen resorted to drastic measures (burning the chapel) to produce a rising.<sup>72</sup>

Information on radicalism in the Athy area is less revealing. The key conspirators were Nicholas Gray and his brother-in-law, Henry Hughes who had been involved in the rebellion in Wexford. They had only recently settled in Kildare. Patrick O'Kelly, who makes curiously little mention of Kildare's involvement in his account of 1803, claimed the men contributed £2,000 to Robert Emmet.<sup>73</sup> Patrick Doolan a captain in Athy in 1798 believed there were 'no meetings in that county now [1804] nor since 1798'.<sup>74</sup> Patrick Whelan of Athy fought under Patrick Dowling in 1798 and was later involved in robberies in both Dublin and Kildare. He believed the county was organised by July 1803 by 'new laws, new tests, new regulations'. He was not, however, admitted to the confidence of those involved because he had previously prosecuted former associates.<sup>75</sup> Meetings were held in Dublin before the rising which discussed the problem of procuring arms for the Athy region (which

<sup>71</sup>William Mills, Kildare town to Marsden n.d. [pre 23 Jun. 1803] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/66/45), John Cassidy to Marsden 21 Aug 1803 (Reb. Papers 620/11/130/19), John Cassidy to marquis of Drogheda 15 Aug. 1803 (Reb. Papers 620/12/141/12).

<sup>72</sup>Lord Tyrawley to Marsden 6 Jun. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/67/158).

<sup>73</sup>Memorial of Nicholas Gray 19 Nov. 1799 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/48/22), Rev. W.W. Pole to --- 1803 (Reb. Papers 620/66/173 ); O'Kelly, *General history* p. 287; Elliot, *Partners in revolution* p. 162.

<sup>74</sup>Examination of Patrick Doolan 9 Oct. 1804 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/13/168/8).

<sup>75</sup>Information of Patrick Whelan, 1804 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/50/38/57).

undoubtedly presented logistical problems). John Boyle was sent to the town to gather intelligence for the rebels. He was informed it was 'ready to rise'. He was later present at a number of meetings at locations between Athy and Straffan in the weeks before the rising. Discussion included plans to break open Athy jail, attack soldiers stationed on the Curragh and inform the people on rising that the French had landed in England. Boyle's information also suggests a number of 'gentlemen' were involved in the preparations. Positive information of organising was provided by the robbery of a stand of arms from a boat in Athy harbour. Despite the recovery of the small quantity the comparisons with the December 1797 robbery were chilling for loyalists. Thomas Rawson commented at this time

I have the most certain information that the vicinity of Clane, Connell, Rathangan and Kildare are fully armed and organised and that the same system of swearing etc. which was practised in 1797 and 1798 is now striding over that part of the county.<sup>76</sup>

The nature of the renewed activity meant there was no real organisation to penetrate. Hence the level of activity in County Kildare was probably underestimated. One of the most important preoccupations of the Dublin leaders was the arming of rebels in the surrounding counties. Micheal Quigly later claimed this incurred a very real danger of discovery. In July ammunition was secretly delivered to Rathcoffey.<sup>77</sup> Connor Keevan appears to have acted as a messenger between the Dublin rebels and north Kildare. On one occasion he visited Hugh Ware's sister at Rathcoffey.<sup>78</sup> Patrick Hanlon of Hogestown was informed as early as December 1802 that the disaffected 'were making pikes and weapons in all the seaport towns

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<sup>76</sup>J. Mansergh to Marsden 23 May 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/66/12), W. James to Marsden 25 May 1803, enclosed: Thomas Rawson to Alderman James 24 May 1803 and Thomas Rawson to Marsden 25 May 1803 (Reb. Papers 620/66/208).

<sup>77</sup>General statement from Micheal Quigly's various examinations, letters etc. n.d. (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/11/135); O'Kelly, *General history* p. 293.

<sup>78</sup>Deposition of Connor Keevan 19 Oct. 1803 (N.A.I. S.O.C. 3529).

and sending them out into the country'. Rebels in the Timahoe area were well organised and armed before the July rising.<sup>79</sup> Many of the potential rebels were of course armed and indeed organised - Doorly's group is a good example. A large force was organised in the Lullymore area since 1802 and before. Three months previous to the July rising Micheal Doorly and John Green told James Nagle they had a six pound brass cannon which had been sent from Gorey. It was buried to prevent discovery though later searches failed to uncover it. In general the Lullymore rebels were well armed by July. 'They had blunderbusses, muskets, fowling pieces, pikes, poles and pitchforks,' noted Nagle, 'every man had something on his shoulder.' Doorly's United Irishmen had made contact with Emmet at some point and were willing to participate in his planned rebellion.<sup>80</sup>

Radical activity in the county was worrying enough in April to cause a county meeting. This was probably precipitated by the initial mission of Quigly and his associates. The gentlemen entered into resolutions of loyalty and determination to oppose rebellion.<sup>81</sup> The activists of 1803 were noticeably distinct in composition from those of 1798. Marianne Elliot has commented, 'leaders were hand-picked, mostly from a lower social grouping....'<sup>82</sup> Fenton Aylmer noted in March: '....the farmers in general are adverse to the measure [rebellion]....The peasantry are determined to elect officers from among themselves and never again trust gentlemen'.<sup>83</sup> Thomas Rawson predictably reported in August that Thomas Fitzgerald, Col. Keatinge (who was in England) and even the duke of Leinster were to act as rebel commanders. However Keatinge himself in the same month argued the lower orders were the basis of the conspiracy and that the 'farmers' had held

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<sup>79</sup>John Wolfe to [Rawson] 15 Jan. 1804 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/13/178/4).

<sup>80</sup>Information of James Nagle 19 Dec. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/11/138/48); John Wolfe to Wickham 6 Jan. 1804 (S.O.C. 1030/39).

<sup>81</sup>J.J. Henry to Marsden 7 Apr. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/65/70).

<sup>82</sup>Elliot, *Partners in revolution* p. 303.

<sup>83</sup>Fenton Aylmer to ---- [Mar.] 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/64/2).

aloof. 'This determination of the latter,' he observed, '...I know is very hard to keep.'<sup>84</sup> Helen Landreth (and Bro. Luke Cullen) believed William Aylmer may have been involved in Emmet's conspiracy. At present there is no concrete evidence to support this supposition. He had been in England with Wogan Browne after his release and enlisted in the Austrian army in 1800. His precise movements in 1803 are however somewhat mysterious.<sup>85</sup>

In a sense the conspiracy of 1803 achieved what that of 1798 did not in that it remained largely unknown to government. There was no spate of housebreaking such as accompanied the preparations of 1798. Major General Trench reported on 1 July 1803: 'The counties Kildare, Carlow, Queen's County and Westmeath are in a perfect state of tranquillity and the inhabitants are pursuing habits of industry'.<sup>86</sup> John O'Brien was despatched to the county by government on 13 July to determine its mood. He spent nine days in Naas, Kilcullen, Athy and Kildare town where he concurred with Trench: 'from all I could learn it would be impossible to induce them [the people] to oppose the government of this country....the people have the greatest aversion to the French'.<sup>87</sup> Preparations in the Dublin depots continued unabated. The Kildare element appeared to have been consolidated, Dwyer agreed to participation (after Dublin rose) and Thomas Russell arrived in April and travelled north with Hamilton to enlist support. Efforts in Meath had been fruitless. In Dublin itself the professional and trading classes which Emmet

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<sup>84</sup>Thomas Rawson to Marsden 21 Aug. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/66/209), Col. Keatinge, Leominster to ---- 20 August 1803 (Reb. Papers 620/11/130/8).

<sup>85</sup>Landreth, *The pursuit of Robert Emmet* p. 253 ; Martin Tierney, 'William Aylmer 1772-1820' p. 105; Richard Aylmer, 'The imperial service of William Aylmer 1800-1814' unpublished paper (1996).

<sup>86</sup>Maj. Gen. Trench to William Wickham 1 Jul. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/67/134).

<sup>87</sup>John O'Brien to Marsden 25 July 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/66/96), a John O'Brien was unsuccessfully prosecuted for administering United Irish oaths at the summer assizes in 1797. See below p. 96.

conceived of as the backbone of his plan were slow to come forward. The French, and indeed English and Scottish elements remained ill-coordinated.<sup>88</sup>

About 15 July Nicholas Gray arrived in the depot at Thomas Street. He was introduced as the General of the Kildare forces by Emmet. On recommendation three men from the Maynooth area: Thomas Frayne, Owen Lyons and Thomas Kereghan were appointed officers. Lyons had been in constant contact with Quigly, Emmet and the other Dublin leaders. Up to ten Kildare leaders were in Dublin a few days previously. It was agreed the Naas force was to march on Dublin after the rising began while other forces acted in the county itself. The subsequent rising loosely implemented this plan, the rebellion at Maynooth was initially local while that at Naas quickly looked to a march on Dublin as its purpose.<sup>89</sup> Disaster struck in Dublin on 16 July when an explosion occurred in the Patrick Street depot. The next day a party delivering arms was interrupted by a watchman. These events alerted the authorities to the preparations for a possible rising. Given the circumstances, comments Elliot, 'the decision to attempt a rising rather than risk discovery of their preparations was predictable'.<sup>90</sup> 23 July was settled on as the date for rising. Notification reached Kildare as early as 20 July. Leaders at Naas, Daniel Brophy, William Andrews, Benjamin Burchell and Richard Scott quickly passed the information on to the surrounding countryside. A landowner near the town learned

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<sup>88</sup>Lt. Col. Aylmer to Wickham 8 Oct. 1803, enclosed: Information of Thomas Frayne 5 Oct 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/11/130/44); Elliot, *Partners in revolution* p. 304-7; Landreth, *The pursuit of Robert Emmet* p. 140-84.

<sup>89</sup>Statement of Micheal Quigly 30 Jun. 1805 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/14/187/11), Information of Carter Connolly July 1803 (Reb. Papers 620/11/129/5); Landreth, *The pursuit of Robert Emmet* p. 165.

<sup>90</sup>Elliot, *Partners in revolution* p. 309.

of the impending rising from a tenant on the same day.<sup>91</sup> On the evening of 21 July Thomas Wylde and John Mahon were despatched to Kildare by Quigly or Emmet.<sup>92</sup>

On the morning of the rising a number of Kildare leaders arrived in Dublin anxious to view for themselves the preparations which had been made. According to Quigly:

[They] stated that 300 men were on their way from town and required to see the preparations and persons of property, their desire being complied with it appeared that the two men who had been sent [to] Kildare had in order to entice the greater numbers exaggerated considerably in their statements, on discovering the truth nothing could exceed the disappointment of the deputies and disagreement having taken place in consequence between them and Mr. Emmet the Kildare men who were coming to town got orders to return and a few men who had actually arrived were sent back.<sup>93</sup>

The two men referred to, who were sent to Kildare were almost certainly Wylde and Mahon. The Kildare leaders obviously expected a much greater level of preparedness. It is not clear who these leaders were or what part of County Kildare they came from. They certainly could not have comprised the total expected force from the county. Their surprise at the real extent of preparations suggests they had not visited the depot previously. James Nagle's evidence states Doorly and his group were in Dublin on 23 July and participated in the rising.<sup>94</sup> The confused Dublin 'rising' which occurred that evening was a complete fiasco scuppered by ill-

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<sup>91</sup>Depositions and informations, Naas 1803 p. 3-5, 206-12, 290, 298 (R.I.A. MS 12 M 8); Landreth, *The pursuit of Robert Emmet* p. 170-1; H.H. Bourke to Castlereagh 22 Jul. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/64/104).

<sup>92</sup>General statement from Micheal Quigly's various examinations, letters etc. n.d. (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/11/135).

<sup>93</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>94</sup>Information of James Nagle 29 Oct. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/50/27).

coordination and confused reports. After a hurried march up Thomas Street the leaders abandoned any hopes of success and Emmet issued countermanding orders.<sup>95</sup>

The confusion in Dublin in turn isolated the Kildare rebellion. It was concentrated in two centres - Maynooth and Naas. Some rebel activity took place elsewhere in the county. Maynooth possibly figured in Emmet's plans specifically to cut off one major route in and out of Dublin. In August the state solicitor James McClelland compiled a report on the 'late insurrection in the County of Kildare' which concentrated on the Maynooth element largely because of the political implications for the duke of Leinster and Maynooth College. It was based on the evidence of the key crown witness Daniel Collison. It does however make some fundamental errors which reflect the narrowness of Collison's information. For example it states 'James Quigly' returned to Ireland in May 1803 and thereafter 'remained principally in Kildare fostering rebellion'.<sup>96</sup> The duke of Leinster and Carter Connolly, a rebel leader, both believed Collison himself was actively involved in the rebellion. The duke of Leinster commented later: 'I can assure you [Marsden] Collison is much deeper concerned in this business than he thinks we are aware of'.<sup>97</sup>

About eight o'clock on the evening of 23 July about 100 people gathered in Maynooth under the command of Owen Lyons, Thomas Kereghan and Carter Connolly. Connolly, the local schoolmaster, was later certified insane

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<sup>95</sup>see Elliot's succinct account of the Dublin rising in *Partners in revolution* p. 310-1; Miles Byrne, *Memoirs of Miles Byrne* p. 364-374.

<sup>96</sup>(copy) James McClelland, to William Wickham 26 Aug. 1803 (P.R.O. HO 100/112/369-377); Information of Daniel Collison 26 Jul. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/11/129/7); Landreth's account of the Kildare rising is based on McClelland's report, *The pursuit of Robert Emmet* p. 226-230.

<sup>97</sup>Duke of Leinster to Marsden 30 Jul. 1803, duke of Leinster to Littlehales 3 Aug. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/65/170,1), Information of Carter Connolly July 1803 (Reb. Papers 620/11/129/5).

following his imprisonment in the aftermath of the rising.<sup>98</sup> One estimate put the figure as high as 400.<sup>99</sup> Their first act was to imprison two Dragoon Guards who were stationed to ensure the safety of the mail coach. About ten o'clock a party of the rebels departed in search of arms in the vicinity. The duke of Leinster was informed almost immediately of the activities of the small rebel army. Despite the fact that Carton was well armed the duke decided to offer his weaponry to the rebels and sent a servant, Thomas Cooney, as a messenger for this purpose. He apparently informed them:

....that the duke's arms were ready for them in the duke's saloon and that refreshment was prepared for his [Lyons'] party - and that the duke desired him to say that he would be glad that Lyons should take his arms least government should say that the party...would not lay a hand on him.

Lyons appears to have cautiously accepted the offer.<sup>100</sup>

About midnight the Longford mail approached the town and the rebels were quickly mobilised into three groups to effect its interception. However the coach managed to pass the first two 'divisions' and the third simply fled. The coach passed through the town with relatively little damage despite the fact that two bullets passed through the carriage.<sup>101</sup> The rebel leaders decided to march to Celbridge where they met Thomas Frayne's contingent. However news of the Dublin failure reached them and plans to march to Rathcoole to link with 'General Fox' were abandoned. A meeting probably took place on Windgate Hill near Celbridge where it was decided to fall back on Rathcoffey.<sup>102</sup> While the leaders dined at

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<sup>98</sup>Petition of Ann Russell (Conolly's aunt) to Lord Lieutenant n.d. [c. Oct. 1803] (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/12/141/28).

<sup>99</sup>W.H. Irvine to ---- 25 Jul. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/65/97).

<sup>100</sup>(copy) James McClelland, to William Wickham 26 Aug. 1803 (P.R.O. HO 100/112/369-377).

<sup>101</sup>*ibid.*, ; Edward Lees to Marsden [25 Jul.] 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/65/192).

<sup>102</sup>(copy) James McClelland, to William Wickham 26 Aug. 1803 (P.R.O. HO 100/112/369-377); Information of Mary Lindsay n.d. (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/65/193).

Quigly's house they received a message from the duke of Leinster offering an unconditional surrender without an enquiry. The offer was not immediately acted upon instead the rebels continued to search for arms. On their return to Maynooth on Monday 25 July they communicated with the duke through Abbe Darre, a professor of natural philosophy at Maynooth College. The duke consented to a surrender and personally accepted that of twenty men including Thomas Kereghan, in the town.<sup>103</sup>

Elsewhere in north Kildare the rebels were prepared for action. John Wolfe received information on the morning of the rising that rebellion was on the verge of breaking out in Prosperous where it was 'this night to join the party in Dublin'. Next day Patrick Hanlon was informed by a rebel leader, at Timahoe, to be prepared for action and that he and 100 men were ready.<sup>104</sup> Micheal Aylmer at Kilcock reported on the same day that rebels had been sighted on the Hill of Lyons and an attack on Kilcock itself was imminent.<sup>105</sup> A report to Dublin Castle stated: 'scarce a person is to be seen about the country on either side [of] the Grand Canal and it is almost certain a great part of the County of Kildare (I mean rebels) will be in arms tomorrow or the next day'.<sup>106</sup> Fenton Aylmer wrote from England, offering his services and urging government to secure the Timahoe-Prosperous area given its strategic advantages exhibited so well in 1798. Wogan Browne believed that despite the disaffection encouraged by Quigly and others the people of his neighbourhood had refused to cooperate with 'the rabble in Dublin'.<sup>107</sup>

Naas was the other major centre of rebellion in Kildare. The main source of evidence for the Naas rising is a collection of depositions and informations

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<sup>103</sup>(copy) James McClelland, to William Wickham 26 Aug. 1803 (P.R.O. HO 100/112/369-377).

<sup>104</sup>John Wolfe Information 23 Jul. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/67/198), John Wolfe to [Rawson] 13 Jan. 1804 (Reb. Papers 620/13/178/4).

<sup>105</sup>Lt. Col. Aylmer, Kilcock to ---- 24 Jul. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/64/23).

<sup>106</sup>Ald. R. Manders to Col. Alexander 25 Jul. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/66/8).

<sup>107</sup>Wogan Browne to Marsden 29 Jul., 3 Aug. 1803 (N.A.I. S.O.C. 1025/22,23), Fenton Aylmer, Harrogate, Yorkshire to Marsden 29 Jul. 1803 (Reb. Papers 620/64/21)

taken in the town between July and October 1803 by the solicitor general, General Trench and John Wolfe. Most of those questioned denied any involvement in the conspiracy. Many admitted their presence in Dublin on the day of the rising but on business. At least 150 men left Naas on 23 July intending to participate in the Dublin rising. Thomas Brophy, a chandler from Naas had, 'not a doubt that there were four times 150 people from the town and neighbourhood of Naas who went to Dublin on 23 July for the town and neighbourhood were deserted'. The same source heard rumours that a group of Wicklow men were expected in the town on Saturday and would massacre people in their beds. Most rebels travelled in small groups of up to ten people. Some turned back on the road having heard of the disastrous events in the capital. Others participated in the skirmishes which occurred and a few were suspected dead as a result of the fighting. The majority returned on Saturday and Sunday. Some spent the following nights in the surrounding country for fear of arrest.<sup>108</sup>

No assault was mounted on Naas itself by the rebels. Nevertheless open rebel activity in the area caused panic among rebels. The Griffiths, Montgomerys and Burghs were all forced to flee to the town itself for safety.<sup>109</sup> The movements of Nicholas Gray who was to command the Kildare forces was particularly suspect. He was known to have been in Dublin in the days before the rising. On 24 July he rode towards Naas and Dublin from Athy but turned back on hearing of the disturbances, at Johnstown. It is possible he was to command the United Irish forces gathered at Naas. His relation Henry Hughes travelled to Wexford, via Carlow, immediately after the rebellion.<sup>110</sup> Further south at Kildare

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<sup>108</sup>Depositions and informations, Naas 1803 (R.I.A. MS 12 M 8).

<sup>109</sup>John Greene to Marsden 24, 25, 26 Jul. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/66/32-4)..

<sup>110</sup>Rev. W.W. Pole to ---- 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/66/173), Thomas Rawson to Marsden 13 Oct. 1803 (Reb. Papers 620/50/22), Thomas Rawson to Marsden 25 Sept. 1803, enclosed William Sutton to Rawson 10 Sept. 1803, Information of Thomas Corcoran n.d. [1803] (Reb. Papers 620/66/210).

town Thomas Rawson believed 'thousands' had assembled on 24 July and were restrained by their leaders 'with difficulty'. Although nothing had occurred in the south of the county, at Athy Rawson industriously arrested 'every person absent from hence on the fatal Saturday, many are wounded'. He was not mistaken in his perception that the area was organised and that veterans of 1798 were involved. A number of '98 veterans were actively involved in fostering rebellion in south Kildare.<sup>111</sup>

The evidence provided by a study of the events in County Kildare in 1803 suggests Marianne Elliot's reappraisal of the conspiracy was correct.<sup>112</sup> Thousands of people were involved in the preparations in the spring of 1803. While no formal organisation was reconstituted, the leaders relied on the prospect of a semi-spontaneous rising. At least one thousand men were prepared to actively participate in the rebellion itself on 23-25 July. The failure of the Dublin element (comparable to the events of 1798) left it completely lacking in direction. It is clear that many of the men of '98 were still warm to the United Irish cause in 1803.<sup>113</sup>

Disaffection continued to exist in the immediate aftermath of the rising but essentially the events of 23-26 July ended the prospect of another attempt in the near future. After the 'Battle of Dublin' James Nagle returned to Doorly's at Lullymore where he continued to drill rebels who assembled in the area. He had met Doorly at Clane the day after the rising itself. Nagle was arrested in October and on his evidence a spate of arrests followed including that of Micheal and Thady Doorly. John Wolfe who examined Nagle and the others expressed serious reservations about the worth of the former's information. It appeared confused and contradictory on

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<sup>111</sup>Thomas Rawson to Marsden 21 Aug. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/66/210); Thomas Rawson to John Wolfe 15 Aug. 1803 (N.L.I. Wolfe Papers).

<sup>112</sup>Elliot, *Partners in revolution* p. 282-322.

<sup>113</sup>see Alphabetical list of suspected persons covering the period 1798 to 1803, marked 'prepared after 1803' (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/12/217). Many of the Kildare suspects were involved in both 1798 and 1803.

points of detail. The cannon he claimed existed was never found. In early 1804 Wolfe recommended the release of twenty four of the twenty five arrested on his evidence. Only Micheal Doorly was held because there was some proof of his involvement in robberies.<sup>114</sup> Admiral Packenham in Leixlip made a large number of arrests in the north of the county in the autumn and winter of 1803.<sup>115</sup> In the Naas area too suspects were rounded up and in September Gray and Hughes were lodged in Athy jail.<sup>116</sup>

The Kildare leaders who had been in Dublin effected their escape to the Wicklow Mountains on 23-24 July. After a week, departing from Emmet they travelled to Rathcoffey. According to Nicholas Stafford they spent about five to seven weeks in that area.<sup>117</sup> This group later separated and a number regrouped at Ardfry, Co. Galway; Duggan, Lennon, Stafford, Quigly and John and William Parrott whose father, an Englishman lived in the area.<sup>118</sup> Their plan was probably to quit the country but in October Quigly, Stafford and the Parrotts were captured. Wyld and Mahon became the objects of an extensive search in which Quigly assisted. Bernard Duggan was finally taken in Dublin in 1805.<sup>119</sup> By the end of October Quigly agreed to provide government with information and continued to do

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<sup>114</sup>Information of James Nagle 19 Dec. 1803, 29 Oct. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/11/138/48, 620/50/27), John Wolfe to William Wickham 6 Jan. 1803 (S.O.C. 1030/29).

<sup>115</sup>Adm. Packenham to Marsden 13, 28 Sept. 1803 and five letters dated 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/66/113-5, 119-22).

<sup>116</sup>Maj. Gen. Trench to various Aug. to Sept. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/67/136-9, 142-3), Trench to Marsden 1 Nov. 1803 (Reb. Papers 620/12/141/36).

<sup>117</sup>Examination of Nicholas Stafford 4 Dec. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/11/138/45).

<sup>118</sup>Madden, *United Irishmen* 3rd ser. vol. ii, p. 110; Earl of Hardwicke *The viceroy's post bag: correspondence hitherto unpublished of the earl of Hardwicke, first Lord Lieutenant after the union* ed. Micheal Mac Donagh (London, 1904) p. 437.

<sup>119</sup>*ibid.*, p. 114ff; E. Boyle to ---- 21 Oct. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/11/130/48) Papers of B. Doogan [sic], 1805 (Reb. Papers 620/14/186/6); Madden, *United Irishmen* 3rd ser. vol. ii, p. 121-4.

so after his release in 1806. The prospect of his disclosures was favourable to government at least in 'reducing our doubts and suspicions to certainties'. William Wickham described Quigly as 'by far the cleverest I have yet seen or conversed with of the rebels'.<sup>120</sup> It is almost certainly a retrospective analysis of Quigly's role as the most senior rebel to provide information that informs Helen Landreth's opinion. She tentatively suggests he was in the pocket of government from the start of his mission to Ireland. She argues 'no effort' was made by Marsden to arrest him in March.<sup>121</sup> It is possible Marsden, who shouldered much of the blame for government inactivity before 23 July, believed more could be learned by following Quigly's movements than by arresting him.

Disaffection continued to present a major problem after Emmet's rebellion. John Wolfe wrote in late October:

I cannot omit this opportunity of endeavouring to impress the extent of disaffection in this county, the great importance of hunting it out in every part of it (and more important perhaps in this county than in any other part of Ireland except the city and county of Dublin). The little progress hitherto made in that respect affecting the neighbourhood of Maynooth and Naas only.<sup>122</sup>

The county establishment and government struggled to find a reason for the widespread activity in the county. The magistrates and justices of the peace assembled for the summer assizes in early August passed declarations of loyalty and condemned the rebellion.<sup>123</sup> A petition requesting proclamation of the county was

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<sup>120</sup>Micheal Quigly, Kilmainham Jail 24 Oct. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/50/38/55), Quigly to Dr. Trevor 29 Oct. 1803 (Reb. Papers 620/12/141/35), Information of Micheal Quigly 1804, 1805, 1806 and 26 Jul. 1808 (Reb. Papers 620/13/177/1-17, 620/14/187, 199/1-10, 205); MacDonagh, *The viceroy's post bag* p. 436-8, 452-3.

<sup>121</sup>Landreth, *The pursuit of Robert Emmet* p. 138-40.

<sup>122</sup>John Wolfe to Marsden 28 Oct. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/67/201 ).

<sup>123</sup>*F.J.* 9 Aug. 1803.

drawn up by fifteen justices of the peace at Naas on 18 August. The county (and neighbouring Meath) were accordingly proclaimed with the active support of the duke of Leinster two days later.<sup>124</sup>

Fenton Aylmer asked in late July, 'have any people of consequence been their leaders or what the devil do they want?'<sup>125</sup> Wogan Browne believed the causes of the outbreak were rather immediate; the fear of detection following the Patrick St. explosion, the report [on 18 July] of a French invasion fleet, the fear that a militia ballot would 'disturb the minds of the people in distant counties' and to counteract the army of reserve. The most puzzling element of the Kildare rising for government was its sporadic nature.<sup>126</sup> James McClelland in compiling his report on Maynooth found such a determined rising in such a relatively small town with no apparent overall strategy 'difficult to account for'. He sought answers in two sources which had remained under suspicion since 1798. Both Maynooth College and the duke of Leinster were implicated at least of inactivity and at worst of supporting the rebels. The college it was argued increased 'among the Catholic inhabitants that intemperate spirit which contributed so powerfully to produce in several counties the former rebellion'. It was also believed the rebels were informed the duke was to lead them.<sup>127</sup> One Maynooth man was informed on the day of the rising, 10,000 men were expected from Longford to join the rebels.<sup>128</sup> The duke for the second time found himself implicated in a rebellion against government. He had in fact written to the viceroy, Hardwicke, on 24 July outlining the situation and requesting 'part of the army' to be despatched. In forwarding the report of the solicitor general to the home secretary Charles Coote, Hardwicke noted that Leinster had no previous knowledge of the rising and had positively acquiesced in the proclamation of the county. As had

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<sup>124</sup>*F.J.* 25 Aug. 1803.

<sup>125</sup>Fenton Aylmer to Marsden 29 Jul. 1803 (N.A.I. Reb. Papers 620/64/21).

<sup>126</sup>Wogan Browne to Marsden 3 Aug. 1803 (N.A.I. S.O.C. 1025/23 ).

<sup>127</sup>(copy) James McClelland, to William Wickham 26 Aug. 1803 (P.R.O. HO 100/112/369-377).

<sup>128</sup>Examination of Francis Lamb, Maynooth, 1803 (T.C.D. Sirr Papers 869/8 f.36).

been the case five years earlier the duke was guilty of what the king himself described as 'extreme weakness'. With the county proclaimed the government of it was essentially in the hands of Dublin Castle.<sup>129</sup>

During the period between the two United Irish rebellions popular radicalism continued to exist among the lower orders. The failure of 1798 ensured the middling and upper classes associated with the liberal-radical cause were separated from militant radicals. They simply had too much to lose. Thomas Wogan Browne, Thomas Fitzgerald and Maurice Keatinge all provided government with reports of radicalism in Kildare between 1798 and 1803. For Dublin Castle Kildare presented a continual problem. During 1804 there were more reports of radical activity than in the years 1800 to 1802.<sup>130</sup> The Lord Lieutenant, Hardwicke, commented after the July rebellion:

....I am sorry to say that such has been the state of the County of Kildare since the rebellion of 1798 as to require at all times the particular attention of government, and there is a more general and rooted spirit of disaffection in that county than in any other part of Ireland.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Hardwicke, *The viceroy's post bag* p. 384-7

<sup>130</sup>see N.A.I. S.O.C. 1030/5, 9-11, 13-15, 22-23, 40-54, 56-9, 110

<sup>131</sup>Hardwicke, *op. cit.* p. 385-6.

## Conclusion

The period from 1790 to 1803 in County Kildare was one of unprecedented political activity and disaffection. Prominent liberals and Catholic activists were involved in campaigning for parliamentary reform and Catholic relief from the early 1790s. Their appeal to a wide base of public opinion radicalised the lower orders to a greater degree than was previously the case. The introduction of Defenderism to the county in 1795 provided the disaffected of a lower social class with a means of co-ordination. However it was the United Irishmen who most effectively harnessed the radicalism of the county. Their propaganda in the form of symbols, mobilisation and politicisation created a vast underground army prepared to rise in support of a separate, French inspired, Irish republic. The radical threat forced loyalists to define their position more clearly. Under the impetus of Dublin Castle the relatively small, but nonetheless powerful conservative faction organised themselves practically and coherently. The pre-rebellion divisions between radicalism and loyalism continued to dominate Kildare's political landscape until the rebellion of 1803 and beyond.

Kildare at the end of the eighteenth century was one of the most liberal counties in Ireland. This was largely due to the powerful influence, politically and geographically, of the duke of Leinster. At the beginning of the 1790s the liberal position in Ireland was increasingly influential. It was institutionalised in the hesitant Irish Whig Club and the short lived Association of the Friends of the Constitution, Liberty and Peace. The beginning of the French war and increasing radicalism within Ireland, which polarised Irish society, rendered the liberal standpoint increasingly untenable. The dilemma facing Whig politicians is illustrated by the case of the duke of Leinster. His attempt to maintain a middle course in opposition to government led ultimately to, an albeit temporary, abdication of his political authority in 1797. The vocal liberal attitude of many of Kildare's landowners in the 1790s created an

atmosphere in which disaffection thrived. Moreover the division in the county establishment which was exhibited most clearly from 1797 further encouraged the dissemination of United Irish ideals as 'out-of-doors' politics became the acceptable means of expressing political opposition. An understanding of liberal politics in Kildare is crucial to the study of the 1790s and the contexts of both 1798 and 1803.

While Jim Smyth has identified the existence of a middling class Defender leadership in Ulster, Lawrence O'Connor remains the only notable Defender leader to emerge in north Kildare.<sup>1</sup> Defenderism in Kildare involved thousands of people in the north of the county. The arrest, trial and execution of Lawrence O'Connor provided the immediate context to the Defenders in Kildare. They showed little signs of the sectarianism exhibited further north. Socio-economic grievances were important in their extension into the county. They re-echoed the anxieties of the anti-militia protesters who appeared in 1794. The politicisation which occurred during the early years of the decade and most immediately during the 'Fitzwilliam episode' had a profound impact on the lower orders. The Defenders when they emerged in Kildare linked particular grievances to wider hopes of a 'just' society now inspired by the prospect of a French assisted revolution.

By 1798 the United Irishmen in Kildare were a powerful revolutionary force with a paper strength of up to 12,000 members. The dormant Defenders provided the militant United Irishmen with a body of revolutionaries in the formation of a Kildare organisation from late 1796. The involvement of Lord Edward Fitzgerald gave the United Irishmen a veneer of respectability. He was crucial in the development of Kildare's United Irish movement based on locally influential figures: George Cummins, Malachi Delany, Matthew Kenna and Micheal Reynolds for example. Fitzgerald himself was not a powerful thinker but a military man of position imbued with the ideas of the French revolution. Almost all the leading Kildare United Irishmen were Catholic. Thomas Pakenham comments that: 'Nothing is more striking than the absence from the movement of Protestant nationalists in the best controlled and best

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<sup>1</sup>Jim Smyth, *The men of no property* p. 100-20.

educated of counties like Kildare'.<sup>2</sup> Those Protestants who were tentatively linked with the organisation by 1798, for example Col. Keatinge or Thomas Wogan Browne, were effectively distanced by the military actions of government in the spring of that year. Prominent liberal figures were more involved than hitherto thought. The evidence connecting Thomas Fitzgerald with the United Irishmen is particularly strong. Others included Daniel Caulfield, Thomas Reynolds and the shadowy Col. Lumm. Their connection is best explained in the context of the breakdown of effective opposition politics around 1797 and the resulting moral respectability of the United Irishmen as the only remaining option for some liberals.

Not all liberals chose to identify with the radical cause in 1798. Richard Griffith of Millicent was a leading Kildare liberal in the 1790s, a member of the Whig Club and prime mover and secretary to the duke of Leinster's association in 1792-3. By 1796 he had openly distanced himself from opposition politics. He sided with the loyalist faction in the establishment split in Kildare in 1797. His remarks during the rebellion in a letter to Thomas Pelham are instructive. They outline his opinion on the far reaching consequences of vocal liberal politics: 'Good God, how bitterly Mr. Grattan and others[will have] to reproach themselves for having wrought the giddy multitude into their excesses'.<sup>3</sup> Yet Griffith had not relinquished his original political sympathies. Commenting on the union question in early 1799 he noted its disadvantages would '...be more than counter balanced by the demolition of the most corrupt assembly that ever disgraced a nation'. He added: 'I confess I am extremely sorry that the union does not bring the Catholics into the pale of the constitution'.<sup>4</sup>

In understanding the period from 1790 to 1803 an appreciation of the forces of conservatism in Kildare is essential. This is particularly pertinent since the

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas Pakenham, *The year of liberty* p. 110.

<sup>3</sup>Richard Griffith to Thomas Pelham 4 Jun. 1798 (B.L., Pelham Papers Add. MSS 33,105 f. 384).

<sup>4</sup>Richard Griffith to Thomas Pelham 15 Jan. 1799 (B.L., Pelham Papers Add. MSS 33,106 f. 169-72).

dominant interest was liberal. John Wolfe emerges as the central loyalist figure at a local level. The threat of the United Irishmen ensured loyalist leaders received the support of Dublin Castle as organised disaffection spread. The military reaction in the form of the Yeomanry was insufficient and in number of cases provided military training for United Irish commanders. In political terms the conservative faction gained ascendancy in Kildare in 1797, exemplified in John Wolfe's replacement of the duke of Leinster as commander of the Kildare militia. After 1798 the radical - loyalist divide was more sharply focused. While the duke himself emerged unfavourably from the events of 1803, the latter rising was not viewed by Dublin Castle as the result of a suspect liberal conspiracy. Thomas Fitzgerald, Wogan Browne and Col. Keatinge were all anxious to volunteer what information they could after 1798.

An examination of the period under discussion in the context of politics and politicisation illustrates important connections between the various shades of the political spectrum in Kildare, from Defenderism to high politics. This also provides the context to the rebellions of 1798 and 1803. The precise motivations of particular individuals involved in these risings is more problematic. The rebellion taken as a whole was not a sectarian rebellion forced on the peasantry by a draconian military government. Of those leaders who participated in 1798 many were locally influential, strong farmers, minor gentry and wealthy landowners; William Aylmer, Micheal Reynolds, John Esmonde, Malachi Delany and John Doorly. The rebellion was inspired and organised by the United Irishmen. It undoubtedly unleashed forces of sectarianism where military control was poor. It is also true the United Irishmen were not blind to the advantages of sectarian fears in a county where the mass of the people were Catholic while many landowners were Protestant.

The mobilisation of the county again in 1803 proves that 1798 was not an isolated reaction. Both rebellions in Kildare have been obscured by the events in Wexford in 1798 and Dublin five years later. Kildare's proximity to the capital ensured its strategic importance in any plans of rebellion. While not on the same scale

as Wexford, Kildare's rebellion in '98 in particular deserves more attention than it has received.

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