



**THE EVOLUTION OF LOCAL POLITICS IN FINGAL,
NORTH COUNTY DUBLIN, 1870-1948.**

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Abbreviations

A.R.P.	Air Raid Precaution
A.O.H.	Ancient Order of Hibernians
B.M.H. W.S.	Bureau of Military History Witness Statement
C.D.F.A.	County Dublin Farmers Association
D.A.T.I.	Department of Agriculture & Technical Instruction
D.E.D.	District Electoral Division
D.E.L.G.	Dáil Éireann department of Local Government
D.C.	District Councillor
D.L.	Deputy Lieutenant
D.L.G.P.H.	Department of Local Government & Public Health
D.O.R.A.	Defence of the Realm Act
D.V.C.	Deputy Vice-Chairman
G.A.A.	Gaelic Athletic Association
H.C.	House of Commons
H.L.	House of Lords
I.C.A.	Irish Citizen Army
I.L.P.U.	Irish Loyal & Patriotic Union
I.N.F.	Irish National Federation
I.N.L.	Irish National League
I.P.P.	Irish Parliamentary Party
I.R.A.	Irish Republican Army
I.T.G.W.U.	Irish Transport & General Workers Union
I.U.A.	Irish Unionist Alliance
J.P.	Justice of the Peace
L.D.F.	Local Defence Force
L.G.B.	Local Government Board
L.S.F.	Local Service Force
M.P.	Member of Parliament
M.S.P.C.	Military Service Pensions Collection
N.D.U.	North Dublin Union
P.D.A.	Property Defence Association
P.L.G.	Poor Law Guardian

P.L.U	Poor Law Union
R.A.M.C.	Royal Army Medical Corps
R.I.C.	Royal Irish Constabulary
R.D.C.	Rural District Council
S.D.U.	South Dublin Union
T.D.	Teachta Dála
T.T.L.	Town Tenants League
U.D.C.	Urban District Council
U.I.L.	United Irish League
U.V.F.	Ulster Volunteer Force
V.C.	Vice-Chairman

Introduction

On Sunday 9 October 1949, half a dozen old men stood in the rain for an hour, at the base of the Parnell monument in O'Connell St. in Dublin, 'unheeding and unheeded by the passing crowds'.¹ They were observing the fifty-eighth anniversary of the death of Charles Stewart Parnell, who died on 6 October 1891. According to annual tradition, on the first Sunday after that date each year, members of the Parnell Commemoration Committee removed the wreaths laid at the monument and carried them in procession to Parnell's grave at Glasnevin cemetery.² One of those who walked that day, and who had attended every year since Parnell's passing, was the seventy-eight year old Patrick Joseph Kettle. It was to be his last attendance, as he died the following year.³

P.J. Kettle, as he was more commonly known, was born in 1871 into a prominent farming family with strong nationalist sympathies. His father, Patrick, and his uncle, Andrew, were involved in both the tenant right and fledgling Home Rule movements. Andrew was a close disciple of both Isaac Butt and Parnell, and played an important part in the political events of the succeeding decades. P. J. Kettle came into the world when Ireland was moving away from the memory of the Famine, experiencing rising prosperity, and the effects of modernisation. Before the age of thirty Kettle inherited the family farm in the Swords area of Fingal in north County Dublin and had become a young and enthusiastic member of the local nationalist farming elite. His lifetime spans the period of this thesis. It began under British rule just as the state church was disestablished and the first attempts were made to address the land question. It ended with the election of Ireland's first inter-party government. Before his death on 9 September 1950, he saw the establishment of an Irish republic under the Republic of Ireland Act, 1948, which came into force on 18 April 1949. P. J. Kettle lived through the major events of the late nineteenth century, including the campaigns for land reform and Home Rule, the cultural awakening, the upheavals of the First World War and revolutionary disruption between 1919 and 1923. He also witnessed the competition for material and political advantage in the new Irish Free State. He was intimately and continually involved in local politics throughout his life, and in the social and cultural organisations and institutions at the grassroots level that played a

¹ *Irish Independent*, 10 Oct 1949.

² *Irish Press*, 10 Oct 1949.

³ Civil registration death record, Patrick Kettle, Dublin North, Q4, 1950, vol. 2, p. 189.

part in informing and shaping modern Ireland. As a poor law guardian, district councillor, county councillor, farmers' representative, Gaelic League activist, magistrate, and later an unsuccessful candidate for Cumann na nGaedheal, and then a supporter and endorser of Fianna Fáil, he was always true to his farming class background, and a staunch defender and promoter of their, and, indeed, his own interests. Kettle is an example of Vincent Comerford's thesis that the great constant of history is the 'manoeuvring for survival and advancement of self and family through access to material resources and socio-political advantage'.⁴ This constant was as applicable to the class of political elites that exercised power and influence in Ireland and Fingal in the 1870s, as it was to those who did so in the late 1940s.

Objectives & methodologies

The aim of this thesis is to examine the evolution of local politics in Fingal through the experiences of its political elite, who exercised varying degrees of power and influence through local government in the generations from 1870 to 1948. It will concentrate on local leadership personalities, their motivations, ideals, activities, alliances and rivalries and their responses to and relationship with a changing national political landscape. It will explore the effect of reforming legislation on political life in Fingal, enquiring whether a measure of autonomy was achieved through local government before independence, and whether this continued after 1922.

The thesis also examines the nature and extent of the social as well as the political revolution that occurred, and attempts to determine the extent to which a counter-revolution followed in independent Ireland. The period from 1870 to 1948 can be characterised as one of continuity and change, frequently local continuity at a time of national change. The significance of intervening periods of progress and consolidation between momentous episodes are often underestimated. How did a local area such as Fingal fit into the national picture? Was Fingal different and, if so, what does this tell us about generalisations in relation to the national narrative? The questions of land, class and nationalism permeate the entire period, but not in lockstep with the national narrative. In the mid-nineteenth century, Fingal was home to some of the most senior figures in the Conservative party and governments in the United Kingdom, including

⁴ R. V. Comerford, *Ireland* (London, 2003), p. 266.

George Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Edward Taylor.⁵ Individuals from Fingal played leading roles in the Land War, but their native region was quiet. It was the only rural location involved in the Dublin Lockout in 1913. Fingal men were military participants in the Easter Rising, but the area remained relatively quiescent thereafter.

Fingal is close enough to the capital city of Dublin, the centre of administration in Ireland, to be intimately involved in its political activities, but sufficiently remote to be also representative of rural Leinster. In the historiography, Dublin County has tended to be included with Dublin city or not at all. This thesis provides an opportunity to probe the differences through a regional case study. It can shed light on the similarities in successive movements and successive generations and how one built upon the achievements or learned from the shortcomings of its predecessors. This work will attempt to find out how nineteenth-century movements found a home in independent Ireland, who departed, who reinvented themselves, who re-emerged and who gained power and control.

If E.P. Thompson championed the discipline of ‘history from below’, this study is a history from ‘half way up’, observing a local political elite as a window on the social and political make up of a community in a time of momentous change.⁶ David Fitzpatrick’s case study of County Clare in which he examines the Irish revolution, has been expanded upon recently in the decade of centenaries to many of the counties of Ireland.⁷ Fitzpatrick’s extrapolations to the national have not rung true for all counties and the ultimate result of such a compendium of works will be a greater appreciation of the variance of local experiences, which cumulatively make up the national in all its varieties. This thesis takes inspiration from this approach, but extends to a much longer

⁵ George Alexander Hamilton, of Hampton Hall, near Balbriggan was M.P. for Dublin University from 1843 to 1859, then Assistant and later Chief Secretary to the Treasury until 1870. See Patrick M. Geoghegan, 'Hamilton, George Alexander', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009). His immediate neighbour was Thomas Edward Taylor, of Ardgillan near Balbriggan, M.P. for County Dublin from 1841, Chief whip of the Conservative party from 1860 and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in 1868. See Georgina Clinton & Sinéad Sturgeon, 'Taylor, Thomas Edward', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁶ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English working class* (London, 1963).

⁷ David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish life 1913–1921: Provincial experiences of war and revolution* (Oxford, 1998); Peter Hart, *The I.R.A. and its enemies: Violence and community in Cork 1916–1923* (Oxford, 1998). Marie Coleman, *County Longford and the Irish revolution, 1910–1923* (Dublin, 2003) concerns her study with the uniqueness of local circumstances; Fergus Campbell, *Land and revolution: Nationalist politics in the west of Ireland, 1891–1921* (Oxford, 2005) found a different experience occurred in Galway. Mary Ann Lyons & Daithí Ó Corráin (eds.), *The Irish revolution, 1912–23 series*. At the time of writing, no volume for County Dublin has been published.

period to understand more fully the changes that occurred, and, importantly, those that did not. It focuses on at least two political generations either side of the 1912-23 period.

In the local context in Fingal the most politically active and influential cohort are the senior officers on institutional bodies and local social organisations. The changing balance of power in these local institutions over the period under study, and their relationship with national government, reflects, articulates and influences the experience, culture and outlook of local society.⁸ This thesis examines the debates and conduct on these local government bodies as a window on what was happening in local society. Local government can be a bridge between the state and local society, a visible manifestation of the state in people's lives. All politics is local, yet local politics is not self-contained and exists within the framework of national politics.

Historiography

Political history, even at local level, requires a fundamental understanding and appreciation of the competing interests and identities. The history of Ireland was dominated since the Act of Union by the nature and reality of its relationship with Great Britain. The questions were always ones focused on who owned Ireland and who governed Ireland – essentially the land question and the national question. This informed the identities that found themselves at a crossroads in Fingal in 1870 as religious and cultural differences became increasingly politicised when these questions were addressed tentatively but realistically for the first time by a British government in Westminster. While it is inevitable that the local narrative is reconstructed predominantly from primary sources, an exhaustive consultation of secondary literature is necessary to put this narrative in context. The land question and Parnellism are extensively covered in Irish historiographical surveys while the release of comprehensive archives and a renewed popular interest in the decade of centenaries has driven an increase in detailed local histories of the revolutionary period. Independent Ireland is less well served to date.⁹ This thesis seeks to address the gaps in the historiography for the entire duration in the Fingal area.

⁸ Andrew Heywood, *Politics* (Basingstoke, 2013) pp 2-9.

⁹ W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland VI: Ireland under the union II, 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996) & J.R. Hill, (ed.), *A new history of Ireland VII: Ireland, 1921-84* (Oxford, 2003) provide a

Alvin Jackson has focussed on comparative and recurring themes in the political histories of nationalism, Unionism and the constitutional relationship with Britain in *Ireland 1798-1998: Politics and war* (Oxford, 1999) and the long predominance of the national question in *Home Rule: an Irish history, 1800-2000* (Oxford, 2003).¹⁰ *Ireland since 1800: Conflict and conformity* by K. Theodore Hoppen (Abingdon, 1989) emphasised the primacy of local politics and personal advancement in an essentially conservative society. He contends that they occasionally combined to take part in national movements, when to their advantage, before retreating to the local again. J.J. Lee provided a probing analysis of twentieth-century Irish politics in *Ireland, 1912 – 1985: politics and society* (Cambridge, 1989). He is critical of a lack of progress in independent Ireland, but mindful of the limits of an emerging nation in an international context, its inherited contexts and realities, and the personal influence of its political personalities. It complements his earlier but shorter volume on how Ireland modernised up to this point.¹¹

The historiography of Fingal in the period is poor with no significant academic survey and a small number of local or event specific histories. The most important is the memoir of Andrew Kettle, published by his son in 1958.¹² Several short histories on the episodes and personalities of the revolutionary period and the short work by this author on Fingal politics before the Great War are the exception.¹³

The Irish Conservative Party 1852-1868: land, politics and religion (Newbridge, 2007), by Andrew Shiels, focused on national politics in mid-Victorian Ireland. (At this time, Dublin County returned two Conservative M.P.s, and Fingal was home to senior party figures, George Alexander Hamilton, and Thomas Edward Taylor.) R. V. Comerford, in *The Fenians in context: Irish politics and society, 1848–82* (Dublin,

thorough chronological survey. F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine*, (London, 1971) and Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600–1972* (London, 1988) offer revised analyses. Recent compendia of chronological and thematic essay collections of current scholarship include Alvin Jackson, (ed.) *The Oxford handbook of modern Irish history*, (Oxford, 2014); Richard Bourke & Ian McBride (eds.), *The Princeton history of modern Ireland* (Princeton, 2016); James Kelly, (ed.) *The Cambridge history of Ireland, volume iii, 1730–1880* & Thomas Bartlett, (ed.), *volume iv, 1880 to present* (Cambridge, 2018).

¹⁰ This study made use of both editions of this publication, Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: War, peace and beyond*, (2nd ed., Chichester, 2010).

¹¹ J. J. Lee, *The modernisation of Irish society: 1848-1918* (Dublin, 1973).

¹² Laurence J. Kettle, *Material for victory, being the memoir of Andrew J. Kettle* (Dublin, 1958).

¹³ Declan Brady, *Culture, politics and local government in Fingal, 1891-1914* (Dublin, 2017). See bibliography section for a list of publications on local histories.

1985) highlighted the Fenian threat and its continuing impact and centrality in politics and society.

Literature on the land issue such as W. E. Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in Ireland: 1848-1904* (Dundalk, 1984) and Philip Bull, *Land, politics and nationalism: a study of the Irish land question* (Dublin, 1996), focus on the national perspective and provide the backdrop against which the Fingal experience can be measured. Collections of essays edited by P. J. Drudy, *Ireland: land politics and people* (Cambridge, 1982) and Samuel Clark & James S. Donnelly Jr., *Irish peasants: violence and political unrest 1780-1914* (Madison, 2003), contain material pertinent to the local experience, examining class, family and market dynamics in rural Ireland. *The decline of the big house in Ireland: a study of Irish landed families 1860-1960* (Dublin, 2001) by Terence Dooley examines the landlords' experience over an extended period and is particularly useful for defining and characterising the landed elite in the context of local economic, social and political hierarchies.¹⁴ The same author captured the lingering nature of the unresolved land question in independent Ireland in '*Land for the people*': *the land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004). Paul Bew linked the land and national questions in *Land and the national question in Ireland, 1858-82* (Dublin, 1979). He later highlighted the struggle within constitutional nationalism itself, between conciliatory and militant factions, the Irish Parliamentary Party being a coalition of Dillonite agrarians, Devlinites Catholic nationalists and Redmondite Home Rulers, in *Conflict and conciliation in Ireland, 1890-1910: Parnellites and radical agrarians* (Oxford 1987).¹⁵ Resolution of the land question in Fingal was somewhat different to the rest of the country, as we shall see, with its proximity to Dublin, and strong tillage bias, exhibiting labour as well as tenant tensions. Raymond Ryan's study of farmers' politics in the Irish Free State is of considerable interest as it reflects much of the political discourse in Fingal at the same time, concerned with rates and annuity payments.¹⁶

Virginia Crossman has numerous publications on the operation of local government and the poor law in Ireland in the nineteenth century while Matthew Potter also

¹⁴ See also Terence Dooley, 'Landlords and the land question 1879-1909', in Carla King (ed.), *Famine, land and culture in Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), pp 116-39.

¹⁵ Named after the leaders of the different factions, John Dillon, Joseph Devlin and John Redmond.

¹⁶ Raymond Ryan, *Farmers, agriculture and politics in the Irish Free State area*, (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, U.C.C., 2005).

includes the twentieth century in *The municipal revolution in Ireland : a handbook of urban government in Ireland since 1800* (Dublin, 2011) but with a greater emphasis on urban municipal bodies. Theodore Hoppen and William Feingold reserve their focus for the changing nature and electoral representation of these local political structures.¹⁷ Commemorative essay collections on twentieth-century local government bodies give a basic account of local administration, against which to compare those in north Dublin.¹⁸ Thomas Nelson has produced an academic history of Kildare County Council in its first quarter century.¹⁹ Mary Daly's history of the Department of the Environment is invaluable for its accounts of the relationships between local government bodies and their successive parent bodies, the Poor Law Commissioners, the Local Government Board, and both the revolutionary and post-independence Dáil Éireann Department of Local Government.²⁰ Her volume on the Department of Agriculture is a similarly comprehensive source on the importance of that department from its origins in 1899, as the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction.²¹ *A Labour History of Ireland, 1824-2000* (Dublin, 2011) by Emmet O'Connor details the evolution of the labour movement, while Pádraig Yeates' *Lockout, Dublin 1913*, (Dublin, 2001) is the definitive account of the Lockout, although it is weak on the Fingal farm labourers' dispute. Several important essays by Pádraig Lane give explicit insights into the labourers' plight.²²

The definitive treatment of Fenianism is Vincent Comerford's *The Fenians in context: Irish politics and society, 1848–1882* (Dublin, 1985). Detailed studies of revolutionary

¹⁷ K. Theodore Hoppen, *Elections, politics and society in Ireland, 1832-1885* (Oxford, 1984) & W. L. Feingold, *The revolt of the tenantry: the transformation of local government in Ireland 1872–1886* (Boston, 1984).

¹⁸ Desmond Roche, *Local government in Ireland* (Dublin, 1982); M.E. Daly (ed.), *County and town: 100 years of local government in Ireland: Lectures on the occasion of the Local Government Act 1898* (Dublin, 2001); Mark Callanan & Justin F. Keogan (eds.), *Local government in Ireland inside out* (Dublin, 2003) & Diarmuid Ferriter, *Lovers of liberty: local government in twentieth century Ireland* (Dublin, 2001).

¹⁹ Thomas P. Nelson, 'Kildare County Council, 1899-1926', (PhD thesis, N.U.I. Maynooth, 2007).

²⁰ Virginia Crossman, *Local government in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Belfast, 1994); *Politics, law and order in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 1996) & *Politics, pauperism and power in late nineteenth-century Ireland* (Manchester, 2006).

²¹ Mary E. Daly, *The Buffer State: the historical roots of the department of the environment* (Dublin, 1996) & *The first department: a history of the Department of Agriculture*, (Dublin, 2002). Dublin county councillors were nominated from 1899 to sit on county committees of agriculture, under the D.A.T.I.

²² Pádraig G. Lane, 'Agricultural labourers and rural violence: 1850-1914' in *Studia Hibernica*, xxvii (1993), pp 77-87; and 'Agricultural labourers and the land question' in Carla King (ed.), *Famine, land and culture in Ireland* (Dublin 2000), pp 101-115.

nationalism by Owen McGee, *The I.R.B.: The Irish Republican Brotherhood from the Land League to Sinn Féin* (Dublin, 2005) and M. J. Kelly, *The Fenian ideal and Irish nationalism, 1882–1916* (Woodbridge, 2006) are complemented by more theoretical treatments by Garvin and Hutchinson who examine causal and motivational forces.²³ The early history of Sinn Féin is important as Swords had a branch from as early as 1906. Michael Laffan, in *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party, 1916-1923* (Cambridge, 1999), and Brian Feeney's *Sinn Féin: a hundred turbulent years* (Dublin, 2002) detail this development and its post 1916 ascent. P. J. Matthews' *Revival: the Abbey theatre, Sinn Féin, the Gaelic League and the co-operative movement* (Cork, 2003) develops the links between the different elements that together formed the wider Irish Ireland and self-help identity. The bibliography includes several key articles relating to different aspects of the development of the G.A.A. and Gaelic League.

There is an appreciable body of academic work on the study of Catholic elites, and the evolution of the emerging strands in Nationalist politics. Senia Paseta's *Before the revolution: Nationalism, social change and Ireland's Catholic elite, 1879-1922*, (Cork, 1999), identified the Catholic intelligentsia that saw themselves as the government in waiting after Home Rule, only to be deprived of the prize after 1916 by an alternative republican rival. Patrick Maume, in *The long gestation: Irish nationalist life, 1891-1918*, (Dublin, 1999) examines the continuing evolution of Irish politics after Parnell and the importance of newspapers in spreading the Nationalist message. He tells how the controlling nature and closed elitism of the I.P.P. led to disaffection and generated its own opposition and antagonism to British governance in Ireland.

Michael Wheatley's work on the immediate pre-revolutionary period in the midlands highlights the contradictions, tensions and competition in Irish nationalism.²⁴ Fergal McGarry and Roy Foster respectively evoke the intellectual dynamism of Dublin in the period around the 1916 rising, in *The rising, Ireland: Easter 1916* (Oxford, 2011), and *Vivid faces: the revolutionary generation in Ireland 1890-1923* (London, 2014).

Charles Townshend produced the authoritative military accounts of the revolution in *Easter 1916: the Irish rebellion* (Dublin, 2006) and *The Republic: The fight for Irish*

²³ Tom Garvin, *Nationalist revolutionaries in Ireland, 1858–1928* (Oxford, 1987) & *The evolution of Irish nationalist politics* (Dublin, 1981); John Hutchinson, *The dynamics of cultural nationalism: the Gaelic revival and the creation of the Irish nation state* (London 1987).

²⁴ Michael Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party: provincial Ireland, 1910–1916* (Oxford, 2005).

independence 1918–1923 (London, 2013) while the principal engagement involving the Fingal battalion under Thomas Ashe is detailed in Paul O’Brien’s *Field of fire: the battle of Ashbourne, 1916* (Dublin, 2012).²⁵ Accounts of the revolutionary period and experience of the First World War in Dublin city are useful for contexts due to the proximity of Fingal to the capital.²⁶ Michael Hopkinson’s two volumes on the war of independence and the civil war are comprehensive chronological and geographical narratives of the two conflicts at a national level.²⁷ Arthur Mitchell appraises the critical role played by nationalist local government bodies in the war of independence in *Revolutionary government in Ireland: Dáil Éireann, 1919-22* (Dublin, 1993).

Much of the relevant historiography of the interwar period reflects the national focus on high politics and national and legislative matters. Ciara Meehan’s study of the Cosgrave government to 1932 is complemented by Mel Farrell who continues through the transition to Fianna Fáil coming to power and the potential challenges to democratic structures in the 1930s. The historical record of the ascent of de Valera and Fianna Fáil through to 1948 by Richard Dunphy covers the historiography to the concluding date of this work.²⁸ John Regan questions the nature of the achievement of the Irish revolution, arguing that a counter-revolution took place in order to ensure and maintain democratic stability and control of the levers of power in the decade after the treaty.²⁹ The challenges of the 1930s are documented by Maurice Manning, in *The Blueshirts* (Dublin, 1970) while Fearghal McGarry’s *Irish politics and the Spanish Civil War* (Cork, 1999) highlights the arbitrary activities of some political personalities in north Dublin involved in support movements for the Spanish rebels.

²⁵ Additional material in the run up to the rising in Fingal can be found in the biography of Thomas Ashe; Seán Ó Luing, *I die in a good cause* (Tralee, 1970).

²⁶ Padraig Yeates, *A city in wartime: Dublin 1914-1918* (Dublin, 2011); *A city in turmoil: Dublin, 1919-1921* (Dublin, 2012) & *A city in civil war: Dublin, 1921-1924* (Dublin, 2015); Richard S. Grayson, *Dublin’s great wars* (Cambridge, 2018).

²⁷ Michael Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence* (Montreal, 2002) & *Green against green: the Irish Civil War* (Dublin, 2004).

²⁸ Ciara Meehan, *The Cosgrave party: a history of Cumann na nGaedheal, 1923-33* (Dublin, 2010); Mel Farrell, *Party politics in a new democracy: The Irish Free State, 1922-37* (London, 2017) & Richard Dunphy, *The Making of Fianna Fáil Power in Ireland, 1923– 1948* (Oxford, 1995). Farrell and Meehan also co-edited a collection of thematic essays on the 1920s, which are of relevance to Fingal politics, Mel Farrell, Jason Knirck & Ciara Meehan (eds.) *A formative decade: Ireland in the 1920s* (Sallins, 2015).

²⁹ John Regan, *The Irish counter-revolution 1921-36: Treatyite politics and settlement in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 1999); Mike Cronin & John Regan (eds.) *Ireland: The politics of independence, 1922-49* (Basingstoke, 2000).

Primary sources

An exhaustive study of local newspapers covering the period 1860 to 1948 was undertaken. To avoid any omissions possible due to the shortcomings of modern digital search engines, the author utilised microfilm, examining full runs of weekly and biweekly editions of the local press, a task involving the reading of some 80,000 pages of newsprint. The ten years to 1870 was included to identify individuals or preceding patterns that were of note prior to the start point of 1870. Detailed analysis of the local newspapers the nationalist *Drogheda Independent*, and the Conservative and later Unionist *Drogheda Conservative*, *Drogheda Argus* and *Drogheda Advertiser* allows the tracing over time of historical personalities and events in Fingal. Searchable digital records of national and additional titles in Ireland and Britain were then examined where relevant. Newspapers reflect the period in which they were created, and provide a glimpse into society as reported at the time. Newspapers are also important for electoral returns, as official records of local elections were not retained until the 1940s. Digitised records of *An Claidheamh Soluis*, the bilingual paper of the Gaelic League cover much of the activities of that organisation in its important early years.

All the available manuscript and microfilmed records of regular and statutory meetings of local government bodies, including the County Dublin Grand Jury, Balrothery Poor Law Union, Balrothery Rural District Council and Dublin County Council were examined at Fingal County Archives and the National Archives of Ireland, covering a period of almost ninety years. The year 1860 was again used as the commencement date to the research to avoid any omissions and to identify trends prior to 1870. The County Dublin Grand Jury annual minutes covered the years from 1860 to 1898. These meetings took place over three days each Easter. Balrothery Poor Law Board of Guardians met weekly and later fortnightly after 1899, when the meetings were combined with those of the rural district council. The minutes of every meeting were viewed on microfilm from 1860 to 1925 for the guardians and in hard copy for the district council from 1899 through to 1930.³⁰ Dublin County Council minutes were examined at Fingal County Archives for fortnightly and later monthly meetings from 1899 to 1941, when the council was suspended, and again in 1948. Balbriggan town

³⁰ The records of the North Dublin Union, which included the north city borough and those of the North Dublin Rural District Council, were examined on an exceptional basis when required, as they both included areas outside of the Fingal region.

commissioners' minute books, available online, were consulted when newspaper reports highlighted matters of interest. Rough minute books for Balrothery Rural District Council at the National Archives were examined where available, mainly in the late 1920s. Comparison with contemporary newspaper reports ensured that full reportage of such meetings was possible, particularly in relation to debates at meetings, reported in the press but not recorded in the official minutes. It is important to note that due to the fire in the Customs House in May 1921, the central records of the parent departments, the Poor Law Commissioners and the Local Government Board do not survive. Thus, only the official local minutes are available and not the departmental notations or responses. There are periods during 1920-21 when no meetings took place, due to the military situation, but otherwise the minutes survive intact. There are considerable if incomplete records surviving for the Dáil Éireann Department of Local Government in the critical period of the War of Independence from 1919 to 1921, shedding light on the often-troubled relationship with local bodies.

In the late nineteenth century, political pamphlets were still a common communication tool used by all political groups. Those published by southern Unionists through the Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union and the Irish Unionist Alliance are particularly extensive. Incomplete surviving record collections from political and cultural groups such as the Property Defence Association, United Irish League, Sinn Féin, the Unionist Convention, North County Dublin Farmers Association, the G.A.A., and the Gaelic League that related to North Dublin were consulted. Records relating to Dublin lodges and meetings of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland and the Irish Unionist Alliance were viewed at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. Personal and private papers consulted included those of Charles Cobbe, Newbridge House, Donabate, Ion Trant Hamilton, M.P.'s election campaign in 1885, the correspondence book of George Alexander Hamilton while secretary to the Treasury in London, and the diaries of Sir Horace Plunkett.

The networks and connections of political elites can be identified through genealogical records: census, civil registration, church baptism and marriages, Church of Ireland vestry records, wills calendars and land records. The latter records were examined to identify family land occupancy and ownership, which can highlight any relevant landlord-tenant relations between those in positions of political influence or leadership. Starting with Griffith's Valuation, carried out in County Dublin in 1847-48, the

cancelled and revision books of the Valuation Office were examined to identify occupants at five to ten year intervals through to 1948. These records list the locations, acreage, valuation, occupier, and owner in every townland and can be used to track changes in all these variables. They are particularly useful for identifying the changes in occupancy or ownership, and individual tenancy relationships among the politically active. In the absence of access to Irish Land Commission records after 1922, these records are a good substitute. However, the records are only available for consultation on databases at the Valuation Office, designed for single record genealogical and land registration consultation, so an extensive hand transcription was needed to produce a survey record of all the relevant Fingal landholdings.

House of Commons parliamentary reports relating to the Land Commission dealings on fair rent determinations and advances under the land purchase acts up to 1921 illuminate not only the effects of land reform legislation but more importantly in the context of this thesis, who were the main beneficiaries and participants. Trade directories were used to locate individuals, occupations, and office holders.

Recently released Irish military archives include the extensive Bureau of Military History Witness Statements and the Military Service Pensions Collection, and I.R.A. brigade activity reports. Caution needs to be taken with such records to avoid bias and errors of memory, as accounts were taken many years after the events described. There may also be issues relating to objectivity and reliability, but they are nonetheless valuable archives, and the only extant records of this nature. British archives critical to both the period prior to and during the revolutionary period include those of the Colonial Office in Dublin Castle (police surveillance and intelligence and R.I.C. Inspector General confidential reports), the War Office (Army of Ireland activities) and the Home Office (prison records of detainees in Britain). Anomalies and omissions in the online and microfilm versions of the British records were addressed by consulting original manuscript versions at the National Archives at Kew, London.

Organisation of chapters

The challenge of a purely chronological approach is that it risks losing the key narrative in the details of everyday events and competing issues. Hence, this thesis adopts both a chronological and thematic approach.

The first four chapters relate to the late Victorian and Edwardian periods of British and Irish politics, with the institutions and contexts of local politics shaped by the morality, standards, and practices of that period. The converging issues of land and nationalism that dominated political discourse and activity portend the declining influence of the landed class. The assumption of local power and influence by the constitutional nationalist elite, the appearance of an alternative nationalism in the cultural revival movement, the rise of Sinn Féin and a revitalised I.R.B. all characterised this period. How all of these influenced the local society and polity in Fingal is examined in detail. The remaining chapters deal with the transformation in Fingal politics brought about by the Great War and the revolutionary struggle of 1916-23. The final two chapters cover the evolution of local Fingal politics in independent Ireland to 1948. Dominated by a small number of influential individuals like Patrick Belton and P.J. Fogarty, the structures changed from sectoral to party political alignments in a period when local power was increasingly curtailed by national government, to the point of suspension and replacement in 1941.

The socio-economic, political, and demographic background in north County Dublin in the early 1870s is described in the first chapter. Political life was largely a product of the relationships between the landed elite, tenant farmers, and labouring classes, underpinned by inherited privilege, wealth, and religious identity. Disestablishment and land and franchise reforms presented a challenge to the existing local wealth and political elites. Competing identities found themselves at a crossroads in their relationships with each other and with their confidence in the British state to represent, grant, deny or protect their rights and interests.

The second chapter examines how the issues of land and nationalism sustained each other through the mobilisation and merging of both, from the start of the Land War in 1879 through the struggles for Home Rule to 1914. The rise and fall of Parnellism, the divisions in nationalism and the reunification of the Irish Parliamentary Party under Redmond, is mirrored by the response of the landlord class, and their transition from Conservative to Unionist. The land reforms of the first decade of the twentieth century brought about a revolutionary transfer in land ownership, but unresolved questions regarding untenanted lands and the plight of the landless remained in Fingal, as elsewhere, in the decades after the passing of the Wyndham Land Act in 1903. The

1913 lockout in Fingal was very much associated with the unresolved land issues. It exposed underlying class tensions and divisions in the nationalist polity.

Chapter three will deal with local government and local politics in north Dublin from the 1870s to 1914. Reforms in franchise and representation led to a shift in local power. Yet, in Fingal, on Balrothery poor law board of guardians, landlord and large tenant farming interests often combined for common political cause. The impact of the Local Government (Ireland) Act in 1898 and its consequences for local administration are examined; this act completed the transfer of local power from one elite to another, and provided a vehicle for further nationalist progress.³¹ Progressive and reforming government legislation and an embracing of the institutions of local government, particularly Dublin County Council, led to a confident cohort of local politicians and administrators who saw themselves as the new governing elite. When Home Rule was passed, they expected to be part of the new legislature.

The fourth chapter will examine the rise of new and alternative forms of nationalism from the 1880s to 1914 and the influence of its cultural and political movements in providing an alternative to mainstream constitutional politics. Irish cultural nationalism came to define the nation as Gaelic, nationalist and Catholic, a perceived national identity that became politicised and exploited by the revolutionary generation. Fingal was at the forefront of these movements with G.A.A. clubs there from 1884, the Gaelic League from 1899 and a Sinn Féin presence from 1906 with Frank Lawless.

The fifth chapter will look at the period of the First World War, the 1916 Easter Rising, and the rise of Sinn Féin from 1917 to 1918. The Fingal Battalion fought the only successful engagement of Easter week while the local political elite continued to support the war effort. Thomas Ashe, commandant of the Fingal Battalion in 1916 and appointed president of the supreme council of the I.R.B. in June 1917, died on hunger strike in September.³² Sinn Féin in Fingal lost much of its leadership to arrests during the conscription crisis and the German Plot in 1918 before Frank Lawless was elected M.P. at the 1918 general election.

³¹ Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898 (61 & 62 Vic., c. 37).

³² Woods, C.J. & Murphy, William, 'Ashe, Thomas (Tomás Ághas)', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

The sixth chapter will explore the period of the War of Independence in Fingal and the crucial role played by local government in legitimising and enabling the revolution and transfer of power in 1922. The success in the 1920 local elections was quickly tempered by the reality of declaring allegiance to the new republic, as the councils became part of the front line in the struggle. The challenging relationship of the local government bodies in north Dublin with the Dáil department of local government will be examined.

Chapter seven focuses on the period of the Cosgrave government of Cumann na nGaedheal from 1922 to 1932. The building and maintenance of a functioning democratic independent state took priority, and the government proceeded to reform the structures of local government, taking greater power and control to the centre, to the resentment of local councillors in Fingal. The lack of local Dáil representation was acutely felt in Fingal in this period amid the challenges presented to the area in the aftermath of war and upheaval. Local government politics in this decade reflected the economic and social difficulties and disappointments that followed independence. Agrarian issues came to prominence once again both within and without the local government chambers.

The final chapter looks at the evolution of Fingal politics in the sixteen years of Fianna Fáil rule under Eamon de Valera from 1932 to 1948. The election of Fianna Fáil to national government and the subsequent election of its party councillors to Dublin County Council ensured that local government divided on a party-political basis and reflected that of Dáil Éireann, led by strong political personalities who dominated the council. Extra parliamentary movements such as the Blueshirts, the I.R.A. and support organisations related to the war in Spain presented challenges to the political establishment, and were embraced by some in Fingal. It will examine the difficult relationship between central and local government as both sought to control the institutions of local administration, and which saw the dissolution of Dublin County Council for seven years from 1941.

Chapter 1

Elites and identities: Fingal in the 1870s

Understanding the social and economic environment in 1870 is crucial to understanding the issues, alliances, and motivations that dominated local political life in Fingal in the decades either side of independence. Local politics in Fingal in 1870 was characterised by the relationships between the landed class, tenant farmers, and the labouring classes, underpinned by inherited privilege, wealth, and religious identity, and manifest in the composition of local governing structures. The Protestant aristocracy and gentry were firmly in control of land ownership, local government, and parliamentary politics, but this was about to be challenged. W. E. Vaughan described 1869-70 as ‘one of those short periods when Ireland played an apparently important part in British politics’.¹

R.V. Comerford has described the years from 1850 to 1870 as both ‘post-famine and mid-Victorian’ when the country recovered from the ravages and memory of the Famine and experienced economic expansion and the benefits of the growth in communications.² Emigration numbers had levelled off, the size of agricultural holdings increased because of the consolidation of vacated and evicted lands, and farming methods improved, bringing modest increases in personal wealth and consumption. The development of railways, newspapers, libraries and postal and telegraph services facilitated the spread not only of goods and services but also of people and ideas. The Dublin-Belfast railway line that connects the Fingal towns of Portmarnock, Malahide, Skerries and Balbriggan opened in 1844. The *Drogheda Argus* (1835) and the *Drogheda Conservative* (1837) newspapers, established before the Great Famine, were joined by the *Drogheda Independent* nationalist newspaper in 1884. All carried a dedicated section on north County Dublin news. This chapter will outline the extent of this progress in Fingal. In this context, it is also necessary to identify the political elite who exercised local power and influence.

¹ W. E. Vaughan, ‘Ireland c.1870’, in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland v: Ireland under the union I, 1801-1870* (Oxford, 1989), p. 726.

² R.V. Comerford, ‘Ireland 1850-70: Post-famine and mid-Victorian’, in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland v: Ireland under the union I, 1801-1870* (Oxford, 1989), pp 372-95.

When Gladstone became prime minister in December 1868, he set himself the political objective of bringing Ireland closer to partnership in the United Kingdom by removing what he believed were the obstacles to that partnership. If he could remove the grievances caused by religion, political representation, and the land question, he believed that further integration in the Union was possible. Alvin Jackson has described the evolving coalition of Irish constitutionalists, militants and British Liberals, which was simultaneously drawing Fenianism closer to the constitutionalists and those constitutionalists closer to Westminster politics.³ Comerford contends that Gladstone's 'justice for Ireland' was offered 'initially and primarily in order to win seats in Ireland'.⁴ After the Fenian threat, and the shock to Protestant ascendancy confidence and security caused by the legislative measures of disestablishment and land reform in 1869 and 1870, the resurgence of an organised Catholic Church, improved economic conditions, and the benefits of modernisation brought about an apparent contentment and complacency that concealed the underlying political issues that were emerging.⁵ *The Times* review of the year 1874, reprinted in the *Drogheda Conservative*, reflected this improving environment in Ireland. Its expectations for the future endorsed a conservative worldview held by many of its readers, attributing the 'peace and comparative prosperity' to Ireland's position as part of the United Kingdom.⁶ Local newspapers and syndication of news articles in particular allowed local societies like Fingal to connect with the issues of the wider national and international world

Socio-economic background

Fingal is the area of north County Dublin beyond the northern limits of the city, comprising the baronies of Balrothery East and West to the north, Nethercross around the towns of Swords and Donabate in the middle, and Castleknock and Coolock to the south. It is c.126,000 statute acres in size, and according to the 1871 census had a population of almost 48,000 people. Aside from the coastal area, with its small fishing fleets, the economy was almost exclusively agricultural. Fingal had

³ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: war peace and beyond* (2nd ed., Oxford, 2010), pp 104-5.

⁴ R.V. Comerford, *The Fenians in Context: Irish Politics and Society, 1848-1882* (Dublin, 1985), p. 152-3.

⁵ *Irish Church Act*, 1869, 32 & 33 Vict. c. 42; *Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Act*, 1870, 33 & 34 Vict. c.46. The latter will be dealt with in detail in the second chapter.

⁶ *Drogheda Conservative*, 9 Jan. 1875.

1,603 farmers who worked 4,515 holdings, as many held more than one in order to have a viable farm. Just over two thirds (68%) of all holdings were under twenty acres in size, typical modest family farm units and the standard farm size later considered viable by the Land Commission. Over half of all holdings (57%) numbering 2,609 were under ten acres in size. With an average of 2.8 holdings per farmer across the region, and as high as 3.7 in the tillage area of south Fingal, the reality was that some farmers were working appreciable farming enterprises. There were 700 holdings (15%) between thirty and one hundred acres in size; these were stronger farmers, engaged in mixed land use, typically grain crops and some grazing, but significantly lower than nationally, where a quarter of all holdings were in this category.⁷ The average size of tillage holdings was around twenty acres. The farms devoted to livestock were, on average, double that size at forty acres.

Farmers employed over 5,000 agricultural labourers as well as an estimated 4,600 family members.⁸ Balbriggan, with a hosiery industry and a busy port, and Skerries, a fishing village with a quarry were the main population centres, with over 2,000 inhabitants each. Balbriggan was large enough to have its own town commissioners since 1854.⁹ There were two small brickworks in Balbriggan and Portmarnock.¹⁰ Malahide, served by the railway since 1844, had developed into a seaside town and a favoured residence for Dublin businessmen and civil servants. In the far south, the growth of the city and its suburbs created the township of Clontarf in 1869 and later that of the combined township of Drumcondra, Clonliffe, and Glasnevin (1878) with over 11,000 residents between them.

⁷ C.S.O., *Life in Ireland, 1916 – Stories from statistics: Agriculture* (Dublin, 2016), p. 6.

⁸ *Census of Ireland 1871: Part I., area, population and number of houses; occupations, religion and education, volume I. province of Leinster*, H.C. 1872 [c.662] lxvii.1; *Agricultural statistics for the year 1870*, H.C. 1871 [c.643] lxiii.299. Collection of statistics at this time was changing from boundaries based on baronies to those of poor law unions so both were used hence data may vary slightly based on method used and aggregates used in some cases. Annual agricultural statistics were still using barony delineation while census was using poor law unions.

⁹ *Towns improvement (Ireland) Act 1854*, (17 & 18 Vict. c.103).

¹⁰ Susan Roundtree, 'Dublin bricks & brickmakers' in *Dublin Historical Record*, lx, 1 (2007), pp. 61-70.



Map No. 1: Map of north County Dublin, c.1900.¹¹

The decline in tillage and the move to pasture in the two decades after the Famine was not as pronounced in Dublin as in the rest of the country. The area under crops in County Dublin decreased by twelve per cent between 1851 and 1871, compared to

¹¹ Source: <http://www.libraryireland.com/Atlas/Dublin-Map.php> accessed 23 Jan. 2022.

just under twenty percent nationally.¹² Just over a quarter of the farming land in Fingal was devoted to growing crops and market gardening, some 33,000 acres, mainly in the southern and eastern regions, supplying the raw materials for the capital's brewing, distilling and milling industries, food for the city's inhabitants, and some exports to Britain. Twenty-one per cent of all Fingal land was set as meadow and clover, harvested to supply local and city hay and fodder markets.¹³ Fingal thus had a considerable seasonal agricultural labour demand. Agricultural labourers' wages in Dublin were higher than in neighbouring counties. Local poor law inspector, Henry Robinson reported them as high as ten shillings per week, compared to an average of just over six shillings per week in adjoining counties, and higher again in the busy spring sowing and autumn harvest periods. Labourers also had access to cottages, plots of land or farm produce, so Dublin labourers, if the harvest was good, were usually content.¹⁴

While prices for grain crops had fallen in the mid-1860s they had recovered by 1871, and there was security in supply contracts with large customers in the city like Guinness's brewery, Jameson's and Power's distilleries and Boland's mills. Prices for green crops and hay had improved in the years to 1870, with increased demand from a growing city and a vibrant livestock trade.¹⁵ The average land valuation at £1 14s per acre was higher than in Leinster as a whole (18s) or nationally (12s). The same was also true of crop yields per acre, a firm indicator of more productive land for farming.¹⁶

The northernmost part of the county was largely grassland (53% grass and 21% meadow) used for cattle grazing, fattening animals for the export trade to Britain, and

¹² Central Statistics Office, *Farming since the Famine: Irish farm statistics 1847-1996* (Dublin, 1997), Tables 1 & 7; Michael Turner, *After the famine: Irish agriculture, 1850-1914* (Cambridge, 1996), pp 15-47.

¹³ Agricultural statistics at the time counted meadow and clover for harvesting as crops. Later statistics included them with pasture for grazing.

¹⁴ Report by poor law inspector Henry Robinson, 6 Jan. 1870, in *Reports from Poor Law inspectors on the wages of agricultural labourers in Ireland*, H.C. 1870 [c.35] XIV.1. Robinson later became vice president of the Local Government Board in 1879, was knighted in 1886 and his son, also Sir Henry Robinson was appointed to the same position as head of the L.G.B. in 1898; see Brendan O'Donoghue, *Activities wise and otherwise: The career of Sir Henry Augustus Robinson, 1898-1922* (Sallins, 2015).

¹⁵ *Land acts (Ireland) report of the royal commission on the land law (Ireland) act, 1881, and the purchase of land (Ireland) act, 1885 vol. ii minutes of evidence and appendices*, H.C. 1887 C.4969 liv.1, pp 953-67.

¹⁶ *Agricultural statistics for the year 1870*, H.C. 1871 [c.643] lxiii.299.

sheep farming. Cattle exports to Britain had more than doubled since 1850, while livestock and produce prices grew by double the rate of rent increases. North Fingal's proximity to the ports of Dublin and Drogheda made livestock farming particularly attractive.¹⁷ The *Drogheda Conservative* reported in 1872, that 'never has the cattle trade and the interests of livestock holders in Ireland been in so flourishing a state', and cited as evidence the 484,000 cattle exported to Britain in 1871. Export demand was often so strong that English buyers came directly to the Dublin cattle market to source animals.¹⁸

There were twenty-five landlords in the Fingal area with estates of greater than 500 acres, who owned an aggregated 56,792 acres in the county, and a further 139,134 acres elsewhere in Ireland or in Britain.¹⁹ Many larger landholders moved into livestock farming as it became more profitable. Only seven per cent, 322 in number, of all the holdings in Fingal were greater than one hundred acres in size, a typical threshold for grazier-size holdings (lands farmed by large farmers for the raising of livestock only).²⁰ The north of the county had 268 cattle per thousand acres, comparable to that of the leading cattle grazing county, Meath, at 271 per acre.²¹ A meeting of the Irish Cattle Trade Defence Association in Dublin, in April 1876, included prominent Fingal graziers, all of whom were justices of the peace (J.P.s) and active poor law guardians. Catholic graziers William Bowden and John P. Byrne attended with Protestant landlord and farmer, Hans Hamilton Woods, and grazier Alexander Sharpe Deane. Woods was vice-chairman of the committee dealing with regulations pertaining to cattle diseases such as pleuro-pneumonia, and foot and mouth, then on the increase. They called for uniform veterinary regulations in Britain and Ireland, similar compensation rates for slaughtered animals, and expressed

¹⁷ Liam Kennedy & Peter Solar, *Irish agriculture: A Price history* (Dublin, 2007), pp 168-83. Rents increased by 20-30% from 1850 to 1880, and beef prices by 63%, mutton by 59% and three year old cattle by 49% from 1850 to 1875. See also Barbara Lewis Solow, *The land question and the Irish economy, 1870-1903* (Cambridge, Mass, 1971) for economic analysis of rent and produce prices.

¹⁸ *Drogheda Conservative*, 29 Jun 1872.

¹⁹ *Return of owners of land of one acre and upwards in counties, cities and towns in Ireland*, H.C. 1876, [C.1492] lxxx.61.

²⁰ This figure of 322 includes all holdings greater than 100 acres including demesne estates.

²¹ *Census of Ireland 1871: Part I, area, population and number of houses; occupations, religion and education, volume I. province of Leinster*, H.C. 1872 [c.662] lxvii.1; *Agricultural statistics for the year 1870*, H.C. 1871 [c.643] lxiii.299. Price trends taken from the evidence of Thomas Grimshaw, to the Cowper commission, *Land acts (Ireland) report of the royal commission on the land law (Ireland) act, 1881, and the purchase of land (Ireland) act, 1885, vol. ii, minutes of evidence and appendices*, H.C. 1887 C.4969 liv.1, pp 953-67.

concerns about restrictive inspection processes regarding the export of cattle from Ireland at both the point of embarkation on arrival in Britain.²² The grazier community, benefitting from increased profitability and resources, with less labour and management commitments, was becoming more prosperous, socially important and, by extension, vociferous and dominant in both trade and political arenas. They had common economic objectives, which cut across political, religious, and social differences.

W.E Vaughan identified several variables that indicated the health of farming in County Dublin. The county had the least number of evictions outside of Ulster in the period from 1849 to 1878, the third highest average size of tenant holding after Meath and Kildare, and the greatest increase in livestock numbers between 1855 and 1874. In housing terms, it was ranked third highest in proportion of second-class housing, and among the lowest in fourth-class housing.²³ Fingal, if the harvest was good, was more prosperous and settled than very many other parts of Ireland, with the added benefits of ready and accessible markets in Dublin and Britain.

Land ownership and tenure

Just over half of the landlords in County Dublin were permanently resident (53%), compared to thirty-nine per cent in Leinster and forty-one per cent nationally.²⁴ At the top of the hierarchy of land ownership in Fingal were twenty-six landlords with holdings of more than 500 acres, who owned a total of 56,792 acres in the county. Only eleven of these had any active involvement in local political life. All but three of these were Protestant landlords who controlled both the landed economy and local

²² *Freeman's Journal*, 21 Apr 1876; Valuation Office revision books, barony of Balrothery West: Ballyboghal parish, (Valuation Office, book 2, 1868-80); Westpalstown parish, (Valuation Office, book 6, 1868-80); Valuation Office revision books, Swords parish, (Valuation Office, book 4, 1870-75); *1876 Return of owners of land of one acre and upwards in counties, cities and towns in Ireland, HC 1876 [C.1492] LXXX.61*. Deane leased 371 acres at Ballyboghal; Byrne, a cattle dealer and grazier leased over 300 acres nearby at Westpalstown, eighty-five of those from Hans Hamilton Woods. Bowden worked 370 acres at Swords, 155 of which he owned, while Woods had recently inherited 8,078 acres in Dublin and Meath. Byrne and Bowden were vice-chairman and deputy vice-chairman of Balrothery guardians in 1868, while Deane and Woods were members of the County Dublin grand jury.

²³ William Edward Vaughan, 'A study of landlord and tenant relations in Ireland between the Famine and the Land War 1850-78', (PhD thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 1973) p. 166. Second class housing was a good farmhouse with five to nine rooms and fourth class was a single room cabin.

²⁴ *Return of number of landed proprietors in each county and province in Ireland, 1870*, H.C. 1870 [167] xlvii.775.

governing bodies.²⁵ The landed estates they owned were, according to Vaughan, ‘the great centres of social, economic, and political power, providing employment, capital for improvements and political patronage’.²⁶ Charles Cobbe, D.L., who lived on his 483 acres demesne at Newbridge House, Donabate, was a typical example of an active landlord with multiple holdings scattered across several counties. His total landholding of 11,367 acres with a valuation of £4,635 included c. 1,500 acres in County Louth, 507 acres at Killossory in north Dublin, 1,966 acres in Donabate and 6,854 acres at Tallaght in south Dublin, almost a third of which was mountain.²⁷

Of these landlords, the twenty-three largest ratepayers were entitled to sit on the local poor law board of guardians, appointed as ex-officio members, alongside the same number of elected members. This class dominated the local social elite and the political life of Fingal in 1870.²⁸ Campbell described this class as a ‘closed elite group’. However, in Fingal, the common economic, business and sporting interests of landlords, extensive farmers, graziers and businessmen helped break down some of these barriers, where the bonds of class and status were often more important than the differences of religious profession.²⁹ Using the revision books of the Valuation Office, a survey of those who were politically active in Fingal provides a useful freeze-frame introduction to this group. Anthony Strong Hussey was a Catholic landowner with 4,100 acres in County Meath adjoining his 600-acre demesne at Westown, Naul, on the Dublin-Meath border. Landlords often leased to and from each other, for both farming and land speculation, such as Matthew Corbally at Rathbeale Hall who owned 261 acres and leased a further 598 acres on the McDonnell and Bolton Massy estates near Swords. George Woods, a significant landlord himself, leased his demesne and residence at Milverton, near Skerries from

²⁵ *Agricultural statistics for the year 1870*, H.C. 1871 [c.643] lxiii.299; *Return of owners of land of one acre and upwards in counties, cities and towns in Ireland*, H.C. 1876 [C.1492] lxxx.61. The three Catholic landlords were baron Gormanston, with 1,327 acres in Dublin and 9,468 in Meath; Patrick Bobbett with 521 acres at Hansfield near Blanchardstown, and Anthony Strong Hussey with 4,700 acres at Naul, straddling the Dublin-Meath border.

²⁶ W. E. Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in mid-Victorian Ireland*, (Oxford, 1994), p. 104.

²⁷ Valuation Office revision books, Donabate parish, (Valuation Office, book 2, 1868-80); parish, (Valuation Office, book 6, 1868-80); Valuation Office revision books, Killossory parish, (Valuation Office, book 4, 1871-84), Valuation Office revision books, Tallaght parish, (Valuation Office); *Return of owners of land of one acre and upwards in counties, cities and towns in Ireland*, H.C. 1876 [C.1492] lxxx.61.

²⁸ Terence Dooley, *The decline of the big house in Ireland: A study of Irish landed families, 1860-1960* (Dublin, 2001), p. 28. Ex-officio guardians were appointees, rather than elected, in descending order of level of rates paid.

²⁹ Fergus Campbell, *The Irish establishment 1870-1914* (Oxford, 2009), p. 20.

his relative Ion Trant Hamilton. The Aungier family of graziers and cattle dealers owned 1,425 acres west of Swords and leased an additional 555 acres from the absentee estates of Bolton Massy and Eyre Coote. The extended Cuffe family leased over 500 acres for grazing in multiple holdings in the Swords area, and worked closely with their relation, Laurence Cuffe, who was a cattle dealer in the city. Grazier Andrew Macken held tenancies for 499 acres at Naul, while his neighbour Patrick Ennis owned 182 acres and leased a further 128 acres. His brother, James Macken leased 288 acres on a long-term lease nearby. Andrew Kettle, a barley supplier to Guinness, managed Robert Russell Cruise's 175-acre estate at Drinan, Swords, during the latter's extended residence in France. He invested in his own tenant holdings at Artane, Coolock and Malahide. His political and business associate, Maurice Butterly, an intensive market gardener, leased 114 acres at Corduff, Blanchardstown. Townsmen also took advantage of the potential in farming. The Cumiskey brothers, coal and builders' merchants in Balbriggan, leased 192 acres from the earl of Howth and 159 acres from the marquess of Lansdowne. Their competitors, Joseph Hamlet and his son Thomas William, coal merchants in Balbriggan, leased 168 acres of farmland from Lansdowne. All these individuals were active political allies or adversaries while at the same time business competitors or associates, indicating the proximal nature and interdependence of the local connections.

Religion and Politics

Rural north County Dublin was 81 per cent Catholic, higher than the city of Dublin (79%), but lower than the province of Leinster (85%).³⁰ D.G. Boyce described the centrality of religion as 'the means by which people identified themselves and distinguished themselves from each other'.³¹ It was, however, only when religion became politicised that it became a potent point of division. The disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869 was regarded as a challenge to the identity and way of life for the Protestant ascendancy in Fingal.³² Two of the most senior Conservative

³⁰ *Census of Ireland, 1871: Abstract of enumerators' returns*, H.C. 1871 c.375 lcx.801.

³¹ D. George Boyce, *Nineteenth century Ireland: the search for stability* (Dublin, 1990), p. 334.

³² Protestant or Anglo-Irish ascendancy was term first used around 1872 to describe the Protestant landowning class that dominated social, political, cultural and economic life in Ireland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See Alvin Jackson, 'Anglo-Irish ascendancy (Protestant ascendancy)', in Robert Crowcroft and John Cannon (eds.), *The Oxford companion to British history* (Oxford, 2015), online at <https://www-oxfordreference->

politicians in mid nineteenth Ireland lived in Fingal, and their careers and influence are worth noting in examining the intersection of religion and politics.

George Alexander Hamilton was a senior and respected representative of that class who found himself at a crossroads in a changing Ireland. Hamilton was the grandson of George Hamilton, baron of the exchequer, who had developed the local hosiery industry, the harbour, and much of the town of Balbriggan in the eighteenth century. George Alexander had a long political career where he was closely associated with causes in the Protestant interest, the Orange movement, and the defence of ascendancy power and position.³³ His politics and experiences can help us to understand some of the fears and priorities that informed the ascendancy's politics in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In 1870, Gladstone appointed him as a commissioner of Church Temporalities, and he accepted the position against the wishes of many fellow members of the Church of Ireland, who remained steadfast in their opposition to disestablishment.³⁴ In 1868, in advance of the threat of disestablishment, the London-based National Protestant Union reprinted a speech he had made at the National Club in 1848 when he was M.P. for Dublin University, in which he stated his belief that the problems in Ireland persisted because Ireland was not governed on the same principles as England. Its laws and administration were compromised so as 'to encourage the disloyal and the disaffected, and discourage the loyal, the peaceable, and the industrious', which he attributed to the [foreign] interference of the Roman Catholic Church. He held the belief that government and faith, if not politics and religion, were mutually entwined, a belief widely shared by members of his class and faith, and which tended to influence their relationships with their Catholic neighbours.³⁵ It captured the dilemma for that class, caught between English and Irish societies and cultures, partly embedded in, partly excluded by both, and increasingly defensive.

com.jproxy.nuim.ie/view/10.1093/acref/9780199677832.001.0001/acref-9780199677832-e-143?rskey=wTYkP2&result=2 accessed 10 June 2021.

³³ Patrick M. Geoghegan, 'Hamilton, George Alexander', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

³⁴ *Drogheda Conservative*, 23 Sept. 1871. The Church Temporalities Commission was set up to administer the transfer of church properties following disestablishment.

³⁵ National Protestant Union, *The clergy of the Church in Ireland weighed in the balance, and the true cause of the condition of Ireland explained*, by George Alexander Hamilton, (London, 1868).

Involved in the formation of the Conservative Society in 1832, Hamilton played a central role in the adaptation of Irish Toryism through what Jackson called the creation of a Conservative electoral organisation and the harnessing of a Protestant political consciousness.³⁶ He lost two election campaigns to Daniel O’Connell in the Dublin City constituency in 1835 and 1837, but was later elected M.P. for Dublin University in 1843. He held the seat until 1859 when appointed assistant secretary to the treasury in Lord Derby’s government, later promoted to chief secretary to the treasury in 1867. He became a privy councillor in 1869. He succeeded to family estates in Co. Down as well as his father’s estate at Hampton Hall, Balbriggan. The tenants on the Hampton estate, which included the town of Balbriggan, showed their support in 1866, when 519 of them signed a petition to Hamilton, declaring their loyalty to him, the crown, and their opposition to the Fenian threat. This was a considerable majority as Griffith’s Valuation shows that he had about 640 tenants in the area.³⁷ Hamilton expressed his pride in both his tenantry and neighbours, when he conveyed this news in a letter to the lord lieutenant.³⁸ His death prompted an obituary praising his political career, noting his attention to detail, but there were other aspects of his legacy.³⁹ Hamilton was a dedicated antiquarian, and used his position at the treasury to purchase the Tara Brooch and much of George Petrie’s private collection of artefacts, to be held in trust for the Irish people. Correspondence showed his political nous by allowing the lord lieutenant, the duke of Abercorn, take the credit in making the announcement.⁴⁰

³⁶ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: War, peace and beyond* (2nd ed., Chichester, 2010) pp 59-60; Leslie Stephen & Sidney Lee (eds.), *Dictionary of national biography*, vol. xxiv (London, 1890) & G. Boase & D. Miller, ‘Hamilton, George Alexander (1802–1871), politician’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://www-oxforddnb-com.jproxy.nuim.ie/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-12071> accessed 21 Mar. 2021. Obituary in *Drogheda Conservative*, 23 Sept. 1871.

³⁷ *Freemans Journal*, 10 Apr. 1866; Griffith’s valuation, Barony of Balrothery East, (Dublin, 1848), online at <https://www.findmypast.ie/search/results?o=parish&d=asc&datasetname=griffith%27s%20valuation%201847-1864&place=balrothery%2c%20east>, accessed 21 Mar. 2021.

³⁸ G.A. Hamilton to Lord Wodehouse, Apr. 1866, Letters Books of George Alexander Hamilton, 31 Aug. 1865 – 25 Feb. 1868, (T.N.A., Treasury papers of Sir George Hamilton and Sir Edward Hamilton, T 168/3).

³⁹ *Kerry Evening Post*, 20 Sept. 1871.

⁴⁰ G.A. Hamilton to Lord Dunraven, 12 Oct. 1867, Letters Books of George Alexander Hamilton, 31 Aug. 1865 – 25 Feb. 1868; G.A. Hamilton to marquis of Abercorn, 5 Mar. 1868, Letters Books of George Alexander Hamilton, 5 Mar. 1868 – 2 Feb. 1870, (T.N.A., Treasury papers of Sir George Hamilton and Sir Edward Hamilton, T168/3-4). These form the basis of much of the antiquities collections of the National Museum of Ireland.

Hamilton's nearest neighbour at Hampton Hall was Thomas Edward Taylor of Ardgillan, M.P. for County Dublin and chief whip of the Conservative party, Thus, Balbriggan was home to two of the most senior figures in the development and organisation of the Conservative party. Taylor attended the inaugural meeting of the Central Protestant Defence Association in 1868, founded for 'the purpose of taking such steps as may be necessary for the defence of the Protestant institutions of the old country' against disestablishment.⁴¹ The other County Dublin M.P., Ion Trant Hamilton, was secretary of the organisation.⁴² Disestablishment was not merely an issue of religion. For the Protestant ascendancy it was a betrayal, a compromise of the principles upon which the union was founded in 1800. The uncoupling of their church from the state also meant breaching the bond with the Church of England, and by extension the crown and the Act of Union. The divestment of church property, amid growing calls for tenants' rights and land reform, heightened the perceived threat to the prosperity and influence of the landed elite whose religion was central to their identity, ethos, politics, and privilege, who valued birthright, law and order, and property rights, as fundamental tenets of that faith and prosperity. Religion and political identity were entwined to the extent that church bodies from the Representative Church Body down through the synod and vestries provided the networks for support and organisation that could ensure the survival and progression of both. The elections of church wardens, vestrymen, synodsmen, and parochial nominators of the various Fingal Church of Ireland parishes illuminates the depth and extent of this network of contact and influence, and the prominent positions held by those key political and socio-economic personalities. These networks of church and politics overlapped with ties of family, business, and society. Edward Taylor and Ion Trant Hamilton, father and son Hans and Edward Hamilton Woods, and Henry Alexander Hamilton, J.P. were related and served together on the Holmpatrick parish select vestry.⁴³ They were all members of the County Dublin Conservative Registration Society in 1871. So were Charles Cobbe, a vestryman at Swords parish and Henry Baker who was also secretary of the grand jury and vice-chairman of Balrothery board of guardians.⁴⁴ George and Henry A. Hamilton were second

⁴¹ *Freemans Journal*, 1 Feb. 1868.

⁴² *Pall Mall Gazette*, 26 Dec. 1867.

⁴³ *Irish Times*, 19 Apr. 1873, 15 Apr 1879 & 27 April 1886.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 3 Nov. 1871; Swords vestry minutes, 14 June 1870, (R.C.B. Library, Swords vestry minute books, 1870-1917).

cousins, and Henry was land agent to both the Holmpatrick estate of Ion Trant Hamilton and the Rush estate of Sir Roger Palmer. Land agents were not just at the heart of landlord-tenant relations, they played a key role at elections and in the political arena, with their extensive knowledge of localities and voters. In 1871, Henry A. Hamilton was in the same Dublin Lodge of Freemasons as Balrothery poor law guardian, Alexander Sharpe Deane, and was honorary secretary of the Dublin Diocesan Synod.⁴⁵

The landed vestrymen of Balrothery and Balbriggan parishes served alongside local businessmen William Whyte, owner of Smyth's Hosiery factory in Balbriggan, coal merchant Joseph Hamlet, and George Blackburne of Balbriggan Town Commissioners.⁴⁶ In the aftermath of disestablishment, there was a coming together of different Protestant denominations in common cause on matters of faith and politics. Henry A. Hamilton sought to remove ecclesiastical prohibitions on attendance at services of other Protestant denominations.⁴⁷ The same personalities who dominated the Church of Ireland vestries of Holmpatrick and Balbriggan in 1870 were still present in 1880, now joined by the younger generation, such as Warren St Leger Woods, brother of Edward. Thomas William Hamlet in Balbriggan joined his father on the vestry. The connections of family, business and faith outlined here highlight the nature and extent of the Protestant and Conservative networks in Fingal, from which their local political influence was drawn. In addition to their wealth, these connections inculcated a confidence and sense of superiority that became evident in the records and workings of local government bodies, as will be evidenced in the coming chapters.

By comparison, the smaller active Catholic nationalist political class in Fingal in 1870 lacked the same levels or density of formal association or high-level influential connections. However, as indicted at the outset, this was changing in 1870. As we shall see with Andrew Kettle, his religious faith underpinned his politics, and his

⁴⁵ The Grand Lodge of Freemasons of Ireland Membership Registers; vol. i, 1860-99, online at https://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=60904&h=34015&tid=&pid=&queryId=4de6f30ec6268ac185c4d446a7278464&usePUB=true&_phsrc=Vso519&_phstart=successSource, accessed 5 Nov. 2020. *Report of the proceedings of the Dublin Diocesan Synod at its second session, 1871, prepared for presentation to the General Synod by Rev. Joseph A. Galbraith and Henry Alexander Hamilton, Honorary Secretaries*, (Dublin, 1871).

⁴⁶ *Drogheda Conservative*, 11 June 1870 & 21 Oct. 1871.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 14 May 1870.

resentment of the Protestant ascendancy often came to the surface. Prominent Catholics maintained their visibility in the community by their conspicuous and public donations to various causes, especially those in support of church building, clerical memorials, and Catholic causes. In 1871, the *Freeman's Journal* recorded donations from William Bowden to the Vatican 'Peter's Pence' collection and the Deaf Institute in Cabra in Dublin, and from Andrew Kettle towards the collection in aid of the Catholic University.⁴⁸

Parliamentary representation

Two landed families dominated parliamentary representation in the two-seat Dublin County constituency. The electorate returned the Conservatives Thomas Edward Taylor from 1841 until his death in 1883, and father and son, James Hans Hamilton of Sheepmore, near Blanchardstown from 1841 to 1863 and Ion Trant Hamilton of Abbottstown, Castleknock, later Lord Holmpatrick, from 1863 to 1885.⁴⁹ The Conservative candidates' appeals in the local press to the 4,744 registered electors in the 1865 elections illustrated their sense of entitlement.⁵⁰ In his letter, Col. Taylor wrote:

I have had the honour of representing the metropolitan county for so long a series of years that I think it is not necessary that I should now enter into a detailed statement of any political opinions. The more so that I am not conscious that I have deviated from the general principles which I professed and which you approved when I was originally returned in 1841.⁵¹

Hamilton felt he was carrying on the family tradition in parliament:

I have no hesitation in offering myself as a candidate for a renewal of that trust which you so generously confided in me at the time of my father's death, and which, I feel confident no conduct of mine, during my brief

⁴⁸ *Freeman's Journal*, 21 Jan., 8 Aug. & 29 Nov. 1871.

⁴⁹ Dillon Cosgrave, *North Dublin* (Dublin, 1909), p. 31; Brian M. Walker, (ed.), *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978), pp 272-3.

⁵⁰ *Returns relative to the condition of the people in Scotland and Ireland for the years 1831 and 1864 respectively, &c.*, H.C. (116) lvii.843. The number of electors had fallen from 6,126 in 1862 to 4,894 in 1863, due to a revision of the lists. *Electors (Ireland), Return of the number of electors, according to the registers of 1862 and 1863, in every county, city, and borough in Ireland; showing also the total number of electors for the counties in Ireland, and the like total for the cities and boroughs*, H.C. 1864 (350) xlvi.235.

⁵¹ *Drogheda Conservative & Advertiser*, 8 July 1865.

political career has, in any way betrayed. My principles are those entertained by my father and upon which he invariably acted during the many years he so faithfully served you.

Describing himself as ‘a resident landed proprietor,’ he argued that his ‘intimate connection with the county would be sufficient guarantee for the interest he would always take in promoting the many subjects of local interest which affect those whom I trust I may be fortunate enough to represent in the next parliament’.⁵² He unashamedly purported to represent the interests of the Conservative voter.

The county parliamentary franchise was limited to householders whose property had a rateable valuation of £12 or more, or £5 in fee tail.⁵³ This excluded the majority of the adult male population who were Catholic and nationalist, and the inclusion of the largely Protestant townships of south Dublin in the constituency further favoured the Conservative candidates. Taylor and Hamilton were re-elected in 1865, securing over eighty per cent of the vote, defeating the Liberal candidate, Capt. Charles White of Woodlands, Luttrellstown, and a younger son of baron Annaly. He had presented a detailed appeal to voters in the *Drogheda Conservative* outlining his commitment, ‘as a conscientious Protestant, to extend civil, religious and educational equality to his fellow countrymen’, as well as undertakings regarding tenants’ rights, emigration, workers’ rights, grand jury reform, and support of the extension of the railways, harbour building, and drainage works in the county.⁵⁴ He appealed to the issues that mattered to a Catholic nationalist tenantry, hopeful that his Liberal message would overcome any impediments of class or creed.

A closer look at Taylor’s career will illustrate his political influence. Lt-Colonel Thomas Edward Taylor, 6th Dragoon Guards, who had an estate of 805 acres at Ardgillan, with an additional 9,456 acres in Louth and Meath, was the grandson of the earl of Bective. His uncle Thomas was the marquess of Headfort, who changed his surname to Taylour, adding the ‘u’, on his succession in 1800.⁵⁵ Educated at Eton

⁵² *Drogheda Conservative & Advertiser*, 8 July 1865.

⁵³ *The history of the parliamentary franchise, Research paper 13/14* (House of Commons Library, London, 2013), pp 27-8; *Reform of the Irish Franchise Act, 1850* (13 and 14 Vict. c 6).

⁵⁴ *Drogheda Conservative & Advertiser*, 12 & 22 July 1865.

⁵⁵ Rory Keane, Anne Hughes & Ronan Swan, *Ardgillan castle and the Taylor family* (Ardgillan, 1995); *Return of Owners of Land of One Acre and upwards in Counties, Cities and Towns in Ireland*, H.C. 1876 [C.1492] lxxx.61.

and Trinity College, Dublin, he was a member of the Carlton, Travellers, and Whites' clubs in London, and Sackville St and St Stephens Green clubs in Dublin.⁵⁶ Taylor had been a key part of the organisation of party structures for the Conservatives in Ireland in the 1850s and 1860s, working diligently on the revision of electors' registers, the funding of potential candidates, and liaising with Orange interests at election time.⁵⁷ Jackson underlines this achievement describing Conservatism as 'the unsung success story of mid-Victorian politics'.⁵⁸ Rewarded with the party whip in 1855, and later appointed chief whip, Taylor, whom Hoppen describes as an efficient, dedicated and hardworking politician of the second rank, worked closely with lords Eglinton as lord lieutenant and Naas as chief secretary.⁵⁹ Disraeli confided to his private secretary in a memo in 1866:

I assume that, after all our experience now of many years of Roman Catholic influences and interests in Ireland, men like Naas and Taylor, especially the former, who is a most able, sensible and enlightened man, are taking the right course, and I will not interfere with them in any way. They know my Irish policy and any observations of mine are unnecessary.⁶⁰

Taylor was close to Disraeli, who appointed him chancellor to the duchy of Lancaster in 1868, a couple of months before Gladstone took office, and again after the Conservatives returned to power in 1874. Holding a cabinet post without portfolio, he was effectively the Conservative leader on the ground in Ireland and a key advisor to the prime minister. Disraeli wrote to Queen Victoria in glowing terms, recommending Taylor's appointment, and mindful of the toll his work as a party organiser had taken:

He is a thorough gentleman, of noble family, Headfort, and runs a very good estate. As manager of the House of Commons, as Chief Whip, he has been rarely equalled, and his duties require great virtues – knowledge of mankind,

⁵⁶ John Bateman, *The great landowners of Great Britain and Ireland, 1883* (4th ed., London, 1970).

⁵⁷ Georgina Clinton & Sinead Sturgeon, 'Taylor, Thomas Edward', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.),

Dictionary of Irish biography (Cambridge, 2009).

⁵⁸ Alvin Jackson, 'Irish unionism', in D. George Boyce & Alan O'Day (eds.) *Defenders of the union: a survey of British and Irish unionism since 1801* (London, 2001) p.116.

⁵⁹ K. T. Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and society in Ireland, 1832-85* (Oxford, 1884) p. 36 & pp 293-5.

⁶⁰ Michel Pharand, Ellen L. Hawman, Mary S. Millar, Sandra den Otter and M. G. Wiebe, (eds.), *Benjamin Disraeli Letters, 1865-67: volume ix* (Toronto, 2013), Letter n4236, Disraeli to Monagu Corry, 16 Oct. 1866, pp 117-8.

extensive acquaintance with society, good temper, patience, energy, and skill. His health has broken down under the anxious labours of many disheartening years and it would be not only just but most pleasing to the whole conservative party that he should be placed now in a position of high distinction and very moderate duty.⁶¹

When the duke of Abercorn succeeded Eglinton, Taylor provided the continuity of leadership in Irish Conservative politics. K. T. Hoppen described Abercorn as the ‘head of a large Conservative tribe’, which extended into Fingal through the Hamilton and Taylor families.⁶²

Ion Trant Hamilton, the younger M.P., at forty years of age, was a deputy lieutenant of the county and magistrate. He owned 3,647 acres, valued at £6,788, at his residence at Abbotstown House, Castleknock. He also owned 3,242 acres in Queen’s County and Meath. As well as a landlord, he was a progressive livestock farmer and finishing grazier, who invested in intensive winter stall feeding, ensuring maximum returns at the spring sales, and year-round market supply.⁶³ A member of the Sackville Street Club in Dublin and the Carlton, Arthurs, and Whites clubs in London, he was a graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge. In 1873, he married Victoria Wellesley, granddaughter of the first duke of Wellington. There were two other Westminster members with residences in the Fingal area. Sir Roger Palmer, who resided intermittently at Kenure House, Rush, had extensive estates in Mayo where he served as member of parliament for that county from 1865 to 1875, but his local involvement in Dublin was minimal until January 1875, when he was appointed high sheriff.⁶⁴ James Talbot, 4th Baron Talbot of Malahide in the Irish peerage, primarily resident at Malahide Castle, was elevated to the English peerage in 1856 when created the first Baron Talbot de Malahide. Appointed lord-in-waiting to Queen Victoria in 1863 and as a whip in both the Palmerston and Russell Liberal

⁶¹ Michel Pharand, Ellen L. Hawman, Mary S. Millar, Sandra den Otter and M. G. Wiebe, (eds.), *Benjamin Disraeli Letters, 1868: volume x* (Toronto, 2014), Letter n5163, Disraeli to Queen Victoria, 11 Oct. 1868, pp 383-4.

⁶² K.T. Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and society in Ireland, 1832-85* (Oxford, 1884), p. 295.

⁶³ David Seth Jones, *Graziers, land reform and political conflict in Ireland* (Washington, 1995) p. 69.

⁶⁴ *Who was who: a companion to who's who, containing the biographies of those who died during the period 1897-1916*, (London, 1920); *Drogheda Conservative*, 23 Jan. 1875; A veteran of the Crimean war, where he took part in the charge of the light brigade, Palmer’s estates in Ireland and Britain exceeded 115,000 acres.

governments, he spoke in the House of Lords on matters of social reform, but his main interests were in archaeology and antiquarianism.⁶⁵

When the county M.P.s and aristocratic landlords took part in the proceedings of local bodies such as the board of guardians and the grand jury, it provided a physical channel of communication between the power at the centre of the British Empire and the lives of the people of north County Dublin. Meetings provided the opportunity for local engagement with senior personalities, legislation, and policy. Talbot, for example, had lobbied Gladstone during the disestablishment debate on the importance of maintaining historic church buildings. He showed how the vertical hierarchical relationship of local and national politics could operate when, in May 1870, as a member of the House of Lords and chairman of Balrothery Poor Law Guardians, he presented a petition on behalf of the North Dublin Union guardians:

praying for the establishment of a Royal residence and a national parliament in Ireland. This petition was one of importance, for it did not emanate from a set of enthusiasts or professional agitators, but from a body of gentlemen, with many of whom he was acquainted, who were of the highest respectability, including landed proprietors and commercial men, of all sections in politics, and belonging to all religions. He could not support the entire prayer of the petition, for he was opposed to the repeal of the union. Much as he disapproved some recent legislation affecting Ireland, he did not think an Irish parliament would improve the position of that country. Much, also, as he deplored the evils which absenteeism tended to produce, he did not think they could be dealt with by legislation. He concurred when the petitioners declared that it would be greatly conducive to Irish interests if Her Majesty were able to have a residence in Ireland, for her presence would assuredly confer many benefits. He did not desire to attach, undue importance to the petition; but as a straw might show which way the wind was blowing,

⁶⁵ David Murphy, 'Talbot, James 1st Baron Talbot de Malahide 4th Baron Talbot, antiquarian', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2016). Talbot was president of the Royal Archaeological Institute for twenty years from 1863.

so this expression of opinion might indicate to the Government the spirit in which their recent "message of peace" had been received in Ireland.⁶⁶

At a time when Irish issues were prominent in British politics, Talbot was aware of the interconnectedness of the issues of religion, land, and self-government as well as his belief that Irish local government was indeed a requisite part of the overall political system.

In the general election of February 1874, both Hamilton and Taylor were returned uncontested for County Dublin. In that election, the first since the passing of the 1872 Secret Ballot Act, Irish independent M.P.s became a significant but loosely formed group winning sixty seats as part of the Home Rule League led by Isaac Butt.⁶⁷ Taylor's appointment as chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster necessitated a by-election the following month and Andrew Kettle, with Cardinal Cullen's support, convinced Charles Stewart Parnell to run. The cardinal was reluctant for the clergy to become involved in politics, but Kettle made the case for their support to mobilise the electorate. Taylor ran for re-election and retained the seat by 2,183 votes to 1,235 for Parnell.⁶⁸ Following that defeat, in the summer of 1874, the County Dublin Independent and Liberal Registration Association formed to ensure the registration of all qualified electors. It identified only 4,226 voters on the register, although over 8,000 were entitled to be on it. It estimated that the majority of those not registered were Liberals and sought to address the imbalance. Andrew Kettle and Maurice Butterly were elected as treasurers.⁶⁹ Parnell won at a by-election in Meath the following year, which commenced his parliamentary career.⁷⁰ Andrew Kettle, a close confidant of Parnell, described Taylor and Hamilton, as 'the leaders of the "Dublin Six", men who had the reputation of being intolerant religious bigots and bad landlords'.⁷¹ Kettle's memoirs illustrate the depth of animosity embedded in

⁶⁶ Hansard, H.L. Debates, 02 May 1870, vol. 201 cc1-2, at <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1870/may/02/petition> accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

⁶⁷ This will be examined in detail in the next chapter.

⁶⁸ Brian M. Walker (ed.), *Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland, 1801-1922*, (Dublin, 1978), p. 120; *Drogheda Conservative*, 21 Mar. 1874. Under the terms of the 1707 Succession to the Crown Act, (6 Anne c 41), some ministerial and legal offices were required to seek re-election on taking up office.

⁶⁹ *Freeman's Journal*, 3 June 1874.

⁷⁰ L. J. Kettle (ed.) *Material for victory: being the memoirs of Andrew J. Kettle* (Dublin, 1958) p. 17.

⁷¹ *Freemans Journal*, 29 Jun 1865 & 13 Feb 1883. The term refers to the six conservative M.P.s that represented Dublin in 1850s and into 1860s, who espoused English Tory and Orange policies rather

mutually held religious and traditional attitudes. Hamilton's staunch and justifiable defence of his Protestant faith and position could give cause for such a view. He was not a great public speaker, with only twenty-two contributions in parliament over the same number of years but he made extensive use of the device of public petitions to parliament. He sponsored 1,383 such petitions in his career, of which 1,179 related to ecclesiastical matters, almost all in opposition to disestablishment.⁷² It is worth adding that Hamilton also supported thirty-five petitions in favour of extending the vote to women between 1884 and 1885. Andrew Derham, a close associate of Kettle on tenant right and land agitation, who rented several holdings from Ion Hamilton at Castleknock and Skerries, described his landlord to the royal commission of inquiry in 1880, in quite different terms to Kettle. He told the earl of Bessborough that 'there is not a more contented tenantry, nor a better paid rental than on the Hamilton property in Skerries'.⁷³ These apparent contradictions in Trant Hamilton's political positions and reputation as a landlord serve to illustrate that there are alternatives to the popular narrative regarding landlords.

Grand Jury of County Dublin

The earl of Howth, who owned 7,377 acres in County Dublin, had been lord lieutenant of the county since 1851, responsible for the control of law and order in the county. Several deputy lieutenants (D.L.) were appointed to help carry out what had become largely ceremonial duties, but they remained positions which carried considerable local prestige. The high sheriff of County Dublin was the county legal enforcement officer, and for 1869-70 was Richard Manders, J.P. of Brackenstown who lived on his 323 acres estate near Swords, and who was a mill, bakery and brewery owner.⁷⁴ The high sheriff had the important role of appointing the twenty-

than represent Dublin; L. J. Kettle, (ed.), *The material for victory: being the memoirs of Andrew J. Kettle* (Dublin, 1958), p. 17.

⁷² U.K. Parliamentary Papers, *Hansard Members Profile, Ion Hamilton*, online at <https://parlipapers-proquest-com.jproxy.nuim.ie/parlipapers/docview/t72.d77.01766?accountid=12309>, accessed 21 Mar. 2021; for further on parliamentary petitions, see Richard Huzzey, & Henry Miller, 'Petitions, parliament and political culture: petitioning the house of commons, 1780–1918', in *Past & Present*, 248, 1, (2020), pp 123–164.

⁷³ *Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners of Inquiry into the working of the Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Act, 1870, and the acts amending the same*, H.C. 1881, C.2779, C.2779-I, C.2779-II & C.2779-III, vol. xviii.1, 73, xix.1, 825.

⁷⁴ *Thom's Irish Almanac and Official Directory of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland for the Year 1868* (Dublin, 1868), p. 1738 & *Thom's ...for the Year 1870* (Dublin, 1870), p. 1210. With his brother Robert, Manders owned a bakery, brewery and flourmills at James' St and Islandbridge in Dublin city.

three members of the county grand jury from the leading landowners in the county, from candidates proposed by the jurors themselves. The grand jury of County Dublin had responsibility for the construction and maintenance of local infrastructure such as roads and bridges and the upkeep of prisons, asylums, harbours, and hospitals in the county area beyond the city boundaries, with the authority to raise finance for these local public works by means of the county cess or rates. As well as judicial responsibilities, the grand jury adjudicated on malicious injury payments. Catholics were forbidden from serving up to 1793, but even after this date the grand jury retained a predominantly Protestant membership, ethos and orientation, and a reputation for corruption and partiality.⁷⁵ The grand jury had permanent oversight and control, with county and baronial presentment sessions held to consider applications for expenditure.⁷⁶

The minutes of a meeting of the County Dublin Grand Jury on 11 January 1870 showed nineteen members in attendance, including nine from the Fingal area, all of whom were Protestant landowners, including the sitting members of parliament for the county, Taylor and Hamilton, and the largest landowner, Charles Cobbe.⁷⁷ Most had held or would hold the position of high sheriff of County Dublin. Hans Hamilton Woods, of Whitestown House, Balbriggan, was a brother-in-law of Thomas Taylor MP.⁷⁸ He was also related to Ion Trant Hamilton, as his mother Sarah was a half-sister of James Hans Hamilton, Ion Trant's father. Alexander Kirkpatrick, Coolmine House, was a barrister and land agent, and future secretary to the grand jury. The remaining members were John Hely Hutchinson, Seafield House, John Vernon of Clontarf Castle, Nathaniel Hone of St Doulaghs, Coolock (the incoming high sheriff), and Henry James MacFarlane, Huntstown House, Mulhuddart, chairman of North Dublin Union for 1870-71. The secretary was Henry Baker of Swords. All were poor law guardians of Balrothery and or North Dublin poor law unions.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ See Virginia Crossman, *Local government in nineteenth century Ireland* (Belfast, 1994) pp 25-41, for an account of the origins of this reputation.

⁷⁶ David Broderick, *Local government in nineteenth century Dublin: The grand jury* (Dublin, 2007) pp 14-15.

⁷⁷ Grand jury of County Dublin minute books, 11 Jan. 1870, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/GJ/1/03, Box 351).

⁷⁸ Woods' father George, and later his sons Edward Hamilton and Warren St Leger Woods all served as grand jurors.

⁷⁹ John Bateman, *The great landowners of Great Britain and Ireland, 1883* (4th ed., London, 1970), *Return of owners of land of one acre and upwards in counties, cities and towns in Ireland*, H.C. 1876 [C.1492] lxxx.61.

Kirkpatrick, Cobbe, and Woods served on the grand jury finance committee in 1870.⁸⁰ Charles Cobbe's private papers for 1874 give an indication of the levels of influence within these networks as he recorded representations and recommendations he made for appointments at Kilmainham gaol, the Richmond hospital, Meath hospital, Trinity College, St. James' Gate brewery and the Botanic Gardens.⁸¹ A few years previously, on 1 April 1866, the grand jury, with much the same membership, indicated their political allegiance in uncompromising fashion, following the suspension of Habeas Corpus and the mass arrests of Fenian sympathisers in February, when they passed a vote of thanks to the lord lieutenant:

for the firm but merciful determination with which you have averted the treasonable conspiracy that has threatened the peace of the country – and upon the intelligent and faithful conduct of the Dublin Metropolitan Police and constabulary force in the execution of their duty.⁸²

The net value of grand jury presentments, the spending budget for County Dublin in 1869, amounted to £36,268. The members had the final say on how this money was spent. Just under £22,000 was spent on road maintenance, the balance on officer salaries, charity disbursements, and miscellaneous items.⁸³ Protecting cess payers' (county taxpayers) interests led to the jury opposing the Dublin Bridges and Quay Walls Bill, and the efforts of both Dublin Corporation and the Dublin Port and Docks Board to levy additional taxes on the county for such works. The grand jury represented a body that was the closed circle of the landed elite in County Dublin, looking after their class, political and financial interests.

Balrothery Poor Law Guardians

The Poor Law Act of 1838 set up local boards of guardians to administer the poor law, and in particular, workhouses, but subsequent legislation had increased their responsibilities, as local administrative power slowly transferred from unelected

⁸⁰ *Thom's Directory*, 1870, p. 1213.

⁸¹ Application and recommendations to Charles Cobbe, 1874, (Newbridge House, Cobbe Archives, 24/1-4, 6).

⁸² Grand jury of County Dublin minute books, 1 Apr. 1866, (Fingal County Archives. FCCA/GJ/1/03, Box 351). Suspension of Habeas Corpus in law allows detention without trial.

⁸³ *Grand jury presentments (Ireland). Abstract of the accounts of presentments made by the grand juries of the several counties, cities, and towns in Ireland, in the year 1869--(pursuant to Acts 49 Geo. 3, c. 84, s. 31, and 4 Geo. 4, c. 33, s. 18)*, H.C. 1870 [263] lv.753.

grand jurors to elected guardians, and by 1898 to fully elected county councils. The poor law boards of guardians, which in Balrothery comprised twenty-three members appointed ex-officio guardians from the largest landowning ratepayers, and twenty-three were elected from the ratepayers. They had responsibility for the operation of the poor law in the north county area. As this thesis is concerned primarily with political life in the rural north county, focus will be on the Balrothery poor law union. Whilst the north county includes the Garristown part of Dunshaughlin union in Meath and the northern rural portion of the North Dublin Union, they are less representative of the area, and were generally concerned with issues not relevant to Fingal. The changing responsibilities and functions of the different layers of local government presented challenges and opportunities to the different cohorts of the political elite, and this began to accelerate from the 1870s. At the beginning of the decade, Balrothery poor law guardians also had responsibility for dispensary medical care, public health, the provision of poor relief, and they had started to take on responsibilities relating to housing. In 1872, the Local Government Board (Ireland) replaced the Poor Law Commissioners as the governing authority, with the appointment of inspectors to oversee guardians' proceedings, which led to greater centralised control and a curbing of board powers. The part-elected local board, although dominated by the unelected ex-officio major ratepayers of the landed class or their representatives, was a vehicle for the gradual politicisation of the local community. Although the franchise was limited, local elected guardians had the opportunity to represent electors and issues that were relevant to their community and influence the implementation of legislation, initiatives, and solutions that affected people's lives. The parliamentary return of numbers entitled to vote in poor law guardian elections in Balrothery in 1874 showed only 1,905 rated electors, so even this franchise opportunity was limited.⁸⁴ In 1878, the Public Health (Ireland) Act provided for the creation of sanitary districts with expenses defrayed out of the poor rate for rural districts and the town rate for urban areas.⁸⁵

The importance of the board of guardians in terms of status and perceived opportunity should not be underestimated. It presented the opportunity for limited

⁸⁴ *Return from Poor Law Unions in Ireland of Number of Persons entitled to vote for Poor Law Guardians, March 1874*, H.C. 1874 [253] lvi.927.

⁸⁵ Harry Lisney, 'Rating and valuation', in *Journal of statistical and social inquiry society of Ireland*, vol. xvi, (1939), p. 74.

representation and official engagement with the landed gentry, and it was through the boards that this class was first challenged and later displaced.⁸⁶ The gradual transfer of power in the period from 1872 to 1886, as identified by Feingold, took place in the boardroom of the workhouse and the committee room of the dispensary, with increasing calls in the press to elect nationalist guardians.⁸⁷ All the guardians worked in the interests of the ratepayers that they represented, either landlords or tenants, and the initial transfer of influence was from landlord to tenant, rather than Conservative to nationalist.

Two Protestant and one Catholic landowner occupied the senior officer positions at Balrothery board of guardians in 1870. Lord Talbot de Malahide was chairman. The vice-chairman, Henry Baker of Balheary House, Swords, was also secretary to the grand jury. A landlord and grazier, with 1,077 acres at Swords, he was the son of Arthur Baker, solicitor, former treasurer of the County Dublin grand jury, who had been land agent to Thomas Claud Hamilton, brother of George Alexander.⁸⁸ Catholic William Bowden, farming at Broadmeadows, Swords was deputy vice-chairman.⁸⁹ Lord Talbot was a poor attendee and it appears that he held the position of chairman out of deference as a major landowner, with Baker chairing most of the meetings in his absence. However, Talbot was re-elected each year until 1874 when Henry Baker became chairman and Bowden was elected vice-chairman, with Thomas McCourt of Lanestown, Donabate, a Catholic tillage and livestock farmer, elected as deputy vice chair.⁹⁰ McCourt leased 377 acres in three adjoining holdings from three landlords in an area between Swords and Donabate, including from Charles Cobbe.⁹¹ This cohort

⁸⁶ Mel Cousins, *Poor relief in Ireland, 1851-1914*, (Berne, 2012), pp 1-3.

⁸⁷ William Feingold, *The revolt of the tenantry: the transformation of local government in Ireland, 1872-1886* (Boston, 1984), pp 82-89, *The Nation*, 15 Aug. 1874.

⁸⁸ Thirty-four letters, receipts and memoranda to Thomas C. Hamilton of Hampton Hall, Balbriggan, County Dublin, mainly from his agent Arthur Baker, Oct. 1831 to Mar. 1847 (N.L.I., Thomas C. Hamilton Papers, MS4566); Will of Arthur Baker, 1863, (N.A.I., Calendars of Wills and Administrations 1858 – 1920), online at

http://www.willcalendars.nationalarchives.ie/reels/cwa/005014885/005014885_00237.pdf, accessed on 5 Nov. 2020; *Leinster Express*, 30 Nov. 1844; *The Nation*, 23 Apr. 1864.

⁸⁹ Valuation Office revision books, Swords parish, (Valuation Office, book 4, 1870-75). William Bowden, baptism, Swords, 21 Aug. 1814, (N.L.I., Catholic Parish Baptism Registers, MF 06616/06) online at <http://registers.nli.ie/registers/vtls000633681#page/81/mode/lup> ; Will of William Bowden, 1907, (N.A.I., Calendars of Wills and Administrations 1858 – 1920) online at http://www.willcalendars.nationalarchives.ie/reels/cwa/005014915/005014915_00024.pdf , accessed on 5 Nov 2020.

⁹⁰ Balrothery poor law guardians minute books, 1870-78 (N.A.I., MFGS 49/032-34: BG40/A46-64).

⁹¹ Valuation Office revision books, Swords parish, (Valuation Office, book 4, 1870-75); Donabate parish, (Valuation Office, book 6, 1864-78).

would remain in place, re-elected annually for the next five years. They were automatically ex-officio members of all committees and had control of agendas, speaking times, and voting divisions. The stipulation that two weeks' notice be given of any motions ensured that these officers could influence the business undertaken.

The elected guardians provided the only opportunity for Catholics and nationalists to exercise any local political influence in the 1870s. Those interested began by serving time on local dispensary and sanitary committees. Farmers such as McCourt, Andrew and Patrick Kettle, John Rooney of Lusk and Christopher McGlew of Balbriggan, who would come to play increasingly prominent roles in local politics in Fingal, served on these committees. Ex-officio members, mindful of protecting their contributions as the largest ratepayers, dominated the guardians' house or visiting committee, with responsibility for overseeing the running of the workhouse, which required the largest expenditure outlay.⁹² Elected guardians soon took control of the agricultural and later finance committees, although ex-officio guardians retained chairmanship of the latter.⁹³ In general, attendances at meetings in the first half of the decade were poor and irregular, the largest attendances usually took place when tenders or appointments were discussed, thus when members had personal or local self-interests at stake, or when the Local Government Board Inspector attended. For example, on 8 June 1874, thirty-four guardians attended for the election of rate collector James McCourt.⁹⁴ These elections for the appointment of local officials were important to the exercise of patronage and influence, but in themselves were often well-paid and desirable positions.

By 1877, earlier than what Feingold found in Connacht, the elected guardians began to outnumber ex-officio guardians on the various committees: by 3:2 on the house committee, 2:1 on the finance committee and 4:1 on the agriculture committee.⁹⁵ The influence and remit of local committees increased when, for example, dispensary committee members were appointed automatically to the sanitary committees for the same districts. However, landlord guardians could still muster enough when required

⁹² Balrothery Poor Law Guardians Minute Books, 1870, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/032: BG40/A46-52).

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 8 June 1874, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/033: BG40/A55).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8 June 1874, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/033: BG40/A56).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9 Apr. 1877, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/034: BG40/A62).

to secure a vote in their interest. For instance, in January 1877, they combined to elect a new clerk of the union, Mr James Stack, formerly of Tralee workhouse.

The business of the Balrothery guardians in the 1870s was largely concerned with local and financial matters, the efficient running of the workhouse and the implementation of the various legislative measures relating to sanitation and health for which they were responsible. It was rare for matters of a political nature to be discussed, but they did support a resolution prior to the 1874 general election ‘that all candidates in the forthcoming election pledge themselves to use their most active exertions and influence to preserve union rating’.⁹⁶ There are almost no surviving sources relating to voting patterns for the election of poor law guardians. However, a House of Commons inquiry in 1878 provides some evidence. The secretary of the Local Government Board described the Dublin Union elections as ‘guided by religious and political feeling to a very large extent’, adding that electoral lists were made up by party candidates, whilst the clerk of the South Dublin union and a former guardian, Mr Byrne, stated that elections were fought exclusively on party grounds.⁹⁷ The *Freeman's Journal* of 18 March 1878 unashamedly called on Liberal registered voters to support the Liberal candidates in the board of guardians’ elections, which included Laurence McCourt, Andrew Kettle’s father-in-law, and brother of Thomas McCourt, who was running in the Glasnevin district for a seat on the North Dublin Union.⁹⁸ Laurence McCourt was a major seed and potato merchant at Bolton St. Dublin, with significant supply contracts to both the north and south Dublin unions and a successful export business. He owned 180 acres at Newtown in St. Margaret’s near Finglas.⁹⁹ Nationalist guardians were beginning to see the value of combining the protection and promotion of their local interests with those national objectives espoused by their nationalist M.P.’s at Westminster.

⁹⁶ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians Minute Books, 2 Feb. 1874, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/033: BG40/56). Motion from Kilkenny board of guardians.

⁹⁷ Mel Cousins, ‘Poor law politics and elections in post-Famine Ireland’, in *History Studies* vol. vi, 34-47, 2005; *Report of the select committee on poor law guardians etc.*, H.C. 1878 (297), xvii, 273, pp 209-15.

⁹⁸ *Freeman's Journal*, 18 Mar. 1878.

⁹⁹ *Post office directory and calendar*, 1858 (Dublin, 1858) p. 216; John Bateman, *The great landowners of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1883 (4th ed., London, 1970).

Conclusion

Hoppen has emphasized the predominance of local issues and priorities in Irish politics in the 1870s as ‘the ingrained localism of political culture’ where jobs, land and property, services, supply contracts and the rates were what mattered.¹⁰⁰ The experience in Fingal as will be seen in the coming chapters will bear this out; this is what mattered most to local political interests. However, the questions of land ownership, tenurial rights and self-determination raised in 1870 were about to present an opportunity for national mobilisation. The confident Catholic rural middle class that emerged in the three decades since the Famine would not be willing to surrender their new but modest gains in prosperity and status. Comerford contends that the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland was highly significant as an acknowledgement by Westminster of the principle that Irish majority opinion could decide a major Irish constitutional issue.¹⁰¹ It also energised the Protestant community who saw it as a betrayal, and a compromise of the principles upon which the union was founded.¹⁰² There were other grievances. Catholic tenants paid the bulk of county rates, but administrative power remained in the hands of Protestant landlords.¹⁰³ It was changing but slowly. Land ownership was still the determinant of wealth that brought local status and political control. The land issue was political, it was local, it was national, and inextricably tied to nationalism. The opportunity lay in the mobilisation of either, to advance the other. A change in land ownership, a change in wealth distribution, and the assertion of religious, cultural, and political identity, would be required to change the balance of political power in Fingal, as throughout Ireland.

¹⁰⁰ K. T. Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and society in Ireland, 1832-85* (Oxford, 1884) pp viii-ix; *Ireland since 1800: Conflict and Conformity* (Abingdon, 1989) p. vii, p.35.

¹⁰¹ R. V. Comerford, ‘Gladstone’s first Irish enterprise’, in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland v: Ireland under the union I, 1801-1870* (Oxford, 1989), p. 443.

¹⁰² D. George Boyce, *Nineteenth century Ireland: the search for stability* (Dublin, 2005) p.162.

¹⁰³ Virginia Crossman, ‘Peculation and partiality – local government in nineteenth century rural Ireland’ in Roger Swift and Christine Kineally (eds.), *Politics and power in Victorian Ireland* (Dublin, 2006), p.133.

Chapter 2

The material for victory: the politics of land and Home Rule, 1870-1914

In the introduction to his father's memoir, Laurence Kettle explained how the title *The material for victory* was based on a quotation from Young Irelander James Fintan Lalor's letter to the editor of *The Irish Felon* in 1848: 'the land question contains, and the legislative question does not contain, the materials from which victory is manufactured'. Andrew Kettle believed that the issues of land and self-government 'were always combined as national objectives', and sought to promote the primacy of the former as the prerequisite to achieving the latter.¹ He believed, like Lalor, in the right to the land of those who worked that same soil.²

This chapter will examine how the interlocking issues of land and nationalism defined and shaped local politics in Fingal from the 1870s to 1914, and how each sustained, complemented and competed with the other. Philip Bull maintained that both questions became so connected that one effectively became a metaphor for the other.³ As national political mobilisation ebbed and flowed, local issues competed for priority in the institutions of local government in Fingal. Proximity to Dublin city provided the opportunity for some of Fingal's political actors to play influential roles on central branches, close to the leadership of national political organisations. This proved to be the case in both the land and Home Rule movements. The response of the landed class to the challenges to their material and political ascendancy shaped their evolution from Conservative to Unionist. This was reflected in the political division in the local government arena, in poor law and later council meetings. Legislative reforms in education, housing, local government and welfare, and the implementation of the land acts contributed to a rising confidence among nationalists while the focus of the Home Rule effort enunciated their political presence. While living standards improved for some, the demands of the agricultural labourer went unheeded and the increasing discontent culminated in a strike in Fingal in 1913, part

¹ L.J. Kettle, *Material for victory: being the memoir of Andrew J. Kettle* (Dublin, 1958), pp ix-x; *The Irish Felon*, 24 Jun. 1848.

² Lilian Fogarty, *James Fintan Lalor: patriot & political essayist, 1807-1849* (Dublin, 1919), p. 85 & 129.

³ Philip Bull, *Land, politics and nationalism: a study of the Irish land question* (Dublin, 1996), p. 4.

of the wider Dublin Lockout. It was distinctly personalised and bitter, with neighbour pitted against neighbour as well as farmer against labourer, exposing underlying class tensions and divisions in the nationalist polity. The labour struggle ran parallel to and largely overshadowed the third Home Rule crisis in Fingal, the latter viewed as a distant event in Ulster and London. The complexity of the local situation means the issues of the land question and Home Rule and their effects in Fingal will be examined separately.

The dominant and most influential Fingal politician within nationalism at this time was Andrew Kettle. He began his entry into public life writing letters to the press in 1866, in defence of tillage farmers. This followed a disagreement with grazier, John Paul Byrne over his calls for compensation for cattle farmers, struggling against bovine diseases. He subsequently joined Butt's revived Irish Tenant League.⁴ Gladstone's 1870 Land Act, while a symbolic first step in addressing traditional landed property rights, failed to provide a workable solution to tenant right issues. Landlords circumvented the act by introducing new leases and began to withdraw many previous non contractual concessions.⁵ Inspired by the response of tenants in Kildare to the duke of Leinster's attempt to do so with the so-called 'Leinster lease', Kettle formed the County Dublin Tenants Defence Association in January 1873, with Maurice Butterly, Charles Reilly from Artane, and William Kelly, a renowned agriculturalist and tenant rights league veteran, who farmed at Portrane, on the Fingal coast. On the committee were business and blood related connections. Kettle, his brother Patrick, and his father-in-law, Laurence McCourt were joined by four members of the O'Neill family who farmed at Kinsealy.⁶ This core group and their

⁴ *Freeman's Journal*, 5 & 12 Feb.; 13 Mar. 1866; L.J. Kettle, *Material for victory: being the memoir of Andrew J. Kettle* (Dublin, 1958), pp 12-13. This league lapsed after the passing of the 1870 land act, and Butt transferred his energies to Home Rule.

⁵ *Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Act*, 1870 H.C 1870, 33 & 34 Vict., c.46. It recognised in law the principle of compensation for improvement, the 'Ulster custom', except in the case on non-payment of rent. The Bright clause allowed limited funding for tenant purchase but the majority of tenants were unable to raise the deposit for purchase; Paul Bew, *Ireland: the politics of enmity, 1789-2006* (Oxford, 2007), p. 277. See also Philip Bull, *Land Politics and nationalism: a study of the Irish land question* (Dublin, 1996), pp 193-207 for a description of all the Irish land acts.

⁶ *Freeman's Journal*, 3 Jan. 1873. For further on the Leinster lease see Terence Dooley, *The decline and fall of the dukes of Leinster: love, war, debt and madness* (Dublin, 2014), pp 40-44. Kettle and Fergus O'Neill spoke at a meeting at Athy and undertook to organise other tenants' defence associations in the country, *Leinster Express*, 8 Feb. 1873. Gerard Ronan, *William Kelly of Portrane: a forgotten hero of the famine and the land war* (Dublin, 2019), pp 29, 97-103 & 147-151; Kelly was land steward of 2,000 acres on Sophia Evans' estate during the Famine, and leased 100 acres from George Evans after her death in 1853. He brought a number of cases for compensation for

relations and associates became the dominant political group over the next fifty years in Fingal. Kettle, Butterly, Reilly and McCourt were all North Dublin Union poor law guardians, which covered the north city and immediate north county area. All became involved in Butt's Home Rule League where for them the land and national issues coalesced. Kettle's repeated calls for a national organisation went unheeded, but it appears that the Dublin branch assumed a coordinating and leadership role until a formal central structure formed in January 1876 with Butt as chairman, and dominated by members of the County Dublin committee.⁷ The National Land Conference in June 1875 mandated Kettle and Butterly the task of formulating tenant rights policy, which formed the basis for Butt's land tenure bill to address the shortcomings in the 1870 act regarding security of tenure and fair rent valuation.⁸ Parliamentarians and agrarians were formalising shared aspirations on land and nationalism, with Fingal political figures at the forefront.

The Land War in Fingal

Successive poor harvests from 1877 and falling prices left tenants across the country in increasingly difficult circumstances and unable to meet rent commitments. The value of crop output fell by a third since 1875 and livestock by a quarter.⁹ By early 1879, newspapers carried increasing coverage of a worldwide agricultural depression.¹⁰ The Central Tenants Defence Association encouraged Fingal tenants to organise and meet with their landlords to seek group rent concessions.¹¹ At this time Michael Davitt was organising protest meetings in Mayo that were a precursor to the founding of the Land League. In October 1879, Andrew Kettle chaired the first meeting of the Irish National Land League at the Imperial Hotel, Dublin. The meeting agreed to adopt a parliamentary approach and elected Charles Stewart

improvements, and against gaming rights; *Freeman's Journal*, 22 Dec. 1870 & *Leinster Express*, 7 Jan. 1871.

⁷ *Leinster Express*, 1 Mar.; *Irish Times*, 21 & 26 Mar.; *Irish Examiner*, 13 June; *The Nation*, 21 June & *Wexford People*, 28 June 1873; *Freeman's Journal*, 4 & 28 Jan. 1876.

⁸ *Freeman's Journal*, 22 Jan. & 11 June; *Drogheda Conservative*, 23 Jan. & *The Nation* 19 June 1875; *Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Act amendment: a bill to amend the Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Act, 1870*, H.C. 1876, 40, vol. iii. p. 411.

⁹ Michael Turner, 'Output and productivity in Irish agriculture from the famine to the great war', in *Irish Economic and Social History*, xvii (1990), pp. 62-78, at p. 68 & pp 74-5; T.W. Moody, *Davitt and Irish revolution, 1846-82*, (Oxford, 1982), p.283.

¹⁰ *Drogheda Conservative*, 25 Jan. 1879. Local press advertising reflected the challenging agricultural outlook, with an increase in the number of adverts for potential emigrants to purchase land in the Transvaal, Canada, Colorado, and Australia.

¹¹ *The Nation*, 3 May 1879.

Parnell as president. The existing tenants defence associations were to be absorbed into the Land League. Parnell saw and grasped the opportunity of a vehicle to serve his purpose. Kettle, Davitt and Thomas Brennan were appointed as honorary secretaries, but Kettle was the only one on the executive of seven who did not have a Fenian or advanced nationalist background and was the only farmer.¹² Laurence McCourt, William Kelly and Charles Reilly joined the fifty-seven strong committee.¹³

Support from John Devoy and Clan na Gael in the United States brought the Fenians into an alliance with Davitt and Parnell that T. W. Moody described as the ‘new departure’.¹⁴ Hoppen saw the coincidence of agrarian unrest among smallholders and larger farmers, as labourers’ numbers declined, as the key factor in the national growth of the Land League.¹⁵ He further contended that ‘economic anxiety’ resulting from recent famine memory was as important a contributor to the start of the Land War as further explained in the ‘revolution of rising expectations’ theory proposed by J. S. Donnelly.¹⁶ The social changes that raised expectations also increased the capacity for mobilisation.¹⁷ The economic and social imperatives emphasized by Comerford probably more pertinently explain the common motivation that brought together the fragile alliance of large and small farmers, townsmen and labourers, all protecting their own interests while mindful of any opportunities for betterment; no different to the landlords protecting theirs.¹⁸

A case in the bankruptcy court involving Andrew Kettle on the Domville estate illustrates this. In November 1879, Kettle claimed inability to pay the balance of £74

¹² Anne Kane, *Constructing Irish national identity: discourse and ritual during the land war, 1879-1882* (New York, 2011), p.95; Donal McCartney, ‘Parnell, Davitt and the land question’, in Carla King (ed.), *Famine, land and culture in Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), p. 72.

¹³ Michael Davitt, *The fall of feudalism in Ireland: or the story of the land league revolution* (London, 1904), p. 173.

¹⁴ T. W. Moody, ‘The new departure in Irish politics, 1878-9’ in H. A. Cronne, T. W. Moody, and D. B. Quinn (eds.), *Essays in British and Irish history in honour of James Eadie Todd*, (London, 1949), pp 303-33. Butt had made such a ‘departure’ more possible by bringing the amnesty, agrarian and constitutional self-government issues closer.

¹⁵ K. T. Hoppen, ‘Landlords, society and electoral politics in nineteenth century Ireland’, in C. H. E. Philpin, (ed.) *National and popular protest in Ireland* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 287.

¹⁶ K.T. Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: conflict and conformity* (Abingdon, 1989) p. 100; James S. Donnelly, *The land and the people of nineteenth century Cork: the rural economy and the land question* (London, 1975), pp 249-50.

¹⁷ Samuel Clark, ‘The political mobilisation of Irish farmers’, in Alan O’Day (ed.), *Reactions to Irish nationalism, 1865-1914* (London, 1887), p. 75.

¹⁸ R.V. Comerford, ‘The Land War and the politics of distress, 1877-82’, in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland vi: Ireland under the union II, 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996), pp 26-52.

outstanding on his £348-8-10 annual rent for his sixty-six acre farm at Finglas, because he claimed that the commercial returns from the land could not justify such a rate. The judge warned that he would declare Kettle a bankrupt if he did not pay. He ruled that Kettle's total 200-acre rental identified him as a businessman rather than a mere tenant farmer.¹⁹ Laurence Kettle noted that his father omitted in his memoir that one of the major difficulties for the leadership in the Land War was convincing some farmers that rents really were unfair. Perceptions of rental value often included the improvements the tenants had made themselves, rather than what was in the contract. Rents were primarily related to the landlord's interest in the property.²⁰ Kettle, like Kelly and Butterly before him, were setting the example and testing this through the legal system.²¹

The Land League agitation for rent reductions and against evictions that started in Connacht in 1879 spread the following year to the more prosperous but cautious farming areas of Munster and Leinster. In Fingal, matters remained quiet, other than the activities of those leading the campaign and the periodic unrest on the Hamilton and Palmer estates at Skerries and Rush over seaweed harvesting rights.²² Seaweed was important as a fertiliser on the market produce farms in Fingal. The *Drogheda Conservative* carried as much coverage of the Afghan War in the winter of 1879-80 as it did of the local land agitation. Police reports show only one Land League meeting in County Dublin in 1879, in November, and a single agrarian crime for the year. In Mayo, there were thirty-seven meetings in 1879 and 178 crimes reported. Authorities reported no further activity in Dublin until December 1880 when eight meetings took place across Malahide, Swords and Howth and at the European Hotel in Bolton St. involving farmers from Glasnevin and Cabra. John Dillon and Davitt spoke at Malahide, the first Land League meeting in Fingal, with Kettle elected president of the Swords branch.²³ Only a couple of incidents came to the attention of the police. Henry Dillon, land agent to Lord Talbot, received threatening letters

¹⁹ *Freeman's Journal*, 15 Nov. 1879.

²⁰ Laurence J. Kettle, *Material for victory: being the memoir of Andrew J. Kettle* (Dublin, 1958), p. xviii.

²¹ *Leinster Express*, 1 July 1871. In 1871, Butterly had registered his improvements with Domville.

²² *Drogheda Conservative*, 8 & 15 Feb.; 5 & 22 Mar. & 5 Apr. 1879.

²³ *Irish Times*, 1, 7, 8, 11, 18, 20 & 31 Dec.; *The Nation*, 7 & 25 Dec. 1880; *Freeman's Journal*, 16 Dec. 1880; *Return of Land League meetings and agrarian crimes reported to the Inspector General of the R.I.C. for each month of the years 1879 & 1880 for each county in Ireland*, H.C. (1881) 5, lxxvii, 793, 77. The numbers do not include central committee meetings and national conferences held in the city borough area and reported by the Dublin Metropolitan Police.

following his denunciation at the Malahide meeting, and a threatening notice to land grabbers was posted in Swords, following an eviction by Col. Forster for non-payment of rent.²⁴ Fingal was quiet because conditions had not deteriorated to the levels elsewhere. The land was better, leases more secure and a nearby market in the city. However, the leaders of the Land League in Fingal soon mobilised.

The change in Land League tactics to include larger farmers in Leinster and Munster in the campaign targeted landlords with excessive rents, by withholding payments until the last moment. This policy of paying ‘rent at the point of a bayonet’ was deployed in Fingal to inconvenience landlords, forcing the recovery of arrears through sheriff’s sales and confiscations, challenging landlords’ authority and financial solvency. In February 1881, Lord Talbot de Malahide obtained a decree to seize and sell goods on Andrew Kettle’s farm at Artane. At the auction, Patrick Kettle his brother, bid for and bought two horses, which covered the debt.²⁵ Some cases saw elected tenant guardians in the Land League take on their ex-officio guardian landlords, personalising political divisions. In August 1881, a sheriff’s sale took place at Kilmainham courthouse to dispose of the interest in two farms at Naul held by graziers Daniel Macken and James Ennis, rented from Warren St Leger Woods. Both the Land League and Property Defence Association attended with the latter bidding for each holding. Macken’s arrears were £211 11s. 6d. on a farm of 167 acres. When the P.D.A. bid only £20 for the interest in the farm, he paid the arrears due.²⁶ Afterwards a large Land League demonstration marched from Balbriggan to Naul in support of the ‘victory’.²⁷ These local sheriff’s sales were important episodes on both sides. They provided a tangible show of support from the Land League on the ground, a rallying opportunity for resistance by tenants. Landlords were fortified by the principle and execution of upholding and defending law and order.

²⁴ *Agrarian Crime (Ireland). Return to an order of the House of Lords, dated 7 Jan. 1881, for return of all agrarian outrages, reported by the Royal Irish Constabulary the 1st day of Feb. 1880 and the 31st day of Oct. 1880, giving particulars of crime, arrests, and results of proceedings for the month of Dec. 1880.* H.L. (1881) 18-II, xiii. No person was made amenable for either crime.

²⁵ Adam Pole, ‘Sheriffs’ Sales during the Land War, 1879-8’, in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. xxxiv, 136 (2005), pp. 386-402; *Freeman’s Journal & The Times*, 14 Feb. 1881.

²⁶ *Irish Times*, 12 Aug. 1881; *Daily Express*, 12 Aug. 1881.

²⁷ *United Irishman*, 13 Aug. 1881; *Freeman’s Journal*, 13 Aug. 1881.

To counteract the escalation in agrarian outrages the government passed a new Coercion Act, (An Act for the better Protection of Person and Property in Ireland, 1881, 44 & 45 Vict., c. 4.), in March 1881, which suspended habeas corpus and trial by jury, and allowed the proclamation of entire districts. When Daniel Macken was arrested in November under the Coercion Act, the press reported the unanimous motion of support for him from his fellow guardians.²⁸ Some landlord guardians present, defending their position, objected in a letter to the *Weekly Freeman's Journal*, to this “unanimous adoption” report.²⁹ At Balbriggan sessions in October nine evictions were sought by St Leger Woods at his Whitestown estate near Balbriggan, and by Mr Townsend, agent for the Palmer estate at Rush. On the bench were Henry Hamilton, Charles Cobbe, A. S. Deane, and Woods’ brother, Edward. Townsend was on the bench for the first case but absented himself for the second. The court ruled for the plaintiff in each of the Woods’ cases.³⁰ The propaganda war that ensued in the guardians’ boardroom and on the Queen’s Bench saw each side maximising the political and judicial tools at their disposal. The Land War in Fingal to this point was limited, confined to high profile episodes where the local leaders of the movement took on their landlords for a combination of greater political capital and personal financial improvement. The irony lay in the proximal nature of the dispute. The same personalities had business and social contact and regularly attended on the board of guardians on matters of common local interest.

Over the winter 1879-80, the downturn in Fingal hit labourers the hardest. The numbers depending on Balrothery union for outdoor relief increased by a third to 550 by the end of February 1880.³¹ The Local Government Board permitted additional works to alleviate unemployment.³² The following winter numbers exceeded 600 per week and remained so through to the summer of 1882.³³ The problem in Fingal was a

²⁸ *Sligo Champion*, 12 Nov. 1881; Balrothery Poor Law Guardians Minute Books, 14 Nov. 1881, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/035: BG40/A71).

²⁹ *Weekly Freeman's Journal*, 26 Nov. 1881. William Townsend and Henry Baker maintain they abstained, and condemned both bringing politics in the boardroom and the criticism of the government coercion measures.

³⁰ *Drogheda Conservative*, 22 Oct. 1881.

³¹ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians Minute Books, 13 Oct. 1879, & 23 Feb. 1880, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/034: BG40/A67), Categories include inmates of workhouse, infirmary and asylum as well as outdoor relief.

³² *Drogheda Conservative*, 17 & 31 Nov 1880.

³³ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians Minute Books, 24 Oct., 21 Nov., 5, 12 & 26 Dec. 1881, 23 Jan., 12 June & 24 July 1882, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/035: BG40/A71-72). This was also a severe winter in weather terms with unusually heavy and prolonged snowfalls.

lack of work for labourers, a consequence of the longer term growth in grazing at the expense of tillage, made worse by the depression with warnings of the danger of increasing poverty in the towns.³⁴ Poor harvests meant less work, and poor returns meant less money for wages.

Landlord responses to both the economic effects and the increasing agitation differed. Some landlords, including Malachi Strong Hussey at Westown, Naul, and Robert Russell Cruise at Drynam, Malahide gave rent abatements of around fifteen to twenty per cent, and extended payment terms on certain leases to aid tenants in difficulty.³⁵ The earl of Howth reduced the rent on the workhouse farm by £15 per year, a minor contribution towards relief.³⁶ The two local M.P.s, Taylor and Hamilton, along with Lord Talbot de Malahide were among the landowners who responded to the formation of the Land League by forming the Irish Land Committee the following month at the Shelbourne Hotel, to represent their interests and according to Adam Pole, County Dublin was one of the best represented in terms of subscribers. They mandated a sub-committee to collect evidence to support their position to the Richmond Commission, set up to examine the causes of the agricultural depression.³⁷ A more proactive response came when the Property Defence Association was formed in December 1880. Talbot and Henry A. Hamilton were on the general committee while all the prominent Fingal landlords and land agents subscribed.³⁸ Both organisations were prolific in producing pamphlets condemning Land League activities and promoting the landlord position, in what Curtis describes as a ‘counter offensive of landlord combinations’.³⁹ When the Land League leaders were arrested in November 1880, the Irish Land Committee claimed that professional agitators, ‘seeking to dismember the empire by a revolution in the land system’, were behind the land agitation. Ion Hamilton called for coercion, while

³⁴ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians Minute Books, 21 Mar. 1881, motion from Edward Rooney, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/035: BG40/A69).

³⁵ *Drogheda Conservative*, 22 Nov. 1879 & 12 Jun. 1880.

³⁶ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians Minute Books, 22 Mar. 1879, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/034: BG40/A68).

³⁷ *Drogheda Conservative*, 8 Nov. 1879; Adam D. Pole, ‘Landlord responses to the Irish land war, 1879-1882’, (Ph.D. thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 2006), p. 169.

³⁸ Heather Laird, *Subversive law in Ireland 1879-1920* (Dublin, 2005), pp 72-73; Property Defence Association annual report for the year ended 30 Nov. 1881 (Dublin, 1881), (N.L.I., IR 3330941); Adam D. Pole, ‘Landlord responses to the Irish land war, 1879-1882’, (Ph.D. thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 2006), pp 239-40.

³⁹ L.P. Curtis Jr., ‘Landlord responses to the Irish land war, 1879-87’, in *Éire-Ireland*, xxxviii, 3 & 4, (2003), pp 134-188.

Col Taylor lamented ‘the paralysis of trade and commerce, amid a state of continuing anarchy’.⁴⁰ The Land War was as political a battle for landowners as it was for tenants. While Fingal itself was mostly quiet, its politicians like Hamilton, Talbot and Kettle played leading roles on the national stage.

By 1881, some estates began to feel the effect of local agitation. Talbot wrote to the *Drogheda Conservative*, capturing the frustration of resident landlords. He lived on his estate at Malahide, his primary source of income, putting up with ‘the multitude of annoyances from which absentees are free’. His family ‘lived there for seven hundred years, survived the Cromwellian and Williamite confiscations, never increased their rents, but never expected as now, for his fate to be sealed by a *soi disant* Liberal government.’⁴¹ He continued that ‘the interference of some upstarts in the Land League had utterly demoralised his tenants, and he now no longer had much interest in his estates, other than to die in peace and leave some property to his children’.⁴²

One of the ‘upstarts’ referred to by Talbot was Andrew Kettle, who was one of his tenants at Millview, Malahide. Kettle was one of the first to test the fair rents provisions of the 1881 Land Act in the courts when he again challenged Talbot.⁴³ Kettle led from the front in the national struggle, with a single-minded determination to achieve the immediate agrarian objectives of the three F’s of fair rent, free sale and fixity of tenure, over the longer term objective of transfer of ownership. His mutual distrust of the Fenian element in the Land League leadership often left him isolated with only Parnell for support. He took the more confrontational line, calling for the withdrawal of the I.P.P. from Westminster, and mass rent strikes to bring matters to a head quickly, concerned about the ability of farmers to endure a long drawn out struggle. A radical, accordingly to Paul Bew, he also represented and saw the value of the involvement of graziers in the campaign. While not a great public

⁴⁰ *Drogheda Conservative*, 6 Nov. & 11 Dec. 1880.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1 May 1881. Talbot specifically used the expression ‘*soi disant*’, which means so-called or self-styled, in reference to his own family history as Liberal members of both houses of parliament.

⁴² *Drogheda Conservative*, 8 May 1881.

⁴³ L.J. Kettle (ed.) *Material for victory: being the memoirs of Andrew J. Kettle* (Dublin, 1958), p. xi. Talbot tried to claim Millview was not an agricultural holding, but merely a residential tenancy. He lost the case, and a fair rent fixed.

speaker, his contribution lay as a strategist and advocate, as his almost thirty pages of evidence to the Richmond commission showed.⁴⁴

The Land Law (Ireland) Act 1881 (44 & 45 Vic. c. 49), conceded the three F's of fair rent, free sale and fixity of tenure. It made available 75% funding for the purchase of tenant holdings repayable at 5% over thirty-five years, but as it made no provision for those in arrears of rent the struggle continued. Kettle was arrested in June 1881, charged under the protection act with 'inciting' tenants not to pay their rent.⁴⁵

Kettle's supporters showed solidarity when some 300 of them, with sixty reaping machines, harvested his oat and wheat crops at his farm in Swords.⁴⁶ Kettle spent over six months in Kilmainham gaol where he was a signatory with Parnell to the 'No Rent Manifesto'. The lord lieutenant released him just before Christmas 1881 on health grounds.⁴⁷ Such commitment helped earn his stature as political leader of the Fingal farming community over the next thirty years.

The events of May 1882 dramatically changed matters. The signing of the Kilmainham Treaty on 2 May, which promised settlement of the rent arrears issue in return for a cessation of agrarian outrages and withdrawal of the no-rent manifesto, saw Parnell and Dillon released. On 6 May, the murders in the Phoenix Park of new chief secretary Cavendish and under-secretary Burke, by a breakaway Fenian group called 'the Invincibles', drew widespread condemnation, with public indignation meetings in Balbriggan and Skerries. The government introduced a new crimes bill within a week.⁴⁸ The implementation of the Land Act of 1881, the introduction of the arrears act, and revulsion at the murders brought a temporary suspension of the land agitation campaigns.⁴⁹

One of the first cases heard by the County Dublin Land Committee adjudicating under the fair rent legislation saw magistrate and former vice-chairman of Balrothery

⁴⁴ *Minutes of evidence taken before Her Majesty's commission on agriculture*, H.C., 1881, C-2778-1 xxxvi (1) 36; L.J. Kettle (ed.) *Material for victory: being the memoirs of Andrew J. Kettle* (Dublin, 1958) pp 39-42; Paul Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland, 1858-82* (Dublin, 1978), pp 54, 113, 123 & 153.

⁴⁵ *Drogheda Conservative*, 4 June 1881.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3 Sept. 1881.

⁴⁷ Kilmainham Prison Registers, 1876-81, (N.A.I., 1/10/16, no. 3) online at <https://www.findmypast.ie/transcript?id=IRE/PRISR/RS00018280/4492657/00640/021>, accessed 18 Jan. 2021.

⁴⁸ *Drogheda Conservative*, 6 & 13 May 1882.

⁴⁹ *Arrears of Rent (Ireland) Act 1882*, (61 & 62 Vict. c.22).

guardians, J.P. Byrne secure a fifteen per cent reduction from sitting chairman Henry Baker.⁵⁰ Tenants could secure a fifteen-year term tenure at an agreed fair rent with the landlord, or a binding judicial rent at court.⁵¹ Second term reviews were brought forward to 1887 due to another agricultural slump and rents reduced on average by forty per cent over the two terms to 1902.⁵² This introduced dual ownership on Irish agricultural holdings where reduced rents handicapped landlord incomes and gave long term protections to tenants. This led to economic stagnation in land and agricultural investment. Despite further provisions and funding in the Ashbourne (1885) and Balfour (1891) acts, by 1896 only moderate change to land ownership had taken place with about twelve per cent of agricultural land transferred.⁵³ There were few cases of tenants in Fingal purchasing their holdings in this period, the extended Kettle family being the exception.⁵⁴ With reduced rents, a sale was attractive to neither purchaser nor seller.

From 1885, declining agricultural prices prompted new demands for rent reductions. Tim Harrington, John Dillon and William O'Brien devised the Plan of Campaign, launched in 1886, to effect rent reductions, in a more focussed way than before. On targeted estates, if reductions were not forthcoming tenants offered a reduced rent, and if not accepted the rent was withheld and paid into a fund managed by the National League organisers, used to assist any evicted tenants.⁵⁵ Though limited to only 203 out of over 20,000 estates, according to Laurence Geary, the Plan was 'subject to intense media scrutiny and came to be seen as a trial of strength between tenants, supported by the National League, and landlords, supported by the government'.⁵⁶ J.J. Clancy, recently elected M.P. for North Dublin County in 1885, worked closely with William O'Brien on the publicity dimension of the Plan of

⁵⁰ *Drogheda Conservative*, 14 Oct. 1882. Court sat at Balbriggan, and the second case awarded seventeen rent reductions against Lord Talbot de Malahide.

⁵¹ L. J. Kettle (ed.) *Material for victory: being the memoirs of Andrew J. Kettle* (Dublin, 1958), pp 120-2.

⁵² Timothy W. Guinnane and Ronald I. Miller, 'The limits to land reform: the land acts in Ireland, 1870-1909', in *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, xlv, 3 (1997), pp. 591- 612.

⁵³ *Report of the estates commissioners for the year ending 31 Mar. 1920 and for the period from 1 Nov. 1903, to 31 Mar. 1920*, [Cmd.1150] H.C., 1921, xiv, 661. There were 73,809 holdings purchased with £23,894,765 advanced in loans up to 1896.

⁵⁴ *Irish land commission (Purchase of Land (Ireland) Act, 1891), Return of advances under the act to 31 Mar. 1895*, H.C. (278) lxxxii.161. Patrick, John and Margaret Kettle bought 131 acres from Col. Forster in 1895.

⁵⁵ The Irish National League replaced the Land League in Oct. 1882 after the former was suppressed.

⁵⁶ Laurence Geary, *The plan of campaign: 1886-91* (Cork, 1986), p. 123.

Campaign.⁵⁷ While not adopted on estates in Fingal, there were some significant connections with estates elsewhere. These episodes shine light on the connections and involvement of some of the political elite in Fingal in national events. Capt. E.C. Hamilton, who was related to the extended Hamilton family in Fingal, was secretary and director of the P.D.A. and land agent on the 5,798-acre Coolgreany, County Wexford, estate of George F. Brooke, a wine merchant, and County Dublin grand juror, who lived at Somerton, Castleknock. Hamilton was the younger brother of Charles Hamilton, brother-in-law of Brooke and land agent to the duke of Leinster.⁵⁸ Over seventy evictions saw 300 people removed from their homes and the fatal shooting of an evicted farmer during an incident in September 1887.⁵⁹ In December 1886, police arrested M.P.s John Dillon, William O'Brien, Matt Harris and David Sheehy at Loughrea, while receiving rents on the Clanricarde estate as part of the Plan of Campaign. The case transferred to County Dublin, where a Conservative jury would be more likely to convict. The new high sheriff, who would select the jury was P.D.A. committee member, Henry A. Hamilton, land agent to Ion Trant Hamilton, and active in Dublin Unionist circles. The politically active landed connections of Fingal were now mobilised against the land movement. He appointed Capt Hamilton, who clashed directly with Dillon at Coolgreany, as deputy sheriff, but press criticism forced him to cancel the appointment. A split jury failed to convict after a ten-day trial.⁶⁰ Henry Hamilton was soon co-opted on to the executive committee of the Irish Landowners Convention when it formed at the end of 1887, with Ion Trant Hamilton and E.H. Woods appointed as delegates for north County Dublin.⁶¹ As in the earlier Land War period, and as would happen with Home Rule, Fingal, while not the most active region, was home to some of the influential participants on the national stage.

⁵⁷ Virginia Crossman, *Politics, law and order in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 1996), p. 157; Laurence Geary, *The plan of campaign: 1886-91* (Cork, 1986), p. 141.

⁵⁸ Sir Bernard Burke, *History of the landed gentry of Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1879), pp 724-25; Terence Dooley, *The decline and fall of the dukes of Leinster: love, war, debt and madness* (Dublin, 2014), pp 30 & 40-42. These Hamilton brothers were second cousins once removed of George A. Hamilton.

⁵⁹ Property Defence Association Annual reports 1881-87, (N.L.I., Property Defence Association Papers, Ir3330941/p7); Laurence Geary, *The plan of campaign: 1886-91* (Cork, 1986), pp 43, 75 & 157; *Weekly Freeman's Journal*, 30 July 1887; *Irish Times*, 22 Nov. 1887. For further on the killing see Brenda Malone, 'The murder of John Kinsella, Coolgreany eviction album, 1887' at <https://thecricketbatthatdiedforireland.com/>, National Museum of Ireland Collection, accessed 15 June 2021.

⁶⁰ Daniel Crilly, *Jury packing in Ireland* (Dublin, 1887), (N.L.I., Pamphlets collection, p2037).

⁶¹ Irish Landowners Convention Annual reports 1-29, 1887-1919, (N.L.I., Irish landowners' convention, Ir3330 941 i8).

Fingal did not experience the same intensity of conflict in the Land War as elsewhere in the country. Proximity to the large domestic market in Dublin helped alleviate the worst of agricultural depression. Police records show only 121 families evicted in County Dublin, between 1879 and 1882, with thirty-four of these readmitted. This amounted to only one per cent of the national figure of 11,824. Of 872 persons detained under the coercion measures, only four were from County Dublin.⁶² The focus of agitation in Fingal was on rent reductions, led by a few tenant farmers within the local nationalist political leadership. Activity levels reported in the press were low, mainly high-profile cases involving national leaders such as Kettle, or local political power brokers, like Macken and Ennis. What occurred in Fingal was a limited campaign played out by political elites for wider political and indeed personal advantage. The exception was where tillage farmers in Skerries and Rush pursued more vigorously their access rights to the foreshore for harvesting seaweed, to use as fertiliser, part of a longer running disputes known locally as the 'seaweed wars'.⁶³ It also sought to mobilise by example. It contributed to a diminished deference to the landed class, followed in Fingal by an increase in poaching and trespass cases.⁶⁴ The responses of the landlords and their agents in Fingal showed that this was a political battle that would not be conceded lightly. The experience of the Land War had energised and emboldened an emerging local nationalist political cohort that was now prepared to take on the landed class at the different levels of local political engagement available to them. It had also fortified and concentrated the political attentions of the Conservative landed political class in Fingal.

Parnellite nationalism: the quest for Home Rule

The first phase of the Land War from 1879 to 1882, despite the fragile unity of the Land League, had, according to Bew, 'endowed Irish nationalism with a sense of excitement and purpose', and according to Anne Kane, a nationalist identity, which Parnell hoped to transfer and harness to achieving self-government through Home

⁶² *Return of cases of eviction which have come to the knowledge of the constabulary in each quarter of the year ended the 31 Dec. 1880*, H.L., 1882, 12, xiii; *Return of cases of eviction which have come to the knowledge of the constabulary in each quarter of the year ended the 31 Dec. 1881*, H.L., 1882, 6, x, 103; *Return of all persons who have been or are in custody under 'The protection of person and property (Ireland) Act, 1881', up to the 31 Mar. 1882*, H.L., 1882, 71, xi.

⁶³ *Drogheda Conservative*, 8 & 15 Feb., 15 & 22 Mar., 5 Apr., 3 & 10 May, 1879, 5 June & 14 Aug. 1880, 3 Dec. 1881. Prosecutions followed and a series of court cases ended up with Hamilton taking on the attorney general and winning at the Court of Appeal, confirming his rights of ownership.

⁶⁴ *Drogheda Conservative*, 17 Mar. 1888 & 12 Oct. 1889.

Rule legislation.⁶⁵ He needed to form a party and electoral structure with a narrower political focus, with greater central control and discipline. The cessation of agrarian agitation and the Phoenix Park murders allowed Parnell to sideline the radical elements of both the Land League and the Fenian movement.⁶⁶ In October 1882, he founded Irish National League (I.N.L.), which effectively took over the existing structures of the Land League, including their funds, with Parnell and the I.P.P. in control.⁶⁷ An early electoral opportunity arose with a by election in the Dublin County constituency in February 1883, caused by the death of Colonel Taylor. The Conservative party viewed this seat, held by Taylor for forty-two years, as theirs by right.⁶⁸ Edward King-Harman easily defeated the Home Rule candidate Edward McMahon by 2,514 votes to 1,428, despite a well-organised and well-funded nationalist campaign.⁶⁹ By October 1884, commitments on Catholic education by Parnell ensured the support of the Catholic hierarchy, and clergy took an increasing role in local I.N.L. branches, particularly candidate selection.⁷⁰

The Franchise and Redistribution Acts of 1884-85 increased the Irish electorate from 224,000 to 738,000 and transformed the electoral potential of the I.P.P. at Westminster. A new single seat North County Dublin constituency had the potential to reverse the Conservative dominance.⁷¹ The legislation provided that boards of guardians appoint their rate collectors as overseers under the Representation Act, to identify qualifying owners and occupiers for inclusion on voters' lists. This was an important opportunity to ensure registration of voters and develop electoral intelligence.⁷² Kettle recalled how local clergy helped the National League in the same exercise.⁷³ Seven Balrothery guardians attended the County Dublin convention of the National League in December 1884, which selected J.J. Clancy, assistant

⁶⁵ Paul Bew, *Conflict and conciliation in Ireland, 1890-1910: Parnellites and radical agrarians* (Oxford, 1987), p. 1; Anne Kane, *Constructing Irish national identity: discourse and ritual during the land war, 1879-1882* (New York, 2011).

⁶⁶ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1898-1998* (2nd ed., Chichester, 2010), p. 122.

⁶⁷ Paul Bew, *Ireland, the politics of enmity, 1789-2006* (Oxford, 2007), p. 340.

⁶⁸ *Drogheda Conservative*, 10 Feb 1883.

⁶⁹ Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978), p. 293; Stephanie Rains, *Commodity culture and social class in Dublin 1850-1916* (Dublin, 2010), p. 111. Edward McMahon had connections with Arnott's department store, was a director of City and County of Dublin Land and Building Company and elected later that year for Limerick city.

⁷⁰ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1898-1998* (2nd ed., Chichester, 2010), p. 124

⁷¹ *Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act 1883* (46 & 47 Vict., c. 51); *Representation of the People Act, 1884* (48 Vict., c.3) & *Redistribution of Seats Act, 1885* (48 & 49 Vict., c. 23).

⁷² Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 9 Feb. 1885, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/036: BG40/A77).

⁷³ L.J. Kettle, *Material for victory: being the memoir of Andrew J. Kettle* (Dublin, 1958), p. 62

editor of *The Nation* newspaper, as their candidate for the next general election.⁷⁴ In his acceptance speech he disparagingly described the sitting M.P.s as ‘an orange deadhead [Hamilton] and a renegade Home Ruler [King-Harman]’ referring to his initial support for Butt in 1870. Dublin was a county, said Clancy, which was ‘hitherto one of the greatest strongholds of Orange Toryism in Ireland’. His speech summed up nationalist grievances, displayed his own personal animosity toward his opponents and highlighted local issues:

besides all the material good prevented from being accomplished for the constituency, it has affected immense moral evil by fostering the pride and indolence of as ignorant, as stupid, as mean, and as tyrannical a squirearchy as can be found. The field was previously abandoned to the strutting J.P.s and D.L.s who have been able not merely to monopolise parliamentary representation, but to tyrannise without notice on the grand jury, at the road sessions, at petty sessions, to pack the magisterial benches with recruits of their own line, to force iniquitous leases on tenants, and degrade and starve the labourers.⁷⁵

The long-held views and prejudices of nationalist political aspirants, who were now learning how to challenge the ascendancy in the union boardroom, achieved greater and more articulate voice with the emergence of a national political leadership, with a real chance of parliamentary representation. Clancy’s speech, published in the newspapers, brought this message to the people, whether they had a vote or not. The following February, he reproached the North County Dublin electorate for their inactivity in their duty to the national cause.⁷⁶ Clancy’s criticism was justified. In January 1885, an I.N.L. branch was formed in Balbriggan, but attempts to start others in Lusk, Rush and Naul were unsuccessful leading the *Drogheda Independent* to call for a single strong branch for the whole region.⁷⁷ The retreat from agitation politics after the Land War made political recruiting and motivating more difficult.⁷⁸ This

⁷⁴ *Freeman’s Journal*, 31 Dec. 1884. Drumcondra, Skerries, Naul, Sutton, Baldoyle, Blanchardstown, Malahide, Balbriggan and Coolock sent representatives; C. J. Woods, ‘Clancy, John Joseph’, in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography*. (Cambridge, 2009).

⁷⁵ *Freeman’s Journal*, 31 Dec. 1884.

⁷⁶ *United Ireland*, 8 Feb. 1885.

⁷⁷ *Drogheda Independent* 17 Jan. 1885.

⁷⁸ Michael J. Keyes, ‘Money and nationalist politics in nineteenth century Ireland from O’Connell to Parnell’, (PhD thesis, N.U.I., Maynooth, 2009) p. 213.

apathy extended to contributions to the National Tribute fundraising for Parnell's financial predicament. Despite Andrew Kettle being one of the honorary secretaries of the fund, the parishes of rural Fingal contributed less than £150 with the national collection exceeding £38,000.⁷⁹ The general passivity in Fingal, evident during and since the Land War, a lack of organisation on the ground, and the fact that the archbishop of Dublin, Dr Edward McCabe, was strongly opposed to Parnellite politics, may all have been factors in this poor level of contribution.⁸⁰

Despite the appearance of unity, competition and division existed amongst the nationalist community, especially regarding access to land, the predominant concern for most. An anonymous correspondent wrote to the *Drogheda Independent*, critical of the duplicity of one speaker at the National Convention in January 1885:

a certain sleek and oily gentleman from the Naul, who attended the National Convention on 30th ultimo, and seconded a resolution condemnatory of land grabbing, a few days later gave an exorbitant price for land from A.S. Hussey, Weston.⁸¹

The *Freeman's Journal* identified this 'oily gentleman' as John Daly, a N.D.U. guardian, living at Baldoyle, near Howth.⁸² Naul was in the pasture rich north of the county, and the *Drogheda Independent* followed up criticising grazier activity in perpetuating high price short land leases, restricting access to land for local tenants.⁸³ Graziers were prominent in nationalist politics in Fingal, and their public exhortations were often at variance with their actions. Maura Cronin has identified this trend in other parts of the country in her study of agrarian protest.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ *Parnell National Tribute: analysis of subscriptions* (Dublin, 1884), p. 31, (U.C.D. library special collections, nineteenth century pamphlet collection), online at <https://digital.ucd.ie/view/ivrla:4594>, accessed 18 Jan. 2021.

⁸⁰ C. J. Woods, 'The politics of Cardinal McCabe, Archbishop of Dublin, 1879-85', in *Dublin Historical Record*, xxvi, 3 (1973), pp 101-110 at p. 103.

⁸¹ *Drogheda Independent*, 17 Jan. 1885; John Bateman, *The great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland* (4th ed., New York, 1970). Hussey owned 600 acres in Dublin and 4,700 in Meath,

⁸² *Freeman's Journal*, 31 Dec. 1884; North Dublin Union Board of Guardians minute books, 13 Feb. 1884, (N.A.I., 7/3/121) at <https://search.findmypast.ie/record?id=ire%2fguardiansminutebooks%2f007634766%2f01007&parentid=ire%2fbogminutebooks%2f00521249> accessed 22 Jun. 2021.

⁸³ *Drogheda Independent*, 14 Feb. 1885.

⁸⁴ Maura Cronin, *Agrarian protest in Ireland, 1750-1960* (Dublin, 2012).

The increase in political activity was evidenced in a rapid rise in the number of I.N.L. branches throughout the country. This prompted a response from Unionists who formed the Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union in May 1885 to oppose Home Rule, which consolidated Unionist opposition in Ireland and proved a highly effective anti-Home Rule propaganda vehicle in Britain.⁸⁵ The country was on an election footing throughout the summer, with reciprocal courting of Liberals and Conservatives by Parnell. Andrew Kettle's proximity to events at this time sheds light on the level of intrigue involved, the centrality of class to the discourse and its significance in British politics. He recounted a meeting with Lord Carnarvon, that provided insight into Parnell's objectives, and the concept of installing an 'aristocratic Home Rule', an idea that Kettle was surprised to hear had its genesis with Lord Randolph Churchill.⁸⁶ Parnell's concept of aristocratic Home Rule saw the devolved government of Ireland firmly in the hands of a Conservative gentry class and within the empire. The prospect of such a 'Conservative class government' appealed to Parnell. The alternative was a 'revolutionary alliance of English radicalism and Irish democracy.'⁸⁷ Andrew Kettle, while sceptical and doubting the sincerity of the Conservatives, agreed to support Parnell's position. He also agreed not to tell the more socialist Davitt of the initial contacts but grew increasingly sympathetic to the latter's position.⁸⁸ This potential alliance is not surprising when one looks beyond the singular issue of Home Rule. Jackson describes how Irish Tory peers and landowners colluded in the passage of the 1881 Land Act, and were more sympathetic to land purchase than 'the more parsimonious and doctrinaire Liberals' because it was in their best interests. The main beneficiaries of land purchase, the larger tenant farmers, dominated the socially conservative National League. The Conservative Party's position on denominational education also held appeal for both this

⁸⁵ There were 862 branches by July 1885 and 1,261 by Jan. 1886; Tom Garvin, *The evolution of Irish nationalist politics* (Dublin, 2nd ed. 1983), p. 80; *Irish Times*, 16 Oct. 1885; *The Recess series 1887-88* (Dublin, 1888); *Publications during the year 1888* (Dublin, 1889) & *Annual Reports 1886-90* (P.R.O.N.I., Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union papers, D989/A/7/1). Using selective content, usually coverage of nationalist speeches and meetings, reproduced from Irish newspapers, its *Notes from Ireland* publication had a weekly circulation in excess of 5,000. In 1886 alone, it printed eleven million leaflets of 203 types, 500,000 pamphlets, and 20,000 twenty thousand posters.

⁸⁶ L.J. Kettle, (ed.) *Material for victory: being the memoirs of Andrew J. Kettle* (Dublin, 1958), pp 63-64.

⁸⁷ Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: an Irish history 1800-2000* (Oxford, 2003), p. 50.

⁸⁸ L.J. Kettle, (ed.) *Material for victory: being the memoirs of Andrew J. Kettle* (Dublin, 1958), p. 81-2; Carla King, *Michael Davitt: after the Land League, 1882-1906* (Dublin, 2016), pp 142-3, 161-2 & 275; Paul Bew, *C.S. Parnell* (Dublin, 1980), p. 74.

nationalist class and the Catholic Church.⁸⁹ Andrew Kettle admitted that this was his natural political alignment, despite his misgivings over other matters, illustrating the ideological proximity of the old and emerging rural political elites, and reflected in the political structures and alignments that evolved in Fingal.⁹⁰

Lord Justice Fitzgibbon, who lived at Howth, was a close friend of Lord Randolph Churchill, who often visited and consulted him on Irish matters.⁹¹ He led a group of dissident Conservative M.P.s, who formed an alliance of sorts with Parnell, and admired the Irish party's obstructionist tactics.⁹² From this group arose the grassroots support organisation, the Primrose League, which proved effective in fomenting anti-Home Rule opinion in Britain working closely with the I.L.P.U. and its successor the Irish Unionist Alliance. The League had an active female membership who were successful at organising social events and support networks.⁹³ Ion Trant Hamilton and his wife Lady Victoria were conspicuously involved with the Primrose League in Ireland, presiding at meetings and fundraising events to support the Conservative-Unionist cause.⁹⁴ Home Rule was as much a British as an Irish issue as the Conservatives feared an alliance of Irish nationalists and British radicals might overthrow the ruling class altogether.

At the National League convention in October 1885 to confirm the candidates for the upcoming general election, twelve priests and at least twenty sitting or future poor law guardians attended as delegates of the thirteen north Dublin branches. The geographical spread of delegates was evidence of a strong and well-organised political network, with close clerical support. It was only ten months since J.J. Clancy criticised the area's political apathy. One of the energetic young organisers in Fingal was P.J. O'Neill of Kinsealy, representing the central branch; he was serving

⁸⁹ Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: an Irish history 1800-2000* (Oxford, 2003), pp 49-52.

⁹⁰ L. J. Kettle, (ed.) *Material for victory: being the memoirs of Andrew J. Kettle* (Dublin, 1958), p. 69.

⁹¹ L. Perry Curtis, *Coercion and conciliation in Ireland, 1880-1892: a study in conservative unionism* (Princeton, 1963), p. 55

⁹² Terence Andrew Jenkins, *Parliament, party, and politics in Victorian Britain* (Manchester, 1996), pp 123-4; J. A. Cannon, 'The fourth party', in Robert Crowcroft & John Cannon (eds.), *The Oxford companion to British history* (Oxford, 2015).

⁹³ L. Perry Curtis, *Coercion and conciliation in Ireland, 1880-1892: a study in conservative unionism* (Princeton, 1963), pp 96-97; Keith Richmond Owen, 'The fourth party and conservative evolution 1880-85', (PhD thesis, Texas Tech University, 2000), p. 2.

⁹⁴ *Dublin Evening Mail*, 20 Apr. 1888; *Weekly Irish Times*, 26 Oct. 1889; *Dublin Daily Express*, 20 July 1895. By 1888, there were 14,922 members of the Primrose League recorded in Ireland across twenty-two branches, Diana Elaine Sheets, 'British conservatism and the Primrose League: the changing character of popular politics, 1883-1901', (PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1986), p. 348.

an apprenticeship in the political trade that would see him become one of the most prominent local politicians in Dublin.⁹⁵

Unionists prepared their campaign with the twin objectives of holding seats and resisting Home Rule. With Ion Trant Hamilton running in the south county constituency, Unionists sought a candidate to run against Clancy in the north county. Edward Hamilton Woods proposed the Catholic Colonel Forster from Swords, but he declined due to military commitments.⁹⁶ Capt. William Roper-Caldbeck, Clondalkin, stood but lost by a large majority of 6,135 to Clancy.⁹⁷ The *Freeman's Journal*, in an extensive article on the eve of the election entitled 'The Gospel of Orangeism', linked the Unionist candidates in Dublin to the Orange Order, and highlighted their financial support for the new Orange hall at Rutland Square. Two of those cited in the article, Hamilton and Edward Cecil Guinness, both prominent personalities in Dublin, were defeated at the polls as the Irish Parliamentary Party candidates won all six of the Dublin city and county seats bar Dublin University. The article recalled a bellicose speech delivered by Capt Hamilton at the True Blue Orange lodge in Dublin city in 1883:

The time has come when we must stand shoulder to shoulder to defend our rights, and I am convinced from the number present and the tone of the meeting, that we are willing and able to do so. We have a number of loyal men in Dublin who are no cowards – at least five thousand who are true to the crown and constitution.⁹⁸

Dublin had an active Orange community with at least thirty Orange lodges and Royal Black Preceptory clubs, organised into three districts in the city and county. They were mainly located in the Unionist townships of the south city and the coastal area, with only one lodge in Fingal, L.O.L. No. 1979, *Ruby Rifles*, in Balbriggan, but this had lapsed by 1893.⁹⁹ Hamilton appealed for voter support on his Unionist

⁹⁵ *Freeman's Journal*, 14 Oct. 1885.

⁹⁶ *Dublin Evening Mail*, 14 Nov. 1885.

⁹⁷ *Daily Express*, 4 Dec. 1885. Clancy held this seat until 1918.

⁹⁸ *Freeman's Journal*, 25 Nov. 1885; *Belfast Weekly Telegraph*, 12 Jan 1884; *Dublin Daily Express*, 3 July 1886. This appears to be the same Edward C. Hamilton of the P.D.A.

⁹⁹ Officers of the city and county of Dublin Grand Orange Lodges and private lodges, 1889; Correspondence books 1865-1874; Dublin Grand Orange Lodge No. 1 & No. 2 district minute books 1867-85, (P.R.O.N.I., Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland papers, D2947/1/5; D2947/3/2 & D2947/4/1). Activity among lodges varied. Most meetings took place at the Orange Hall, Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, 10 Rutland Square, or at the lodge rooms at 49 York Street. The occupations and addresses in

principles, but the nationalist press ridiculed him for his approach and previous record. The attacks on him were personal and cruel but highlighted the depth of feeling the election generated. The acerbic Tim Healy said he ‘understood that when with his friends in his Orange lodge in Rathmines he communicated in deaf and dumb language’. Healy represented the contest as one between ‘eloquent Esmonde’ or ‘dumb Hamilton’.¹⁰⁰ Sir Thomas Esmonde, his opponent, was a descendant of Henry Grattan and a landlord with over 8,000 acres in the south east. The family seat was at Ballynastragh House, County Wexford.¹⁰¹ The parish priest in Dalkey returned Hamilton’s election literature to the sender, with a note: ‘I am not a supporter of the representative of blood stained Orangeism – keep your vile trash for your friends’.¹⁰² In his victory speech, Esmonde, with a majority of 1,378, was less than magnanimous, and did not lament the end of the Hamilton parliamentary dynasty: ‘It was a victory not merely over an anti-Irish party, but over an ascendancy of a particularly offensive type.’¹⁰³ The rhetoric had reached new levels of personal vitriol that hardened political entrenchment. The defeat was such a shock to the Conservatives that they dissolved the old registration committee and reformed.¹⁰⁴

When the results were counted in December 1885, Parnell and the I.P.P. held the balance of power in the House of Commons, with 86 seats. Having supported and courted Salisbury’s Conservative government during 1885, they now formed an alliance with Gladstone upon his conversion to Home Rule. This alarmed the Unionist community in Ireland and prompted numerous meetings, speeches and resolutions against Home Rule.¹⁰⁵ The Grand Synod of the Church of Ireland resolved to uphold the union, endorsed at Easter vestries across Fingal. Swords vestry sent a petition to the House of Commons.¹⁰⁶ Political tensions heightened when Gladstone introduced the Home Rule bill in April 1886, causing a split in the

minute books and attendance lists indicated that members were predominantly from the middle, artisan or trades classes, and used the organisation largely as a Protestant networking vehicle.

¹⁰⁰ *Freeman’s Journal*, 15 Nov. 1885.

¹⁰¹ Patrick Maume, ‘Esmonde, Sir Thomas Henry Grattan’, in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography*. (Cambridge, 2009).

¹⁰² Letter from Revd John Kelly, Chapel House, Castle St, Dalkey, to Hamilton’s election agent, (N.L.I., South Dublin Election 1885 scrapbook, MS5946), underlined as per original note.

¹⁰³ *Freeman’s Journal*, 1 Dec. 1885.

¹⁰⁴ Committee of County Dublin Conservative Registration Society, Invitation to meeting of loyalists, Feb. 1886, (N.L.I., South Dublin Election 1885 scrapbook, MS5946).

¹⁰⁵ *Drogheda Conservative*, 19 Sept. 1884, 9, 16 & 23 Jan. 1885.

¹⁰⁶ *Drogheda Conservative*, 27 Mar. & 1 May 1885, Church of Ireland vestry minute book for Swords parish, 27 Apr. 1886, (RCB library).

Liberal party. The bill was defeated by 341 votes to 311 in the House of Commons in June, with ninety-three Liberal M.P.s voting against the government.¹⁰⁷ The resulting general election saw the Conservatives returned to government. Not alone was the dream of Home Rule over for the present, but the Parnellites were now wedded to the Liberals with an organised Conservative-Unionist opposition to any future Home Rule.

A disappointed Parnell became more withdrawn from public life, undecided on the Liberal alliance, and less sympathetic to the agrarian militancy of his colleagues and the Plan of Campaign. Political momentum and support declined. In May 1887, the *Drogheda Independent* reported the frustrations of Balrothery guardian Christopher McGlew and dispensary committee member Richard McCabe at a lack of support for the Balbriggan I.N.L. branch, with McCabe wanting to publish the subscription list.¹⁰⁸ When the movement split over Parnell's fitness to lead, Fingal, like Dublin city, largely remained loyal to the leader, influenced by Kettle and Clancy.

Balbriggan did not. The editor of the *Drogheda Independent* supported the Irish National Federation (I.N.F.), the anti-Parnellite breakaway, founded in March 1891. Balbriggan branch held its first meeting in June with guardians Patrick McCabe and mill owner Charles Gallen prominent.¹⁰⁹ Andrew Kettle, while loyal to Parnell, tried to maintain a neutral position between the factions. Parnell persuaded a reluctant Kettle to run as the Parnellite candidate in the Carlow by-election in the summer of 1891, but he lost a bitter contest by a crushing margin of 2,216 votes local merchant John Hammond. Callanan described Kettle as 'a maverick agrarian radical who lacked in political weight' and outlined the ridicule he suffered during the campaign, for having the surname Kettle, 'the most unhappily named candidate in the history of Irish politics'.¹¹⁰ Kettle's strengths, as already described by this author lay in strategy and advocacy, not in the cut and thrust of campaign or parliamentary politics. Healy referred to him as 'Parnell's utensil', adding that 'when we are all done with these pots and kettles we will send them over to Brighton as a wedding present'. Parnell's

¹⁰⁷ T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin & F.J. Byrne (eds.) *A new history of Ireland viii: a chronology of Irish history to 1976*, p. 361. Joseph Chamberlain and George Trevelyan had already resigned from cabinet.

¹⁰⁸ *Drogheda Independent*, 7 May 1887.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 14 Mar. & 6 Jun. 1891.

¹¹⁰ Frank Callanan, *The Parnell split, 1890-91* (Cork, 1992) p. 117 & pp 129-30. The banging of kettles by women and children disrupted Kettle's open-air election meetings.

marriage to Katherine O'Shea on 25 June did not help Kettle's cause.¹¹¹ His experience, after a previous defeat in Cork, saw Kettle assume a background role in national politics, but exercise his influence and connections where he saw demand or opportunity. He returned to concentrate on the business of farming and local politics.¹¹² Parnell's departure was more permanent, as he died on 6 October 1891.

Although not a close confidant of Parnell, John Redmond emerged as the leading figure among the minority Parnellite faction.¹¹³ While he sought compromise between the factions, he attracted the antagonism of the competing factions. Balbriggan I.N.F. opposed Redmond's support of the land purchase and local government bills, declaring them as 'sham' and 'worthless measures', and ridiculed Parnell as 'a moral leper, loathsome to all pure minded men, an obstacle to the cause he had hitherto been honoured leader'.¹¹⁴ In 1892, the divisiveness of political activity in Fingal saw attempts to set up I.N.F. branches targeted by Parnellite supporters. Police had to intervene at Garristown in June to prevent a violent escalation between the factions.¹¹⁵ At the general election in July 1892, the I.N.F. ran prominent Dublin publican Joseph Mooney from Cabra, against sitting M.P. Clancy. The Redmond-Clancyite faction disrupted several election meetings in Swords, Donabate and Skerries. The pro-Mooney *Drogheda Independent* reported the presence of 'certain' P.L.G.s during the disruption or their alleged active involvement.¹¹⁶

Unionists saw an opportunity to exploit these acrimonious divisions and ran Edward Hamilton Woods. Fellow guardian Thomas Plunkett, at a meeting at Malahide, endorsed his candidature as Unionist but not Orange. Col Forster compared the progressive benefits of the last six years of Conservative government to the

¹¹¹ Paul Bew, *Enigma: A new life of Charles Stewart Parnell* (Dublin, 2011), p. 177.

¹¹² Kettle ran in the Cork County constituency in the 1880 general election, at Parnell's request, but faced local opposition from the outset as an outsider, orchestrated in part by a number of local priests, despite support from tenant farmers and townspeople.

¹¹³ Michael Laffan, 'Redmond, John Edward', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography*. (Cambridge, 2009).

¹¹⁴ *Drogheda Independent*, 27 Feb. 1892.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 18 June 1892.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 25 June 1892, *Freeman's Journal*, 30 June 1892. Andrew Kettle is alleged to have been behind the disruption with Christopher Friery, Clancy's election agent, and solicitor to Balrothery P.L.U.

limitations of a federal Home Rule.¹¹⁷ Woods was president of the local constituency association of the Irish Unionist Alliance, which succeeded the I.L.P.U. in 1891. Following the electoral defeats in Dublin and throughout the county in 1885, the Unionist polity became focussed on reorganising itself against Home Rule in any form and expanded its connections with British anti-Home Rule constituencies as a means of maximising any such vote at Westminster. Its ties with the broader loyalist community indicates how organised Dublin Unionism had become, and it worked closely with ladies' organisations and committees to 'unite bonds of intelligence and sympathy' with English constituencies who had small Conservative majorities. E.H. Woods' wife gave support to the Chesterfield constituency, while Lady Victoria Hamilton served on a number of reception committees associated with the major meetings.¹¹⁸ The attendance at the Unionist Convention of Leinster, Munster and Connacht, held at Leinster Hall Dublin in June 1892 was so large that they needed a second hall to take the overflow. It doubled as a great election rally, following the recent Ulster Convention in Belfast, where 12,000 had attended in opposition to Home Rule.¹¹⁹ Ion Trant Hamilton, former president of the I.L.P.U., was unable to attend. Although no longer an M.P., he was now vice-president of the Irish Unionist Alliance Fund, chair of the Dublin branch of the Irish Landowners Convention, a privy councillor and lord lieutenant of the county. He was the architect of the election of Unionist candidate Sir Horace Plunkett in Dublin County South in 1892.¹²⁰ Clancy retained his seat by 1,095 votes beating Woods into third place.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ *Irish Times*, 13 July 1892.

¹¹⁸ *Annual reports 1891-1900*, (P.R.O.N.I., Irish Unionist Alliance, D989 A/7/2). Its annual meeting in 1893 included addresses from a wide spectrum of Unionist society, including the Dublin Chamber of Commerce, T.C.D., the Conservative Club, the Conservative Workingman's Club, the Constitutional club, the Liberal Union of Ireland, the Primrose League, a number of city and county lodges of the Grand Orange Lodge, the county registration associations and the Irish Landowners Convention.

¹¹⁹ *Unionist Convention for the provinces of Leinster, Munster & Connaught - Report of Proceedings, Lists of Committees, Delegates, etc.* (Dublin, 1892). Father and son J.C. and R. F. Colvill, flour merchants and prominent businessmen, of Coolock House, Raheny and Artane respectively, were on the executive committee. Henry A. Hamilton, I. T. Hamilton, George Brooke, Somerton, the earl of Howth, Col Hartley, Clonsilla, Col Lindsay, Glasnevin and Sir Roger Palmer were listed on the general committee. The Balrothery ex-officio guardians Plunkett, E.H. Woods, Hussey, Hely-Hutchinson, Lewis Whyte, Macartney Filgate, Perrin, Hamlet, Deane, Whyte, Forster and Warren St Leger Woods all attended.

¹²⁰ *Irish Times*, 2 Dec. 1887, 1 Apr. 1891, 3 Mar. 1892, 17 Mar. 1893 & 21 Dec. 1894, *Dublin Gazette*, (Dublin, 1892), p. 978, in 'Lieutenants and lords-lieutenants (Ireland) from 1831: a provisional list compiled by J. C. Sainty, September 2005', online at <https://archive.ph/UAUYv> accessed 19 Jun. 2021.

¹²¹ Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978), p. 348.

The election increased the number of Liberal seats but with no overall majority Salisbury remained as prime minister until a lost vote in August saw Gladstone installed for a fourth term. The prospect of Home Rule again energised the Unionist community in Fingal, followed by protest meetings and petitions.¹²² A coordinated Anglican clerical response confirmed their parishioners' staunch opposition.¹²³ The vicar of Swords, Revd Twigg, regarded it as 'insane, unjust and ruinous to the country'.¹²⁴ Holmpatrick parish adopted a more neutral position, possibly reflecting an acknowledgement of the mixed social, religious, and political balance within its parish around the town of Skerries: 'that mindful of the recommendation of the general synod their vestry was not sufficiently representative of the parish to take any action on the matter'.¹²⁵ It is notable that the resolution was passed in the absence of the senior and more political vestrymen of that parish: Ion Trant Hamilton, E. H. Woods and H. A. Hamilton. Colonel Forster and Thomas Plunkett signed the Catholic Petition against Home Rule.¹²⁶ The I.U.A. co-opted distillers John and Andrew Jameson onto its executive to strengthen financial management during the crisis, while Lords Iveagh and Ardilaun, of the Guinness brewing dynasty pledged £9,000 over three years, reflecting the changing influence and financial support in Dublin Unionism from landed interests to that of business.¹²⁷ Introduced in February 1893, the Home Rule bill passed its third reading in the House of Commons in September by 301 to 267 votes but was defeated in the House of Lords the following week by 419 votes to 41.¹²⁸ The campaigning around the Home Rule bill further polarised Irish politics into those for and against, with little middle ground. Its defeat hastened the political departure of Gladstone, and marked an end to Liberal engagement with Home Rule, as the new prime minister, Lord Rosebery, confirmed his lack of intention in that direction.¹²⁹

¹²² *Irish Times*, 15 Apr. 1893. The north County Unionist Registration Association presented a petition of 3,900 names.

¹²³ *Drogheda Conservative*, 11 Mar., 1 Apr. & 10 June 1893.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 11 Mar. 1893.

¹²⁵ Church of Ireland vestry book of Holmpatrick parish, 6 Apr. 1893, (R.C.B. library).

¹²⁶ *Irish Times*, 24 Mar. 1893.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 4 Mar. & 4 July 1893. Ion Trant Hamilton pledged £150 in comparison, a significant contribution but dwarfed by that of the business sector

¹²⁸ T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin & F.J. Byrne (eds.) *A new history of Ireland viii: A chronology of Irish history to 1976*, p. 369.

¹²⁹ Lord Rosebery's reply to the Queen's speech, *H.L. Deb 12 March 1894 vol. 22 cc4-3*, online at <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1894/mar/12/address-in-answer-to-her-majestys-most> accessed 9 Apr. 2018.

Ion Trant Hamilton, Baron Holmpatrick, died in 1898, less than a year after his elevation to the peerage that he had yearned for all his life but had little time to enjoy.¹³⁰ One obituary described him as an ‘uncompromising Conservative’.¹³¹ The system of patronage and privilege, which he and his class had embraced, perpetuated, and fought to maintain, locally and nationally, was crumbling. The uncompromising conservatism of the landed class he represented had administered an unsustainable system of government and land tenure. Legislative changes around 1870 alerted the Protestant landed class to their predicament as much as it gave confidence to the Catholic tenantry that progress was possible. The economic conditions of the late 1870s accelerated the opportunity for a reconfiguration of alliances that combined the issues of land and nationalism in an emerging Irish identity, countered by the defensive reorganisation of the Conservative Protestant landed class, which Home Rule transformed into Unionism.

The ‘habits of mind and action’ created by the Land War continued onto the national question, turning the political arena at both national and local level into a ‘class riven, confrontational and sectarian’ political field.¹³² The divisions in Irish society narrowed into a bipartite polity of nationalists and Unionists, and came to characterise most political discourse.

Winners, losers and unanswered questions: The Wyndham Land Act and its aftermath

The continuing plight of uneconomic smallholders in the congested West of Ireland prompted a revival of anti-landlord and anti-grazier agitation and the formation of the United Irish League in 1898 by William O’Brien. Bull maintains that O’Brien intended to use the new organisation to unify the factions in the I.P.P., and pursue unresolved issues in the land question through a popular, grassroots extra parliamentary movement. O’Brien called for the redistribution of untenanted lands,

¹³⁰ Diamond jubilee honours, announced 22 June 1897, *London Gazette*, 14 Mar. 1898; Will of Ion Trant Holmpatrick, 1898, N.A.I., online at http://www.willcalendars.nationalarchives.ie/reels/cwa/005014910/005014910_00379.pdf; letter from Hamilton to Lord Belmore, 11 Sept. 1866, requesting support for his elevation to the peerage, (P.R.O.N.I., *Belmore papers*, D3007/J/15). The executors to his estate of £27,578 were George Brooke of Somerton and George Fowler, his land agent, Kells, Co. Meath, both part of his elite network.

¹³¹ *Kildare Observer*, 12 Mar. 1898.

¹³² Paul Bew, *Ireland: The politics of enmity, 1789-2006* (Oxford, 2007) p. 576.

those which had no occupier or family living on them, largely consolidated from the holdings of evicted tenants and let at short-term leases to graziers, at rates beyond the reach of small farmers. As untenanted lands, they avoided the fair rent provisions of the 1881 legislation.¹³³ The rapid growth of the U.I.L. and its success in fielding candidates in the 1899 local government elections, combined with its democratic branch structure, marked it out as a threat to the I.P.P., who reunited under John Redmond in 1900.¹³⁴ The U.I.L. was soon absorbed into the national movement as its grassroots organisation, where the influence of grazier interests thwarted O'Brien's agrarian objectives. Thus, he embraced the opportunity to engage with a landowner initiative, led by Lord Dunraven, to resolve the land issue from both of their perspectives. A land conference in 1902 produced recommendations that formed the basis for the Wyndham Land Act, 1903.¹³⁵ This addressed the shortcomings of the dual ownership dilemma and established peasant proprietorship as an irreversible principle. It provided loan funding for tenant purchase at annuity repayments lower than rental levels, payable over a term of sixty-eight and a half years, which made purchase viable and attractive to tenants and full payment in cash to landlords, with a twelve per cent cash bonus.¹³⁶ Landlords could sell their demesne holdings and repurchase on the same terms as their tenants, effectively on a low interest loan. The land purchase acts between 1870 and 1896 had facilitated less than one in seven occupiers out of 545,000 acquiring their holdings prior to 1903. This act, and its successors, advanced £77.3 million to 124,000 tenants to purchase 7.3 million acres.¹³⁷ Patrick John Cosgrave concluded that the Wyndham Act was not the final solution to the land question that many then and later claimed. It effectively bailed out an ailing landlord class and provided strong farmers with the social status and

¹³³ Philip Bull, *Land, politics & nationalism: a study of the Irish land question* (Dublin, 1996) pp 109-15; See also Fergus Campbell, 'Irish politics and the making of the Wyndham Land Act, 1901–03', in *The Historical Journal*, 45, (2002), pp 755–73.

¹³⁴ Patrick Maume, *The long gestation: Irish nationalist life 1891–1918*, (Dublin, 1999), p. 31; Tom Garvin, *The evolution of Irish nationalist politics*, (Dublin, 1981) p.91.

¹³⁵ *Irish Land Act, 1903*, (3 Edw. VII, c. 37), known as the Wyndham Act, after George Wyndham, the Conservative chief secretary for Ireland; Paul Bew, *Conflict and conciliation in Ireland, 1890–1910: Parnellites and radical agrarians* (Oxford 1987), pp 94-95.

¹³⁶ Patrick John Cosgrave, 'The Wyndham land act, 1903: the final solution to the Irish land question?' (Ph.D. thesis, N.U.I., Maynooth, 2008), pp 35-38. Cosgrave's work gives a comprehensive account of the origins and consequence of the act; Philip Bull, *Land Politics and nationalism: A study of the Irish land question* (Dublin, 1996), pp 153-8.

¹³⁷ *Report of the estates commissioners for the year ending 31 Mar. 1920 and for the period from 1 Nov. 1903, to 31 Mar. 1920* [Cmd.1150] H.C., 1921, xiv, 661; see also Philip Bull, 'The significance of the nationalist response to the Irish Land Act of 1903', in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxvi, 111 (1993), pp 283–305.

ownership they aspired to, at lower repayments than the pertaining rents, but it left unresolved the related problems of evicted tenants, those with uneconomic holdings, and made no provision for agricultural labourers.¹³⁸ This was especially pertinent in Fingal with its higher reliance on tillage. It ignored the landless class in a landed society.

The nationalist political elite in Fingal quickly assumed an authoritative position in negotiations on behalf of tenants seeking to purchase their holdings. For example, the U.I.L. hosted a meeting at Swords in October 1903 where J.J. Clancy and Dublin County Council chairman P.J. O'Neill encouraged tenants to organise themselves and approach their landlords to negotiate the purchase of their holdings.¹³⁹ O'Neill advised tenants to work collectively, but 'not be too hasty in rushing into bargains' as the burdens of repayment would pass on to future generations. Clancy gave the act a guarded welcome, writing to Thomas McLean of the Swords branch of the County Dublin Labourers' Association, admitting that the act had neglected the housing needs of agricultural labourers. He added, with no doubt an eye on future votes that the provision of labourers' cottages was only of value if the labourers also had sufficient work. This would only occur, he stressed, when self-government through Home Rule happened.¹⁴⁰

In September 1904, O'Neill chaired a meeting of fifty tenants on the Talbot estate at Malahide. It is worth noting that the tenants voted at the outset to have the press present for the full proceedings. Talbot offered different purchase prices for different categories of tenants, depending on the length and nature of the tenancy, but the tenants deemed this unfair. Following concessions from Talbot, the only outstanding issues related to sporting rights, the position of evicted tenants, and status of current rents in the purchase price. O'Neill dismissed comparisons with past offers and commended Talbot's fairness. All but two tenants voted to accept the arrangement, pending the reinstatement of three evicted tenants.¹⁴¹ Talbot refused to reinstate, and the sale did not proceed. It was five years before those evicted made a claim under

¹³⁸ Patrick John Cosgrave, 'The Wyndham land act, 1903: the final solution to the Irish land question?' (PhD thesis, N.U.I., Maynooth, 2008), pp 3 -7.

¹³⁹ *Drogheda Independent*, 17 Oct. 1903.

¹⁴⁰ *Drogheda Conservative*, 24 Oct. 1903.

¹⁴¹ *Drogheda Argus and Leinster Journal*, 03 Sept. 1904.

the Evicted Tenants (Ireland) Act, 1907, and were allocated land elsewhere, but not on Talbot lands.¹⁴²

Demand for purchase was such that the processing of applications was slow and further funding needed. By March 1906, the Estates Commissioners, set up to administer the sales under the act, had purchased only two estates for sale in the Balrothery rural district area. The delays contributed to an increase in the price of 'conacre' or short term leases, often on untenanted lands, as landlords sought to maximise their income in the interim, and exacerbated tensions where such holdings existed. A 1906 parliamentary return showed that 10,011 acres, or twelve per cent of the land in the Balrothery rural district area was untenanted or demesne land. For instance, the brothers Edward Hamilton and Warren St Leger Woods, extensive graziers as well as landlords, held over a thousand acres demesne and untenanted land between them.¹⁴³ Non-residential grazing rentals provided no employment at a time when many were seeking work and thus attracted the attention of smallholders and labourers alike. Westmeath M.P., Laurence Ginnell encouraged participation in what became known as the ranch war from 1906, a campaign of agrarian protest directed against graziers across the midlands and it extended to the northwest part of Fingal, on the Meath border. There were 2,910 acres of untenanted land in the electoral districts of Balcadden, Hollywood, Clonmethan and Garristown in that area.¹⁴⁴ Ginnell advocated cattle-drives, scattering or removing cattle herds, and criticised the influence of large graziers in the U.I.L. and local politics.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² *Return prepared pursuant to section 3 of the Evicted Tenants (Ireland) Act, 1907, giving particulars of all cases in which an evicted tenant (or a person nominated by the estates commissioners to be the personal representative of a deceased evicted tenant) has been, with the assistance of the estates commissioners, reinstated, either by the landlord or by the estates commissioners, as a purchaser of his or his predecessor's former holding or part thereof, or provided with a new parcel of land under the land purchase acts, during the quarter ended 31 Mar. 1909, H.C. 1909, Cd. 4761, lxxiii.795 73, & year ended 31 Dec. 1912, H.C., 1913, Cd. 6746, iii.11, 53,*

¹⁴³ *Untenanted lands (Ireland), return of untenanted lands in rural districts, distinguishing demesnes on which there is a mansion, showing: (1) rural district and electoral division; (2) townland; (3) area in statute acres; (4) valuation (Poor Law); (5) names of occupiers as in valuation lists, H.C., 1906, 250, c.177, 100.* Women owned two of the largest holdings, Lady Holmpatrick with 759 acres and Mary Aungier, with 643 acres at Garristown.

¹⁴⁴ *Untenanted lands (Ireland), return of untenanted lands in rural districts, distinguishing demesnes on which there is a mansion, showing: (1) rural district and electoral division; (2) townland; (3) area in statute acres; (4) valuation (Poor Law); (5) names of occupiers as in valuation lists, H.C., 1906, 250, c.177, 100.*

¹⁴⁵ Pauric J. Dempsey, Shaun Boylan, 'Ginnell, Laurence', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

By 1909, growing U.I.L. calls for the sale of untenanted lands and the reinstatement of evicted tenants were politically awkward for some.¹⁴⁶ In November, Andrew Mooney at Garristown exhorted farmers to avoid untenanted leases, to force the owners to sell.¹⁴⁷ Garristown had 1,141 acres of untenanted land in 1906, including 643 acres let by Mary Aungier.¹⁴⁸ At Swords in April 1910, Thomas McMahon, local U.I.L. branch president used the language of the past, referring to graziers from outside the area as ‘planters and emergency men’. J.J. Clancy was more restrained, stating that they could not exclude ‘all’ other Irishmen from a livelihood, or close their counties to others. He was more concerned with the lack of political activity in Fingal, citing poor organisation as the reason for Dublin being ‘a dumping ground for land grabbers from everywhere’. Described by the *Drogheda Independent* as the largest meeting in years, it doubled as an election meeting, with the usual motions supporting Home Rule and Redmond.¹⁴⁹ It is not difficult to draw the conclusion that a level of heightened agitation was stoked in the circumstance, as according to police reports the summer of 1910 was peaceful in Fingal with ‘little political activity and a good harvest, the usual branches of nationalist sentiment meeting irregularly’.¹⁵⁰ This was Bull’s metaphor in practice, the land and national questions competing while sustaining each other.

A subsequent meeting the same month at Swords illustrates how local politicians involved themselves in the land sales process. R.J. Rooney, chairman of Balrothery rural district council, spoke at the meeting ahead of the sale of the 919-acre Digby Langtry estate in Oldtown. He held 168 acres nearby and lamented the general local disinterest, warning that outsiders would get the best land when the estate came up for sale. They could organise, or ‘give it to Dempsey from Ashbourne’, referencing an interested Meath grazier.¹⁵¹ He told of the four-year struggle on the Rooney estate at Garristown, who were no relations, where tenant agitation included digging up

¹⁴⁶ *Irish Times*, 8 Mar. 1909; *Drogheda Argus*, 23 Oct. 1909.

¹⁴⁷ *Drogheda Independent*, 27 Nov. 1909.

¹⁴⁸ *Untenanted lands (Ireland), return of untenanted lands in rural districts, distinguishing demesnes on which there is a mansion, showing: (1) rural district and electoral division; (2) townland; (3) area in statute acres; (4) valuation (Poor Law); (5) names of occupiers as in valuation lists*, H.C., 1906, 250, c.177, 100.

¹⁴⁹ *Irish Times & Drogheda Independent* 16 Apr. 1910.

¹⁵⁰ R.I.C. Inspector General and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports, Jan. – Dec. 1910, (N.A.I., *The British in Ireland*, CO 904/80-82 & 86, POS 8331-3).

¹⁵¹ *Drogheda Independent*, 30 Apr. 1910.

fields, cattle drives and an empty open grave dug on one farm, with a warning note used to intimidate outsiders. This bitter struggle, which divided the locality, was as much about the resettlement of outside-evicted tenants as it was about graziers looking for land. The Rooney family sold the 238 acres estate, but tried to retain 25 acres for one of their sons.¹⁵² The North Dublin executive of the U.I.L. tried to get involved in the sale of the Digby Langtry estate. There were pre-existing tensions with the current owner. When the unmarried William Lloyd Digby died in 1891, the estate had passed to a second cousin, George Digby Langtry, a shipping owner and merchant in Liverpool. Langtry had disputed a later will that benefitted some of the tenants for their care of Digby at the time of his death. He also objected to some of the existing leases pending the resolution of the will and later let the demesne farm of 180 acres on conacre.¹⁵³ The chairman of the executive P.J. Kettle, failing to secure a meeting with Estates Commissioners, complained that they were refusing to answer his letters, but according to R.J. Rooney there were no issues among the ten tenants who had applied to purchase.¹⁵⁴ In February 1912, J.J. Clancy intervened with the local U.I.L. to desist from objecting to grazier leases until the sales process was complete. By the end of 1912, when the sale was complete, police reported local satisfaction with the outcome.¹⁵⁵ The sales were completed in 1915. The priority of the motions at these local meetings is informative, demonstrating the U.I.L. and I.P.P. attempts to control the agenda of any mass activity, exploit any discontent, and take credit for any benefits realised. Motions passed initially called for Home Rule and support for Redmond, before condemning police activity and only then calling for untenanted lands for local tenants, while taunting the police surveillance at the meetings.

Records show the politically active in Fingal to the fore in purchasing their holdings. P. J. and John Kettle purchased 138 acres at Swords in 1908, as did district

¹⁵² *Wicklow Newsletter*, 21 Dec. 1907, *Drogheda Independent*, 22 & 28 Jan., 26 Feb. 1910 & 10 June 1911.

¹⁵³ *Belfast Newsletter*, 15 & 22 Dec. 1891; *Freeman's Journal*, 3 Feb. 1892 & *Drogheda Independent*, 22 June 1907; Wills of William Lloyd Digby, 1891, N.A.I., online at http://www.willcalendars.nationalarchives.ie/reels/cwa/005014905/005014905_00102.pdf and http://www.willcalendars.nationalarchives.ie/reels/cwa/005014905/005014905_00102.pdf, accessed 6 Feb. 2022.

¹⁵⁴ *Evening Herald*, 28 Nov. 1912 & *Freeman's Journal*, 13 Dec. 1912.

¹⁵⁵ R.I.C. Inspector General and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports, Jan. – Dec. 1910, Feb. 1911 & Dec 1912, (N.A.I., *The British in Ireland* CO 904/80-82, POS 8331-3, CO 904/86, POS 8337 & CO 904/88, POS 8339); *Drogheda Independent*, 17 June 1911.

councillors Nicholas Long and Patrick Cuffe.¹⁵⁶ The O'Neill family bought 162 acres in 1910. In Balbriggan, when the marquess of Lansdowne sold part of his Bremore estate, T.W. Hamlet purchased 241 acres and Thomas and William Cumisky bought 179 acres.¹⁵⁷ The status of landownership was as important as merchant wealth for the two coal and construction merchants. By the end of March 1911, 178 landlords in County Dublin had applied under the land purchase acts to sell 1,732 holdings with a purchase value of £1,670,810.¹⁵⁸ The census of the same year returned 6,643 agricultural holdings in County Dublin, indicating that just over a quarter of the holdings were available for purchase.¹⁵⁹ Under the terms of the Wyndham and subsequent British legislation prior to the Hogan Land Act of 1923, 2,124 holdings were sold in County Dublin, covering 72,731 acres valued at £2,140,733.¹⁶⁰ This is just under a third (32%) of all the land in County Dublin outside of the borough area. Only one third of the estates in Fingal greater than 500 acres appear in land purchase records or change of occupant under land purchase based on valuation office records. If the landowner did not wish to sell, there was no compulsion to do so. Fingal land was good quality, tenurial relationships generally good and with many landlords themselves engaged in farming, seemingly no great desire to sell. The objectives of the Wyndham Act were to facilitate land purchase and relieve congestion, and although the implementation of the act suffered delays due to being oversubscribed, organisationally under resourced and insufficiently funded, it commenced the transformation of Irish society through the transfer of land ownership in Ireland from landlord to tenant.

Land purchase was not the only concern of farmers in Fingal. Outside of the political U.I.L., there were representative alternatives for farmers that offered tangible benefits for their energies. The North County Dublin Farmers Association formed in 1905 with P.J. Kettle as president and fifty-three members to represent the collective

¹⁵⁶ *Return of advances made under the Irish land act, 1903*, July 1908, H.C., 1908, [Cd. 4490] p. 400; Aug.-Oct. 1909, H.C., 1908, [Cd. 5402] p. 477; Nov. 1910, H.C., 1912-13, [Cd. 6028-29, 6096, 6137] p. 887.

¹⁵⁷ Revision books, Balrothery East, 1855-1948, (Valuation Office, Dublin).

¹⁵⁸ *Report of the estates commissioners for the year ending 31 Mar. 1911 and for the period from 1 Nov. 1903, to 31 Mar. 1911* [Cd.5888] H.C., 1911, xxix, 511.

¹⁵⁹ *Census of Ireland, 1911, General report, with tables and appendix*, H.C. 1912-13, [Cd. 6663] cxviii.1, 118, p. 324, table 150.

¹⁶⁰ *Report of the Irish Land Commissioners for the year from 1 Apr. 1948 to 31 Mar 1949 and for the period ended 31 Mar. 1949* (Dublin, 1949).

interests of farmers of different political and religious backgrounds, although its committee contained many U.I.L. officers, including Michael Dunne and Joseph Christie. Its inspiration was the successful Irish Cattle Traders and Stockowners Association, whose president was butcher William Field M.P.¹⁶¹ Some of their activities and campaign serve to illustrate. Soon after their formation, P.J. Kettle met with Dublin Corporation to discuss a scheme to dispose of manure waste from the city, but concerns about transport costs involved prevented an agreement. In the agricultural trade, paying customers, whether for livestock, fodder or labour, were always welcome, no matter what their background. The economic significance of Lusk military remount depot was underlined by the number of regiments there in the summer of 1905, when the 11th and 19th Hussars, 6th Inniskilling Dragoons, 3rd Dragoon Guards, the Royal Horse Artillery and Army Service Corps, were all stationed there for cavalry manoeuvres and equine replenishment.¹⁶² A couple of years' later 2,000 men and 1,500 horses were involved in summer training there.¹⁶³ When such business was threatened, the response of nationalist elites was telling, highlighting a reality that often forgotten in the narrative of the journey to Irish independence. In August 1906, a cattle trade deputation of nationalist minded Irish M.P.s met with the secretary for war to protest at the British Army purchasing American instead of Irish meat. P.J. O'Neill, representing the General Council of County Councils, and Dublin County Council, ridiculed the notion that foreign meat was as good as the home produced product, adding that there must be a reason why it was so cheap. Protests in support of this trade attracted large numbers at the Dublin horse show later in the month.¹⁶⁴

The unanswered land question: the agricultural labour issue

Dan Bradley has highlighted some of the difficulties in defining the rural labourer as some smallholders described themselves as labourers, whilst some labourers with small plots thought of themselves as farmers. Whichever, the rise in their standard of

¹⁶¹ *Drogheda Conservative*, 8 Jul. 1905. Edward H. Woods, Milverton, Skerries was a prominent member and a champion livestock breeder.

¹⁶² *Drogheda Advertiser*, 12 July 1905.

¹⁶³ *Drogheda Conservative*, 6 July 1907.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 4 Aug. & 1 Sept. 1906. The delegation included Field and Lorcan Sherlock, a city councillor and future Lord Mayor of Dublin.

living lagged behind the rise in their expectations.¹⁶⁵ As the tenant farmer turned owner, the labourer remained landless, powerless but to look on as his farming neighbour's lot appeared to improve. Following the Wyndham Land Act in 1903, the 'land question' was not dead but no longer the only question in Irish politics. The act had raised expectations for agricultural labourers that there would be land for them too. The labourer had long persevered with inadequate wages and housing, a lack of access to land, and a sense of social inadequacy as 'landless men', where community status was linked with land ownership or leasehold.¹⁶⁶ Clear has concluded that farmers who were exposed to agricultural price variances maintained their newfound prosperity 'by not paying too much in wages'.¹⁶⁷ Utilising family labour and part payment in non-monetary forms of excess produce, accommodation or provision of small plots, kept overall wages down. A series of labourers' acts since 1883 alleviated housing difficulties to an extent, with labourers' cottages erected on farms, through the poor law unions and rented to labourers.¹⁶⁸ Whilst there was often resistance from landlords, ratepayers and farmers, this represented some improvement and also conferred significant local influence on the guardians making these decisions.¹⁶⁹ National and local politicians ensured that the issue remained about land rather than working and living conditions. Inadequate welfare provision, perennially low remuneration, the dependency effect of part payment by produce, and fears of decreasing employment prospects due to mechanisation made the farm labourers amenable to outside intervention and leadership.

Local labourers' action or defence groups were absorbed or eclipsed by those of the farmers, or exploited by opportunistic politicians seeking to control their agitation or seek association with their cause for electoral purposes. For example, the grand juror and landowner Thomas Aungier courted the labour vote in Swords in the local elections in 1899. In 1898, the franchise was extended under local government reforms to all occupiers with twelve months residence in the same dwelling, which

¹⁶⁵ Dan Bradley, *Farm labourers: Irish struggle 1900-1976* (Belfast, 1988), pp 7-8; W. E. Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in mid-Victorian Ireland* (Oxford, 1994), p. 211.

¹⁶⁶ Virginia Crossman, *Politics, pauperism and power in late nineteenth century Ireland* (Manchester, 2006), p. 174.

¹⁶⁷ Catriona Clear, *Social change and everyday life in Ireland 1850-1922* (Manchester, 2007), pp 18-19.

¹⁶⁸ Enda McKay, 'The Housing of the Working Classes 1883-1916', in *Saothar*, xvii, 1992 pp. 27-38.

¹⁶⁹ Padraic Kenna, 'Outline of the Development of the Irish Housing System', in *Housing law, rights and policy* (Dublin, 2011), p. 31.

gave some labourers the vote for the first time.¹⁷⁰ In 1902, Swords Labourers Defence Association, led by Thomas McLean, who had supported Aungier, threatened to run candidates in the local elections. McLean took the district councils to task and P.J. Kettle in particular, alleging favouritism in the allocation of labourers' cottages after two councillors had undertaken to support different applications for the same cottage.¹⁷¹ The unsuccessful applicant was a member of the labourers association. Bew states that the labourers often had no alternative to the U.I.L.¹⁷²

Calls for town housing reform ran parallel to those of land for the landless labourer. The Labourers (Ireland) Act, 1906 (6 Edw. VII, c. 37), and the Housing of the Working Classes (Ireland) Act, 1908 (8 Edw. VII, c. 61), also known as the Clancy Act, after its sponsor J.J. Clancy, were modest improvements. They provided council funding for house construction and rental, and loans for house purchase. M.P.s Clancy and William Field supported the labourers cause at mass meetings but by summer of 1907, their appearance on platforms at Malahide drew heckling from members of the North Dublin United Labour League, tired of the empty rhetoric. Denied an opportunity to speak, the new local Sinn Féin organisation intervened on the labourers' behalf and held a rival meeting afterwards. In 1908, Naul Labour Union publicly supported candidates who espoused the labourers' cause and helped Andrew Mooney top the rural council poll in Garristown.¹⁷³ In 1911, as rents increased, the Skerries Town Tenants League (T.T.L.) increased pressure on Lord Holmpatrick to sell to his tenants. There were reports of some tenants depositing night soil on the foreshore, in protest at the lack of privy sanitation and inadequate waste collections.¹⁷⁴ By July 330 of the 624 tenants in the town had joined, supported by the national secretary Coghlan Briscoe, who called for rent reductions and foreshore rights to seaweed and gravel. Local branch secretary, Patrick Matthews presented their case at the national convention in Dublin, which prompted a visit by

¹⁷⁰ Arlene Crampsie, 'Governmentality and locality: an historical geography of rural district councils in Ireland, 1898 – 1925', (Ph.D. thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 2008), pp 49-52; Neal Blewett, 'The franchise in the United Kingdom 1885-1918', in *Past & Present*, xxxii, (1965), pp. 27-56.

¹⁷¹ *Drogheda Independent*, 15 & 29 Mar.; 19 Apr. 1902.

¹⁷² Paul Bew, *Conflict and conciliation in Ireland, 1890–1910: Parnellites and radical agrarians* (Oxford 1987), p. 75.

¹⁷³ *Drogheda Independent*, 27 July 1907, 30 May & 6 June 1908.

¹⁷⁴ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 31 Aug. 1910; 5 Apr. & 24 May 1911. Night soil is the excreted contents of overnight chamber pots.

J.J. Clancy and an even larger meeting.¹⁷⁵ Clancy's support paid political dividends when a branch of the U.I.L. formed in Skerries in July 1912, with a committee almost identical to that of the T.T.L., another example of nationalist politicians moving quickly to subsume any local discontent into the wider Home Rule effort.¹⁷⁶ The tensions over Holmpatrick's resistance escalated with claims that his agent was ignoring correspondence from the tenants. In April 1913, when Mathews called for I.P.P support in Westminster on the issue, W.J. Derham insisted that 'it was too small a matter to be raised at Westminster, that Home Rule was paramount, to the exclusion of almost everything else'.¹⁷⁷ The town tenants were secondary, just as the labourers were, in the pursuit to secure self-government. The demands of the agricultural labourer that were not addressed by the partial solution to the land question would continue into independence. An opportunity for mobilisation came sooner than expected.

The 1913 Lockout in Dublin city started on 26 August when conductors and drivers of the Dublin United Tramway Company, owned by former Parnellite M.P., William Martin Murphy went on strike. They were members of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, and refused a demand from their employer to forswear union membership or face dismissal. The company then locked them out. By January 1914, the union had lost the battle, lacking the resources for a long campaign. At the same time, a farm labourer dispute in Fingal, over wages and conditions, was dragged into the larger dispute and thus prolonged, turning into a bitter struggle that exposed the unresolved labourers' issue from the time of the Land War.¹⁷⁸

During 1913 city-based organisers of Larkin's I.T.G.W.U. began recruiting members in the Fingal area on farms that directly supplied the Dublin markets, identifying and harnessing issues of discontent among the farm labouring class. At Balbriggan in May, Larkin told an audience that 'the harshness and misery of the agricultural labourer's lot greatly rivals in intensity the worst experiences of his inner-city colleague'.¹⁷⁹ The labourers went on strike for better pay and conditions in late July,

¹⁷⁵ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 22 July, 26 & 30 Aug. 1911.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 24 July 1912.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 4 June 1913.

¹⁷⁸ See Pdraig Yeates, *Lockout: Dublin 1913* (Dublin, 2001) for the definitive account of the city dispute.

¹⁷⁹ Eugene Coyle, 'Larkinism and the 1913 County Dublin farm labourers dispute' in *Dublin Historical Record*, lii, 2, (2005).

which threatened the harvest season on the tillage farms owned by the political elite, including those of P.J. and Joseph O'Neill at Kinsealy, Nicholas Long at Swords and the various Kettle farms around the north county. In a year that promised a bumper crop the strike had the potential to compromise expected profits. The County Dublin Farmers Association met in August and came to a negotiated agreement with the strikers for 17 shillings for a six and a half day week and to meet again on agreed prerequisites, or 'perks'.¹⁸⁰ However within a fortnight events in the city, on Bloody Sunday, 31 August 1913, escalated matters, turning the strike into a lockout and an industrial dispute into a political one, over union membership. It dragged on for the next six months.¹⁸¹ Employers' leader, William Martin Murphy called on his fellow employers and nationalist U.I.L. colleagues not to employ transport union labour and they responded as requested, abandoning the agreement, and refusing to employ union labour.

This bitter agrarian dispute, characterised by intimidation and tactics redolent of the agitation of the Land War, was part of the unresolved settlement of the land question. It was not just about the pay and working conditions of farm workers, but also about the position in society and the local economy of the rural labourer, the landless man bypassed by the land acts. Largely forgotten in local and labour history, this dispute is absent in the general historiography of the land struggle in Ireland.¹⁸² Class, agrarian and political issues all converged in north Dublin in 1913. The threat to the wealth and status of the farming and political elite in Fingal was met head on, led by the Kettle and O'Neill families. Nationalist and Unionist landowning and farming interests stood together. The estates of Cobbe at Donabate, Holmpatrick at

¹⁸⁰ *Irish Times*, 18 Aug. 1913. Prerequisites were also known as 'perks', non-monetary forms of remuneration such as farm produce, coal, lodging, and plots. James McGrane and P.J. Kettle led the farmers' delegation.

¹⁸¹ For an account of the farm labourers dispute see E. A. Coyle, 'Larkinism and the 1913 County Dublin farm labourers dispute' in *Dublin Historical Record*, lii, 2, (2005), pp. 176-190, and Gerard Hanley, 'Let the harvest go to blazes: farm labourers in north County Dublin and the 1913 lockout', (M.A. thesis, St. Patricks College, Drumcondra, 2014).

¹⁸² For additional reading on agricultural labourers, see David Fitzpatrick, 'Class, family and rural unrest in nineteenth-century Ireland', in P. J. Drudy (ed.), *Irish studies ii, Ireland: land, people and politics* (Cambridge, 1982), pp 37-75 & 'The disappearance of the Irish agricultural labourer, 1841-1912', in *Irish economic and social history*, vii (1980), pp 66-92. See also Padraig G. Lane, 'Agricultural labourers and the land question', in Carla King (ed.), *Famine, land and culture in Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), pp 101-15; John W. Boyle, 'A marginal figure: the Irish rural labourer', in Samuel Clark & James S. Donnelly Jr (eds.), *Irish peasants: violence and political unrest, 1780-1914* (Madison, 2003) & Fintan Lane, 'Rural labourers, social change and politics in late nineteenth-century Ireland' in Fintan Lane & Donal Ó Drisceoil (eds.), *Politics and the Irish working class, 1830-1945* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp 113-36.

Abbotstown, Talbot at Malahide and Woods at Milverton, Skerries received police protection.¹⁸³ Andrew Kettle, then almost eighty years old, veteran of the land struggle, coordinated the importation of 'free labour' to save the harvest, under police protection, bypassing union labour. Joseph O'Neill, chairman of the North Dublin R.D.C. instigated the eviction of strikers from labourers' cottages on his land, sanctioned by the landowning magistracy at the petty sessions.¹⁸⁴ He obtained seven further decrees in December as winter took hold, and refused to reinstate any strikers.¹⁸⁵

The farm proprietors of north Dublin in 1913 were organised and experienced, determined to protect their interests and capable of taking on the I.T.G.W.U. In some cases in the absence of available labour, the larger farmers themselves saved the harvest. Magistrate Christopher Dodd of Cloghran transported twenty 'gentlemen' farmers by motorcar to harvest sixteen acres of corn at Charles Kettle's farm at Artane. He was a son of Andrew Kettle and brother of former M.P. Thomas Kettle, whose sympathies with the city strikers caused strain within the family as the conflict developed. Their cousin, P. J. Kettle, had the help of neighbouring farmers to bring in his harvest, with some of his men who had returned to work in October. Farmers from Kinsealy, Swords, and Ballymun applied at Swords petty sessions for repossession of cottages where some of the magistrates had interests in the same locations, including Colonel Hely-Hutchinson, Colonel Forster, John Cuffe and Joseph Christie, a committee member of the County Dublin Farmers Association. Cuffe, a district councillor, reported boycotting and intimidation against both farmers and workers and their families, and the turning loose of horses and sheep.¹⁸⁶

During the dispute, strikers targeted Dublin County Council chairman, P.J. O'Neill's farm at Kinsealy, breaking windows at his steward's house after an altercation over the reinstatement of union members. A heavy police protection presence prevented an escalation, but the strikers opened the farm gates and released livestock including prize horses. Similar incidents occurred at one of the Kettle farms at Drynam as the dispute intensified and positions hardened. The dispute became personal and petty.

¹⁸³ E. A. Coyle, 'Larkinism and the 1913 County Dublin farm labourers dispute' in *Dublin Historical Record*, lii, 2, (2005) p. 184.

¹⁸⁴ *Irish Times*, 29 Sept., 23 Oct. 1913.

¹⁸⁵ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 10 Dec. 1913, & 21 Jan. 1914.

¹⁸⁶ *Drogheda Independent*, 27 Sept. & 4 Oct. 1913.

At Swords fair, a planned demonstration was frustrated when the strikers' band were refused access to their instruments in the band room on Swords Main Street, owned by the local U.I.L. The police surrounded the room until the crowd dispersed.¹⁸⁷ There was rioting at Swords in October and several suspicious burnings occurred in the locality. These were blamed on the strikers, after which the arrests of union leaders and agitators effectively crushed the strike, just as a cold and hungry winter began.¹⁸⁸ The rioting at Swords had been brewing since the start of the strike, due to the large number of idle farm labourers living in the town. Incidents of intimidation of 'scabs' increased, usually outside public houses serving drink to alleged strike-breakers. Following a meeting in the town on 8 October, at a house used by union officials nicknamed 'Liberty Hall', the strikers attempted to stop large herds of cattle and sheep passing through to Dublin. Police responded by baton charging the strikers and rioting followed, with considerable damage to properties in the town. Sporadic incidents followed on the second night, including attempts to damage properties in Kinsealy. Further arrests followed with convictions for rioting and intimidation. Frank Moss, one of the leaders, spent most of his incarceration on hunger strike in Mountjoy prison.¹⁸⁹ Michael Dunne, chairman of Balrothery R.D.C., complimented the *Irish Independent* for its 'strong stand against socialism', and lamented a weaker line taken by the *Freeman's Journal*.¹⁹⁰ Socialism, Larkinism, trade unionism and republican nationalism were emerging to compete with constitutional nationalism and militant Unionism. The burnings included the destruction of the large mansion at Brackenstown House, near Swords, owned by Captain O'Callaghan, unoccupied at the time, and thirty tons of hay at the Flower and McDonald saltworks at Balbriggan. Balrothery R.D.C. called for extra police to prevent arson attacks, while the I.T.G.W.U. declared at a public meeting in Swords that the Brackenstown fire had been the work of the police, and criticised the role of 'the public men of the district'.¹⁹¹ The fires, and the costs of resulting malicious injuries claims, led to a

¹⁸⁷ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 24 Sept. & 4 Oct. 1913. Interview with a 'prominent' member of the County Dublin Farmers Association. Although not named, this is most likely to be P.J. Kettle or Michael Dunne.

¹⁸⁸ Christopher Lee, 'The principal rallying-ground for the Larkinites – The Swords riots of 1913', online at <http://www.theirishstory.com/2013/07/15/the-principal-rallying-ground-for-the-larkinites-the-swords-riot-of-1913/> accessed 31 Aug. 2021.

¹⁸⁹ 'Frank Moss (of the Irish Transport Union) during his period in custody, Oct. 1913-Feb. 1914', (N.A.I., General Prisons Board files, G.P.B. /S.F.R.G./1/24).

¹⁹⁰ *Drogheda Independent*, 20 & 27 Sept. 1913.

¹⁹¹ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 29 Nov. 1913.

suspension of road works in January 1914, causing further distress to an already problematic unemployment situation.¹⁹² Police never ascertained the cause of the Brackenstown fire. By early November, except for some resistant pockets in Swords and Kinsealy, the dispute was over. The strikers' leaders were in prison and the harsh reality of a hungry winter broke their morale. Yet the leading members of the County Dublin Farmers Association continued to press their advantage, anxious to eliminate the Larkinite threat. Andrew Kettle at St. Margarets let out his 'team' of free labourers to work on adjoining farms, whilst they slept at his premises under a police guard. Farmers continued to repossess houses from strikers on their lands, including Nicholas Long of Swords, and Joseph O'Neill, while intimidation cases continued in court.¹⁹³ By the time Moss was released from prison in February 1914, the farmers had won. The poachers of the Land War had proven able gamekeepers in 1913.

Attempts were made to start a new labour union at Garristown, with U.I.L. support, at which Richard Rooney criticised the I.T.G.W.U. and its 'paid agitators' in Swords. Andrew Mooney warned that if labourers did not join this union then they would end up with 'a branch of Liberty Hall, with its annoying rancour, unemployment, misery and distress, such as had become the lot of the other parts of Dublin'.¹⁹⁴ A new independent labour union formed at Swords by January 1914, organised by farmer and publican Joseph Early, with local U.I.L. and C.D.F.A. cooperation. It held a ploughing match on John Kettle's Drynam farm, to thank those labourers who remained loyal to their employers during the strike. Mrs P.J. Kettle presented the prizes.¹⁹⁵ Such 'acceptable' representative organisations for workers had the support of the Catholic hierarchy, who warned of the dangers of socialism, syndicalism and interference from English trade unions. They called for conciliation boards to deal with labour grievances and housing problems.¹⁹⁶

This brought the farm labourer class effectively back to the place that they had inhabited before the strike, when in the absence of any union the U.I.L. controlled any potential agitation. The farmers had regained control. The dispute saw

¹⁹² *Drogheda Advertiser*, 17 Jan. 1914.

¹⁹³ *Irish Independent*, 11 Nov.; *Drogheda Independent*, 29 Nov. & *Donegal News*, 13 Dec. 1913

¹⁹⁴ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 26 Nov. 1913.

¹⁹⁵ *Weekly Irish Times*, 13 Dec. & *Irish Independent*, 17 Dec. 1913; *Drogheda Advertiser*, 21 Jan. 1914.

¹⁹⁶ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 28 Feb. 1914.

unprecedented mobilisation of labourers but ultimately their cause failed, and it would be almost a half century later with the effects of emigration on the labour market before the basic economics of supply and demand forced wages upwards. The dispute was a clash of self-interests where in the absence of protective legislation, the strong won out over the weak, the landed over the landless. Land, and its produce, was at its heart. The importance of land in the Irish psyche explains the depth of feeling and bitterness on both sides and may even be responsible for why the strike was forgotten in local memory. The legacy at local level caused a breakdown in relations, the rural workers returning weakened and defeated. The challenges of saving the harvest hastened the introduction of mechanised farming. Socialism and Larkinism were defeated and I.T.G.W.U. membership fell, replaced by representation more acceptable to the farmers. The County Dublin Farmers Association strengthened its organisation and in May elected the Malahide seed merchant, James Robertson, J.P., of the County Dublin employers committee, as its incoming president. The committee included the political elite at the forefront in the lockout dispute; P.J. Kettle, Michael Dunne and Joseph O'Neill, and landlords R. A. Butler and Elias Corbally.¹⁹⁷ Butler and Dunne were delegates a year later to the Irish Farmers Union, as both organisations grew closer.¹⁹⁸

Home Rule and the question of Ulster

The success of the Land Conference in 1902 encouraged further dialogue through the Irish Reform Association set up in 1904 to explore discretely the possibility of devolution for Ireland. When the discussions became public, they were condemned on both sides by Dillonite nationalists and Ulster Unionists.¹⁹⁹ The alarm in Ulster at such a re-emergence of the Home Rule issue, and the unpreparedness of Unionists prompted a greater concentration on Ulster Unionism as its priority, and the formation of the Ulster Unionist Council in 1905. A further initiative aimed at some level of devolved administration, the Irish Council Bill of 1907, also failed. Although it proposed the transfer of eight departments of the Irish administration to the control of a partly elected council, nationalists saw it as an inadequate substitute for Home Rule. The *Ne Temere* papal decree on mixed marriages in 1907 and the Irish

¹⁹⁷ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 6 May 1914.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3 Mar. 1915.

¹⁹⁹ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: War, peace and beyond* (2nd ed., Chichester, 2010) p. 152.

Universities Act in 1908 heightened Ulster Unionist fears of what life might be like under Catholic Home Rule. By 1910, Ulster and the rest of the country were on different paths.²⁰⁰ Fingal politics remained focussed on local issues, which will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

In April 1909, the Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George introduced the People's Budget, the keystone of which were new social welfare programmes funded by unprecedented taxes on the lands and incomes of Britain's wealthiest classes. It caused a constitutional crisis in November when the House of Lords rejected it and forced a general election. The result in January 1910 was the opportunity that Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party had been waiting a quarter of a century for. A hung parliament saw the balance of power revert to Irish nationalists at Westminster with a combined eighty-two seats. Asquith remained as prime minister with the support of Redmond's party. Ignored for years the I.P.P. now had a voice and renewed hope of Home Rule. J. J. Clancy returned unopposed for the Dublin County North constituency. U.I.L. meetings were the best attended in a number of years, with Thomas McMahon, Michael Dunne and P. J. Kettle announcing their continued support of Redmond.²⁰¹ Asquith called a second general election in December 1910 to strengthen his mandate to curtail the power of the House of Lords. It delivered an almost identical result and the I.P.P. still held the balance of power. Asquith promised Redmond that he would introduce a Home Rule bill in return for supporting the government, and did so in April 1912.²⁰² The reaction in Ulster was to mobilise and organise to resist Home Rule by whatever means necessary, which became progressively more militant.²⁰³ With the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force in January 1913, Ulster Unionists increased their fundraising, recruiting and drilling, to resist any implementation of home rule. The I.P.P. leadership continued to dismiss this opposition as bluff from Edward Carson, yet its threat was evident when

²⁰⁰ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: War, peace and beyond* (2nd ed., Chichester, 2010) pp 153-6.

²⁰¹ *Drogheda Independent*, 16 Apr. 1910.

²⁰² *The Parliament Act* (1 & 2 Geo. V, c.13) passed in August 1911 removed the House of Lords' power to in relation to budgets and restricted their power of veto over other bills to a two-year suspension.

²⁰³ See Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: War, peace and beyond* (2nd ed., Chichester, 2010) pp 223-35 for specific account of this period and by the same author for an overview of Unionism, 'Loyalists and Unionists', in Alvin Jackson (ed.), *Oxford handbook of modern Irish history* (Oxford, 2013).

a large shipment of over five hundred rifles addressed to Lord Farnham were seized at Dublin port in June, on the City of Dublin Steam Packet.²⁰⁴

Conclusion

The changed political landscape in Fingal between 1870 and 1914 reflected the shifts in power and influence that were happening across the country. The language and priorities of local politics changed, alternating between the land and national questions while the composition of local bodies passed through legislative and franchise reforms from landlord to tenant and Conservative-Unionist to nationalist control. Landlord and Unionist responses in Fingal were prompt and resolute, with its leaders playing senior roles in national opposition to the Land War and Home Rule. Land legislation produced winners and losers, particularly the class of strong farmers who benefitted at the eventual expense of landlords, while the labouring class was left behind. Parnellites gained control of and politicised Balrothery board of guardians before retreating in the 1890s, when local and land issues returned to prominence.

The first decade of the twentieth century began with hope and opportunity with a stake in local government for Fingal nationalists but more importantly the means to advance. Slow but steady implementation of land purchase delivered the strong farmer out of tenurial arrangements. Those neglected, the smallholders and labourers, remained as they were, and would bring their social and political issues into an independent Ireland. The nature of the labour dispute in 1913 highlighted unresolved class divisions, and the latent threat of organised labour. The political power brokers in local government were learning how to govern, for when the opportunity for national government came. They saw themselves as an integral part of the national political movement advance towards Home Rule. By 1912, with Home Rule in sight, Ireland was very much part of the union, more part of the system than not. The potentially explosive sequence of events from 1912, born of Ulster opposition to Home Rule, which continued to the outbreak of war in August 1914, brought greater local politicisation and division, within and without the local political elite circles. While Fingal did not play a prominent part in the Land War or Plan of Campaign,

²⁰⁴ Patrick Maume, *The long gestation: Irish nationalist life 1891–1918*, (Dublin, 1999), p. 129, *Drogheda Advertiser*, 14 June 1913.

some in Fingal, and Andrew Kettle, in particular, played important roles on the national stage, close to Butt and Parnell. The actions and words of nationalists in Fingal replicated and reflected Kettle's undoubted influence, as seen on local bodies such as the poor law board of guardians, later the district and county councils, and in representative organisations such as the County Dublin Farmers' Association.

Chapter 3

The politics of local government 1870-1914

The primary framework for examining the evolution of local politics in Fingal is the local government structure that developed from largely autonomous local bodies through a more centralised and connected network to an essential layer of national administration between 1870 and the First World War. By analysing political discourse and competition within these institutions, one can trace the evolution of local politics. This chapter will explore these developments through the personalities who held positions of influence and power, initially on the grand jury and board of guardians, and later on the new county and rural district councils after 1898. The most influential were obviously those who held the officer positions such as chairman, vice-chairman and deputy vice-chairman, the highest attendees and the most prolific contributors.

Particular attention will focus on the impact of the Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898, (61 & 62 Vic., c. 37) and its consequences for local politics in Fingal, highlighting how it transformed local administrative power, and how it was then used to further nationalist interests. The first elections and the first triennial term from 1899 to 1902 provide insights into ways in which local politics were revolutionised. The provisions of the Local Government Act facilitated a transfer of power hailed by Michael Davitt, nationalist politician and agrarian agitator, as the ‘greatest of all victories won by Irish forces’.¹ The benefits of progressive legislation and an embracing of the institutions of local government, particularly Dublin County Council, led to the emergence of a confident cohort of local politicians and administrators, throughout the country and in Fingal, who looked forward to their future as the governing elite when Home Rule would come.² In the meantime, up to 1914, the successful exercise of power at local level continued through the operation

¹ Michael Davitt, *The fall of feudalism* (London, 1904), p. 686.

² See Andrew Gailey, *Ireland and the death of kindness: the experience of constructive unionism 1890-1905* (Cork, 1987) on the effects of progressive legislation; Patrick Maume, *The long gestation: Irish nationalist life, 1891-1918* (Dublin 1999) and Senia Paseta, *Before the revolution: nationalism, social change and Ireland's Catholic elite, 1879-1922* (Cork, 1999) on the political cohort mentioned here.

of local administrative structures within the framework of the existing British system.

Politics and the poor law guardians 1870-1885: From local business to national politics

William Feingold described how throughout Ireland control of the boards of guardians transferred slowly from landlord to tenant farmer between the mid-1870s and 1886. As the latter became more politicized, the boards were effectively ‘nationalised’ under the coordinated and focused influence of the Land League and later the National League.³ From the beginning of the 1870s, a growing political consciousness among tenant guardians throughout the country inspired them to use the boards as platforms for voicing popular causes such as amnesty for Fenian prisoners, local land issues and calls for self-government. An editorial in *The Nation* in August 1874 sought to build on the success of the Home Rule League in the general election and proposed ‘that every position open to popular election be captured and held for Ireland’. It called for the updating of electoral registers and pointed out the proximity and potential accessibility of local bodies such as the boards of guardians as part of a national movement, to develop local leadership and maintain continuity of political activity.⁴

In Fingal, this process at first appears to have begun much earlier than identified by Feingold, with Catholic and tenant officers elected to Balrothery board of guardians for a number of years prior to 1870. The Catholic Dublin timber merchant and builder, James Fagan, who served as Liberal M.P. for County Wexford from 1847 to 1852, was vice-chairman in 1859. A former member of Dublin Corporation, he failed in his bid to succeed his mentor, Daniel O’Connell, as Lord Mayor of Dublin for 1844.⁵ When he retired from the timber business, he leased the Turvey estate, at Donabate, and became an extensive sheep farmer. In partnership with baron Talbot, he built the Royal Hotel and a number of fashionable houses in Malahide, and helped

³ William Feingold, *The revolt of the tenantry: transformation of local government in Ireland 1872-86* (Boston, 1884), pp 82-89 & 174.

⁴ *The Nation*, 15 Aug. 1874.

⁵ *Dod’s parliamentary companion*, vol. 15 (London, 1847); James H. Murphy, *The politics of Dublin Corporation, 1840-1900: from reform to expansion* (Dublin, 2020), pp 38-9.

develop the town as a tourist attraction to take advantage of the new railway.⁶ Another Catholic tenant farmer and mill owner, Walter Rickard, who leased 167 acres from the earl of Howth, at Whitestown, Rush, was deputy vice-chairman from 1860 to 1866.⁷ In August 1863 Balrothery board of guardians elected Catholic grazier John Paul Byrne as vice-chairman following the death of John Baker, a position he would retain for the next seven years.⁸ There were now two Catholic tenant officers, which continued when William Bowden succeeded Rickard in 1866.⁹ All four were successful businessmen who moved in similar public social and economic circles as the landlord guardians, with common interests to protect and exploit. Talbot de Malahide was the chairman during this period, but his attendance was infrequent and as they held two of the three officership positions Catholic tenant influence grew. Henry Baker deputised for Talbot de Malahide for most of the meetings after he became vice-chairman in 1870. Talbot remained as chairman until 1874 when the guardians elected a landlord, a grazier, and a tenant farmer as officers that year: Henry Baker, William Bowden and Thomas McCourt respectively. Both Byrne and Bowden were former Repealers and supporters of Isaac Butt in the Home Rule League, but not of Parnell. A supporter of Edmund Dwyer Gray, the moderate Byrne became a city councillor but was ousted from Dublin Corporation when he opposed the freedom of the city for Parnell at the end of 1881.¹⁰

By 1877, the Home Rule League was inviting guardians to attend as delegates to its conference.¹¹ It was not until 1881, however, when Parnell made a more direct call to tenant candidates to contest poor law elections, ‘to wrest local government from the landlord class’, that any substantial progress was made.¹² An editorial in the Parnellite *United Ireland* newspaper the following year was more direct: ‘every seat

⁶ *Wexford Independent*, 13 June 1849; *Freeman’s Journal*, 1 Aug. 1849; *Farmers’ Gazette & Journal of Practical Horticulture*, 11 Nov. 1854. He sold the hotel, now the Grand Hotel, to Talbot in 1852, *Freeman’s Journal*, 28 Feb. 1863.

⁷ Griffith’s Valuation, Balrothery East, Lusk civil parish, 1847, online at <https://www.findmypast.ie/transcript?id=IRE%2FGRIFF%2F314%2F314088%2F052%2F1> accessed 12 Dec. 2021; *Freeman’s Journal*, 4 Jan. 1860; Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 18 Apr. 1860, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/030: BG40/A29. Book A28 is missing, which recorded Rickard’s election as D.V.C.

⁸ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 19 Aug. 1863, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/030: BG40/A35).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 10 Jan., 16 May & 5 Sept. 1866, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/030: BG40/A40-41).

¹⁰ *Freeman’s Journal*, 18 July 1843; *Derry Journal*, 26 Oct. 1881; *Dublin Weekly Nation*, 17 May 1879 & 29 Oct. 1881.

¹¹ *Waterford Mail*, 9 Oct. 1877.

¹² *Freeman’s Journal*, 1 Mar. 1881.

of power is ours by right. The poor law is the first rung of the ladder of self-government.’¹³ In 1881, in addition to Henry Baker in the chair, Balrothery guardians elected two tenant farmers, the moderate Thomas McCourt, and nationalist activist, Patrick McCabe, as officers.¹⁴ Despite regular assertions by the ex-officio guardians that political matters should not be entertained in the boardroom, nationalist guardians continued to present political motions. What was political for one side was social and economic expedience for the other. Balrothery guardians unanimously agreed a motion from Andrew Kettle in April 1876, to petition parliament to support Isaac Butt’s land tenure bill.¹⁵ In October, however, a request from the Central Tenants Defence Association, of which Kettle was secretary, to send delegates to the national land conference failed, as there was no seconder to the motion. The other guardians in attendance were all graziers and landlords. The two weeks’ notice given of the motion appeared to have influenced the attendance on the day, and no doubt increased Kettle’s mistrust of some of his fellow guardians.¹⁶ When economic conditions worsened in 1877 a petition to parliament to reject the Valuation of Property (Ireland) Bill, which was critical of rent reviews, passed as it included an amendment on the state of the cattle trade from H.H. Woods and J.P. Byrne. Mutual material interest could overcome differences of political opinion.¹⁷

Growing in confidence, nationalist tenants began to take control of dispensary committees, which now had responsibility for sanitation. In April 1882, Andrew Kettle defeated Thomas Luke Plunket, for the chair of Malahide dispensary committee, and was joined by cousins Joseph O’Neill as vice-chairman and P.J. O’Neill as secretary, in a complete takeover. This committee exercised their newfound influence in a long running dispute over the extent of ratepayers’ liability for the installation of a remediated water scheme that primarily benefitted only the

¹³ *United Ireland*, 4 Feb. 1882. William O’Brien was editor, for further see Myles Dungan, *Mr. Parnell's Rottweiler: Censorship and the United Ireland Newspaper, 1881-1891* (Dublin, 2014).

¹⁴ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 3 & 24 Oct. & 19 Dec. 1881, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/035: BG40/A71); note that book for Mar.-Sept. 1881 is missing. Patrick McCabe, a grazier, leased 166 acres across five holdings at Barnageeragh, near Skerries, 100 acres from Sir Roger Palmer; *Valuation Office revision books, barony of Balrothery East: Holmpatrick parish*, (Valuation Office, book 2, 1869-92).

¹⁵ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 24 Apr. 1876, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/034: BG40/A60).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 16 Oct. 1876, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/034: BG40/A61). The other attendees were grazier William Bowden in the chair, A. S. Deane, H. H. Woods, John Hely Hutchinson, Charles Cobbe and H. A. Hamilton.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16 July 1877, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/034: BG40/A62). There were eight ex-officio and sixteen elected guardians present.

more affluent, mostly Protestant and Unionist, inhabitants of the town, and not the entire district.¹⁸ Ex-officio guardians held on to power where they held influence: Warren St Leger Woods and Anthony Strong Hussey in Balbriggan, and Ion Hamilton and Richard Butler in Holmpatrick dispensary districts.¹⁹ A fourteen strong ex-officio attendance at the first meeting of the board of guardians for 1882-83 elected Charles Cobbe as chairman with Thomas McCourt (V.C.) and Patrick McCabe (D.V.C.). Elected men dominated the agricultural committee, but the senior landowners controlled the visiting and finance committees. Despite the election of Cobbe as chairman, most of the meetings continued to be chaired by Henry Baker, the guardians deferring to his long-standing tenure in the role.²⁰ The Balrothery board of guardians, and its dispensary, sanitary and library sub-committees had ceased to be landlord dominated, but the personality and character of the more able of the landlord elite would not surrender power without a fight.

When Colonel Taylor M.P. died in February 1883, Balrothery guardians passed a resolution from Patrick McCabe calling on electors to vote for the Irish Party candidate in the by-election and copied this to the *Freeman's Journal*.²¹ The board of guardians was now a political arena. In April, William Townsend wrote to the board on behalf of Sir Roger Palmer indicating that he was prepared to have his name removed from the ex-officio list, provided his agent took his place. Palmer rarely attended meetings, but still wanted to maintain a proxy influence. The board pointedly declined to make any comment: 'The board have nothing to say to the matter'.²² Palmer remained on the list of ex-officio guardians while Townsend was unsuccessful in the election the following year in Lusk when he received only eight per cent of the vote, with three nationalists returned.²³

In March 1884, Balrothery elected Henry Baker, Patrick McCabe and Daniel Macken as chair, vice-chair and deputy vice-chair respectively, one ex-officio and two elected and active nationalist guardians. The changing socio-economic and political balance

¹⁸ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 23 May 1887, 31 Dec. 1888 & 12 Aug. 1889, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/035: BG40/A82, A84 & A86.).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17 Apr. 1882, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/035: BG40/A72).

²⁰ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 27 Mar. 1882, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/035: BG40/A72).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 19 Feb. 1883, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/035: BG40/A73). The attendance record on that date shows ten elected guardians and three ex-officio. The I.P.P. candidate Edward McMahan was defeated.

²² *Ibid.*, 2 Apr. 1883, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/035: BG40/A74).

²³ *The Nation*, 29 Mar. 1884.

within the board, from ex-officio Protestant and Conservative landlord to elected Catholic nationalist tenant farmer and grazier, was reinforced on the committees with only one ex-officio appointment made to each of the six member visiting, agriculture and finance committees.²⁴ Motions now began to appear from sister unions on political matters, as well as from Irish Party M.P.s, including calls for the appointment of nationalist guardians Joseph O'Neill of Kinsealy and James Ennis of Naul, as peace commissioners.²⁵

In the desire to serve their remit and their responsibility to the ratepayers of the union, some guardians were prepared to confront those who did not take earnestly their responsibilities as guardians, regardless of their politics. In October 1886 Mark Perrin, J.P., Lusk, and Thomas McCourt resolved that the clerk enquire of those ex-officio guardians 'who were not in the habit of attending meetings', if they wished to have their names struck off the list, to be replaced by magistrates 'resident continuously' in the union. Whilst the language was diplomatic, the message to the landlords was clear. Included were Ion Trant Hamilton, Sir Roger Palmer, John Hely-Hutchinson, John Jameson and Robert Aungier.²⁶ Protecting the ratepayers' interest was always one of the most important considerations for the guardians, irrespective of politics. Costs had doubled since 1865 even though the numbers claiming indoor and outdoor relief had not increased pro rata. Audited expenditure increased from £3,423 in 1865 to £4,811 in 1876, £6,158 in 1880, and £6,985 in 1884, and expected to rise to £7,474 for the twelve months ended September 1885.²⁷ J.P. Byrne chaired a committee, which reported in November 1884, on the costs directly associated with administration of the poor law such as workhouse maintenance, outdoor relief provision, rate collection and election expenses, and those associated with the new additional responsibilities – dispensaries, civil registration, sanitary authority, burials, cattle diseases, and superannuation. These latter civil responsibilities brought increased influence and power to the guardians, but involved a contribution from the ratepayers, and the largest ratepayers were the guardians themselves. Financial responsibilities had further increased with the

²⁴ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 31 Mar. 1884, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/036: BG40/A75).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5 Apr., 5 & 19 May 1884, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/036: BG40/A76). Motions on mitigating emigration through land redistribution came from N.D.U. and from Parnell.

²⁶ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 11 Oct. 1886, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/037: BG40/A81).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8 Sept. 1884, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/036: BG40/A76).

implementation of the Labourers (Ireland) Act, 1883 (46 & 47 Vict., c.60) which enabled the union to borrow on the security of their rate receipts, to fund the erection of cottages for agricultural labourers. Whilst they found explanations for most of the increases in costs, the committee was concerned about increased access to outdoor relief and generous compensation for the slaughter of diseased cattle because of the outbreak of foot and mouth.²⁸ If expenditure on the poor increased so did expenditure on those better off. Records show that the largest and most timely beneficiaries of such compensation were often the grazier guardians themselves. They appointed one of their own, James Ennis from Naul as assistant inspector and livestock valuer to address the problem. He resigned as a guardian, as required by law, on confirmation of his appointment.²⁹

Some guardians, while accepting the labourers' housing scheme, objected to the use of their own lands for such purposes, fearful of a threat to their own property rights.³⁰ H.A. Hamilton reluctantly offered a couple of sites in Balbriggan, but not on any of the lands where he resided.³¹ Lord Talbot's concern with proposed sites in Malahide was their proximity to the local Church of Ireland and that they would affect lettings on the affluent Windsor Terrace. Charles Cobbe was concerned that when labourers became tenants of the union they became independent and could work where they wished, diminishing the landlord's control.³² These labourers paid rent to the poor law union rather than to the landlord, even if it was located on his land. The philanthropic Col Forster returned a cheque for £50 for a site on his land for cottages as he said he had promised to provide the site free of charge.³³ These guardians supported the principle of housing the poor, as long as it did not encroach on them.

Feingold asserted that there was little evidence of influence or interference by the leaders of the national movement in the affairs of poor law boards of guardians, finding only infrequent reference to any involvement in Irish National League records. The exception occurred where a local M.P. got involved as the local representative. Balrothery guardians' minute books show significant, if intermittent,

²⁸ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 24 Nov. 1884, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/036: BG40/A77).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 22 Dec. 1884, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/036: BG40/A77).

³⁰ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 14 Dec. 1885, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/036: BG40/A79).

³¹ *Drogheda Independent*, 10 July 1886.

³² *Ibid.*, 2 Jan. 1886.

³³ *Ibid.*, 24 Oct. 1885.

correspondence with their M.P., J.J. Clancy. He wrote in 1886 of ‘the importance he placed on the resolutions and exhortations from the guardians even though he may not always be able to affect their desired outcome’.³⁴ While accepting the benefits of nationalist support on the boards of guardians, the I.P.P. did not see extensive reform of local government as an immediate priority, or any substitute for Home Rule. They introduced a bill in 1884 that proposed a secret ballot for the election of all guardians, abolishing ex-officio guardians and proxy votes, but were far more concerned with grand jury reform. Their objective was to gain control of the spending departments of government in Ireland, through Home Rule; the administration of the multitude of government boards, particularly the Local Government Board, boards of education and agriculture, and the Board of Works. The party believed that self-government would solve all the problems in Ireland, including the land question. Many English politicians looked upon local government reform as a possible solution to the Irish question, and thus willing to consider reforms in this area. Parnell’s position was unequivocally that local government reform was no substitute for self-government. There were nine separate bills between 1884 and 1885 related to changes in the constitution of and elections to Irish poor law boards.³⁵ However, the local branches of the Irish National League were intensely involved themselves supporting national issues in local government politics, which they perceived as playing their part at their level in the national movement. Unionist guardians thought otherwise. For example, in early 1886, Balrothery guardians passed resolutions calling for a suspension of rents due to the depression in agricultural prices and one supporting Home Rule. Charles Cobbe protested on record against the introduction of political matters into board proceedings.³⁶ He had no such reservations concerning political statements issued by the county grand jury on which he also served, when they made their political

³⁴ William Feingold, *The revolt of the tenantry: transformation of local government in Ireland 1872-86* (Boston, 1884), pp 159-63; Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 6 Sept. 1886, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/036: BG40/A80).

³⁵ William Feingold, *The revolt of the tenantry: transformation of local government in Ireland 1872-86* (Boston, 1884), pp 168-171; *Poor Law Guardians (Ireland) bill, 1884*, H.C. 1884-85 (176) v, (1).

³⁶ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 18 Jan., 23 Feb. 1886, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/036: BG40/A80).

priorities very clear on 15 April 1886, expressing loyalty to the crown and opposition to Home Rule.³⁷

Poor Law Guardians 1886-98: nationalism and localism

At the meeting of 24 January 1887, the guardians elected a Catholic non ex-officio chairman for the first time when John Lowndes defeated Mark Perrin on a show of hands, following the death of the long serving Henry Baker.³⁸ When the guardians met for the first meeting of the next term for the annual election of officers, Lowndes was re-elected with Daniel Macken and Joseph Lawless, a farmer from Swords as V.C. and D.V.C. respectively, the first time that the officer positions did not include an ex-officio, Protestant or Unionist. Feingold's analysis shows that in 1886 half of all officers nationally were tenants, and higher in parts of Munster, Connacht and the midlands, but lower in Ulster. At Balrothery, the elected guardians now outnumbered ex-officio members by two to one on the visiting, finance and agricultural committees, which was effectively three to one as the main officers sat on those committees as well. The elected, tenant and nationalist takeover of Balrothery union was complete.³⁹ Against the backdrop of the general elections of 1885 and 1886 and the defeat of the first Home Rule bill in 1886, motions and debates now took on a greater political hue, with every opportunity for advantage exploited. For example, in April 1887, demonstrating their political allegiance, the new board passed a motion of protest against the coercion bill, Perrin being the only dissident.⁴⁰ The language and condemnations grew stronger. Later that month, Balrothery expressed 'indignation and astonishment at the introduction of an Irish crimes bill of such a despotic character that if passed into law it will annihilate civil liberty in Ireland'.⁴¹ By the end of the year the Balrothery board was issuing resolutions such as that in support of the incarcerated M.P., William O'Brien, 'in his lonely prison cell in Tullamore' forwarded to O'Brien himself, chief secretary Balfour, the *Freeman's Journal* and the *Drogheda Independent*.⁴² O'Brien had been arrested for his

³⁷ Minute book of County Dublin grand jury, 1886, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/GJ/1/03, Box 351).

³⁸ Death record, Henry Baker, (G.R.O., Balrothery, 1887, Q1/2/353); Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 24 Jan. 1887, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/037: BG40/A81).

³⁹ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 4 & 11 Apr. 1887, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/037: BG40/A82).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 18 Apr. 1887, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/037: BG40/82).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 25 Apr. 1887, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/037: BG40/A82).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 21 Nov. 1887, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/037: BG40/A83).

participation in the Plan of Campaign, one if his many spells in prison. The language of the boardroom, once polite and diplomatic, now mirrored that of national politics. Such resolutions were important public statements of nationalism, circulated in correspondence among other unions voicing criticism or seeking support, forwarded to nationalist members of parliament, and the government minister concerned, as well as copied to and reported in the press. As part of the Irish National League party structure, the nationalist members of the boards of guardians were a potent part of the local political culture. James H. Murphy described a similar politicisation of Dublin Corporation in the same period as a ‘Parnellite takeover’, as that chamber became ‘an adjunct of wider politics’.⁴³ Balrothery’s nationalist guardians likewise saw themselves as an integral part of the national movement for Home Rule. Ostensibly innocuous motions often had a political dimension with accompanying rows quite common. These varied from whether to provide meat to the workhouse inmates to mark the Queen’s jubilee, a row over alleged proselytization at the workhouse between the Catholic and Protestant chaplains, to the continuing disagreement on a new water scheme for the town of Malahide.⁴⁴

Aside from political motions, the board had to deal with the pressing local issues of poverty and hardship. The minutes of guardians’ meetings in January 1889 reflected the difficult winter with calls for rent reductions. Outdoor relief recipients grew to 464 persons, with 222 inmates in the workhouse, infirmary, and asylum.⁴⁵ By the end of April, the numbers on outdoor relief reached 504 persons and 205 in the workhouse and hospital.⁴⁶ The board was concerned with the persistent high level of outdoor relief claimed in Balbriggan at the end of the summer, in ‘circumstances which cannot at present be called unfavourable’, and directed the local guardians and relieving officer to review each case.⁴⁷ Over the previous winter months of 1889-90, the numbers in receipt of outdoor relief from Balrothery union remained at over 500,

⁴³ James H. Murphy, *The politics of Dublin Corporation, 1840-1900: from reform to expansion* (Dublin, 2020), p. 149.

⁴⁴ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 6 June 1887, 1 Apr. 1889, 27 Jan., 12 May, 2 June, 20 Oct., 17 Nov. & 15 Dec. 1890, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/037-38: BG40/A82-89); *Drogheda Independent*, 11 June 1887.

⁴⁵ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 7 & 21 Jan. 1889, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/037: BG40/A85).

⁴⁶ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 22 Apr. 1889, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/037: BG40/A86).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 25 Aug. 1890, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/038: BG40/A88).

peaking at 545 in February 1890.⁴⁸ They had not abated significantly into the better months. Despite the difficult economic conditions, one cannot rule out that the new balance of power on the board of guardians was also a factor. Nationalist guardians were more lenient in the dispensation of relief and services in difficult times.

Attendance at meetings was often poor and irregular but the politically astute guardians knew the importance of ensuring sufficient voting strength when needed to secure the success of particular motions. Extensive and regular local newspaper coverage of meetings and their resolutions provided an opportunity to influence public opinion that should not be underestimated. Potentially political motions of a nationalist persuasion, from sister unions, were often ‘read’ rather than ‘adopted’ when a sufficient Unionist or landed proprietor cohort attended. An ‘adopted’ motion became a statement of policy or intent, whereas motions that were ‘read’ were only recorded as notified to the board. In November 1893, a resolution from the North Dublin Union guardians, which called for the reinstatement of evicted tenants, was marked only as ‘read’ following objections from ex-officio guardians.⁴⁹ Localised personal and political rivalry also surfaced such as between Thomas Luke Plunkett and P.J. O’Neill, which lasted for years. Plunkett, a Catholic Unionist, qualified barrister, landowner and employer had established brickworks in Portmarnock around 1881, and supplied the facing brick in 1892 for the new Richmond lunatic asylum annex, built at Portrane.⁵⁰ They clashed publicly in 1893 over the former’s signing of the Catholic Petition against Home Rule.⁵¹ O’Neill was joint secretary of the Independent Home Rule fund in 1893 with Tim Harrington M.P., while Andrew Kettle was treasurer.⁵² Personal rivalries that developed between the politically active guardians in Balrothery were often most acute between fellow co-religionists or among nationalists.

The receding threat of Home Rule after the defeat of the second bill in 1893 allowed Unionists to adopt common ground with nationalists on issues of mutual benefit.

⁴⁸ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 23 Dec. 1889, 6 & 20 Jan. & 3 Feb. 1890, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/038: BG40/A87).

⁴⁹ *Drogheda Independent*, 11 Nov. 1893.

⁵⁰ Alan Costello, *Portmarnock and the Plunketts, 1850-1918: Portmarnock brick and terracotta works*, (Dublin, 2013), pp 42-9. Other notable projects in Dublin included Lord Ardilaun’s red stables at St Anne’s in 1883, the Iveagh market, and the city fire stations at Thomas, Tara, and Buckingham Streets.

⁵¹ Garry Ahern, *Portmarnock: its people and townlands: a history* (Dublin, 2013) p. 267.

⁵² *Irish Independent*, 31 May 1893.

This common ground and the absence of any imminent constitutional change helped facilitate cooperation.⁵³ There was unanimous support from Balrothery guardians for a motion from Ennis P.L.U., which condemned the government for its refusal to fund repairs and improvements to workhouse buildings. It was overtly critical of the grand juries and sought 'to put guardians on the same footing as the most favoured public bodies in Ireland as regards borrowing money'.⁵⁴ As Home Rule and nationalist political motions abated those concerning land and farming increased. In March the board adopted a motion from Bawnboy P.L.U. welcoming the government inquiry into the operation of the land acts but objecting to the constitution of tribunals 'made up entirely of landlords and land agents ...who have no knowledge of farming, and whose sympathies are with the landlord class'. Hussey, the only landlord present, dissented.⁵⁵ This was now a farmers' board with farmers' priorities. When asked to send a deputation to the Irish Agricultural Society conference to discuss the upcoming land legislation, Thomas Hamlet queried if it was an 'agricultural only non-political' forum. Patrick McCabe answered that one could not settle the land question without reference to politics. Hussey and Woods declared no interest, but a delegation of ten attended including Patrick Kettle and P. J. O'Neill. Andrew Kettle was president of the society.⁵⁶ Discussion on a proposed railway line between Garristown and Swords to the city caused an 'unusually animated' level of debate, mainly to do with costs for ratepayers if the project went ahead. The County Dublin grand jury had similar reservations and questioned the justification for a train line merely to transport cattle from the grazing heartland to Dublin port.⁵⁷ Some minor motions highlight the social priorities of some of the landed members, anxious to protect their sporting and hunting interests. In the midst of reported outbreaks of rabies in the county, the board passed a motion on 24 June 1896 to muzzle all dogs, but three weeks later rescinded the original motion at a meeting attended exclusively by ex-officio guardians led by Mark Perrin.⁵⁸ Though their control was diminishing,

⁵³ Constructive Unionism or 'killing Home Rule with kindness' refers to the Conservative policy towards Ireland between 1886 and 1906, following a reference to such by Gerald Balfour soon after his appointment as chief secretary for Ireland in 1895. See Andrew Gailey, 'Unionist Rhetoric and Irish Local Government Reform 1895-9', in *Irish Historic Studies*, 24, 93 (1984), pp 52-68.

⁵⁴ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 8 Jan. 1896, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/040: BG40/A99).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 7 Mar. 1894, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/039: BG40/A95).

⁵⁶ *Drogheda Independent*, 1 Feb. & *Irish Times*, 19 Feb. 1896.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 10 Mar. & 21 Apr. 1894.

⁵⁸ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 24 June & 8 July 1896, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/040: BG40/A100).

the landed guardians could still mobilise when their economic, personal, or cultural interests were threatened.

The board of guardians an important representative forum with local exposure and prestige. However, few of the elected seats were contested each year on Balrothery board of guardians, and records of elections do not survive, lost with Local Government Board archives in the fire at the Custom House in May 1921. Guardians' minute books did not record elections with references only found through infrequent newspaper reports. In 1895, only one election took place, in Holmpatrick, with Bartholomew Grimes and William Boylan returned, with Joseph Boylan the unsuccessful candidate. Usually a direct replacement, uncontested, was the method of changing representative in an area.⁵⁹ As guardians were unpaid, only those with the means and the time available could take up the responsibility. The alternative to landlords were graziers, comfortable farmers and merchants, the emerging nationalist political elite.

The poor law union provided significant business opportunities for local suppliers of goods and services. The union could be a lucrative proposition for those successful in winning supply tenders or as rate collectors. The biggest suppliers to the union were those supplying milk, Edward Rooney, Lusk and bread, William Ennis, Skerries.⁶⁰ Often positions were 'passed on' in families. When rate collector Patrick Harford died in October 1895, the guardians elected his son Joseph in his stead a fortnight later, with twice as many votes as the next nearest candidate.⁶¹

Following the death of Thomas McCourt on Christmas Eve 1892, Balrothery guardians elected Catholic Unionist Anthony S. Hussey to the chair, after William Boylan withdrew. Thirteen of the twenty-two guardians in attendance were ex-officio.⁶² When the new council met on 5 April 1893, Hussey withdrew in favour of Boylan for the chair but became vice-chairman with T. W. Hamlet deputy vice-

⁵⁹ *Drogheda Conservative*, 16 & 30 Mar. 1895.

⁶⁰ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 9 Oct. 1895, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/040: BG40/A98).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 16 & 30 Oct. 1895, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/040: BG40/A98-99); Death record, Patrick Harford, (G.R.O., Balrothery, 1895, Q4/2/275); Joseph Harford, Census of Ireland 1901, N.A.I., online at <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Dublin/Swords/Baldurgan/1266843/> accessed 22 Aug. 2021.

⁶² Death record, Thomas McCourt, (G.R.O., Balrothery, 1892, Q4/2/268) aged 78 years. McCourt's occupation on his death certificate mentioned his chairmanship of the guardians, indicting the prestige the post held for him; Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 18 Jan. 1893, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/040: BG40/A92).

chairman.⁶³ These officers and the ex-officio guardians, Mark Perrin, Arthur Maxwell and A.S. Deane attended the most meetings over the succeeding period, thus retaining considerable influence over everyday affairs.⁶⁴ This reversed the shift to a more nationalist board, with a moderate nationalist tenant farmer and two Unionists as officers and it remained so until 1899. This marked a return to a more localised focus and reflected the departure of the more politically oriented guardians like Daniel Macken. Perrin, Hamlet, and Hussey were the most prominent and active at meetings, with many debates or arguments among themselves, rather than on anything resembling a political division. Many of these disagreements exposed the class differences between the Conservative Catholic landlord Hussey and the Liberal Protestant merchant and *arriviste* grazier Hamlet. During this time one can trace the latter's conversion from Unionism to Home Rule, as his personal priorities became more aligned with that of constitutional nationalism.⁶⁵ With most meetings poorly attended, their voices were the dominant ones, a group exercising influence without necessarily occupying all the top positions. William Boylan fulfilled a neutral rather than leadership role as chairman. The Woods brothers, as busy J.P.s and grand jurors, were less regular attendees but prominent at crucial times.

At local and dispensary committees, farmer and merchant representation was at its strongest, where Patrick Kettle, Nicholas Long, and Joseph Lawless of Swords, and Patrick McCabe of Balbriggan, pursued a nationalist, tenant farmer agenda. Major landowners Talbot de Malahide, Hamilton, Palmer, Thomas Plunkett, Thomas and Robert Aungier, and Matthew Corbally, rarely attended or turned up only for votes on tenders or appointments.⁶⁶ Andrew Kettle confined his involvement to the local Malahide committee. The return to the comparative 'normality' of local matters in Balrothery guardians' boardroom reflected the weariness and disinterest in national politics after the Parnell split and the defeat of the second Home Rule Bill. Hoppen's theory that localism was the default and normal condition in Irish politics is evident

⁶³ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 5 Apr. 1893, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/040: BG40/A93).

⁶⁴ Desmond McCabe, 'Perrin, Louis', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2009). Perrin was a retired barrister & Registrar of Judgements, of Beau Lusk, a son of Louis Perrin, M.P.; Deane was a retired Land Commission official and landowner; *Weekly Irish Times*, 25 Feb. 1939; Hamlet was also the barony cess collector for Balrothery East, *Thom's Directory*, 1891 p. 1075.

⁶⁵ *Drogheda Independent*, 21 Jan. & 26 Aug. 1893.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 26 Nov. 1892, re the election of Tolan as rate collector. Plunkett, Corbally & Thomas Aungier were county grand jurors.

in Balrothery poor law union in the 1890s. The absence of a distinct national agenda allowed for the diversion of energies to local issues, highlighted how collegiate and cooperative the local government sphere could be.

Local Government Act 1898: ‘the greatest of all victories’

Since the 1840s, a succession of supplementary functions were added to the responsibilities of the poor law guardians, but no comprehensive legislation enacted for the administration of local government. The unrepresentative and monopolistic, landlord-dominated grand juries retained power over most local infrastructural expenditure. There was a need, although not any demand, to rationalise county government, improve its efficiency and effectiveness, and put the Irish system on a more democratic and representative basis. Local government reform, based on the English legislation of 1888, presented an opportunity to reduce the burden of agricultural rates on the landed class and potentially quell the demand for Home Rule in any reform legislation. The Conservative government, in a further step in its reform programme of ‘killing Home Rule with kindness’, introduced the Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898 (61 & 62 Vict. c. 37).

This act provided that ‘a council shall be established in every administrative county, and be entrusted with the management of the administrative and financial business of that county’, to be ‘elected by local government electors of the county’. This was potentially an important step on the quest for national self-government, providing the opportunity for local representation and exercise of power, replacing the old grand jury system, and proving that nationalist Ireland could successfully govern itself. Local nationalist elites embraced this opportunity and utilised local government in preparation for the day when further concessions might deliver Home Rule. P.J. O’Neill, at a meeting of electors in Swords in December 1898 called it ‘the first step towards Home Rule, which would educate the people for when Home Rule did arrive’.⁶⁷ Greater levels of political brokerage, patronage and representation for the nationalist electorate were possible for the first time. Regardless of the extent of powers granted, the new structures presented the opportunity to prove that the Irish could successfully govern themselves. In the period up to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, that generation of constitutional nationalists believed they were

⁶⁷ *Drogheda Independent*, 17 Dec. 1898.

progressing to their destiny and this local government initiative was a step on their journey.⁶⁸

The 1898 Act introduced to Fingal a two-tier system of local administration with the elected rural district councils (R.D.C.s) of Balrothery, North Dublin, and Celbridge No. 2 covering the north county region, answerable to the new Dublin County Council. Balbriggan town council remained as a borough council. Garristown, a district electoral division (D.E.D.), in effect the dispensary district, transferred from Dunshaughlin P.L.U., mostly in Co. Meath, to Balrothery R.D.C., and thus under the jurisdiction of Dublin County Council.⁶⁹ Balrothery R.D.C. area covered the same administrative area as the Balrothery poor law union, with North Dublin R.D.C. covering the rural North Dublin Union area outside of the northern limits of the city and Dublin Corporation. The north county also included the township of Clontarf, and the combined township of Drumcondra, Clonliffe and Glasnevin, both of which transferred to Dublin city in 1900, along with New Kilmainham.

The new franchise extended the vote to all male and female ratepayers and adult male householders and occupiers of rated dwellings of at least £10 annual valuation, and abolished multiple votes based on property valuations. Any qualified resident elector or voter was eligible to stand for council office, with elections every three years. Women could sit on district and town councils but not on county or borough ones.⁷⁰ There were separate polls for the district and county councils. This created greater electoral accountability, forcing the political elite to take cognisance of an electorate previously ignored or to whom they paid only lip service. There were no ex-officio landowner appointees, as had been the case with the guardians.⁷¹ There was now a county electorate of 10,117 eligible to vote in local elections.⁷² Those elected as rural district councillors served simultaneously as poor law guardians with both meetings held consecutively on the same day.

⁶⁸ See Senia Pasetta, *Before the revolution: nationalism, social change and Ireland's Catholic elite, 1879-1922* (Cork, 1999) for an account of this mindset.

⁶⁹ The district electoral divisions of the rural districts were the same administrative units as the dispensary districts of the former poor law unions.

⁷⁰ *Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898*, 61 & 62 Vict., c. 37.

⁷¹ John Coakley, 'Local elections and national politics', in Mary Daly (ed.) *County and town: one hundred years of local government in Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), p. 77.

⁷² *Return of local government electors*, H.C., 1901, 2, lxiv.413.

Landlords were compensated for their loss of ex-officio representation on the new councils. Part of the concession involved a rerating of lands which reduced their poor rate tax liabilities by up to fifty per cent through an agricultural grant paid from central funds to each council. The county cess previously paid to the grand jury was reduced, with poor rate liability now extended to all occupiers, regardless of valuation. Previously landlords were liable for the poor rate for tenants' holdings valued at less than £4 valuation.⁷³ As all ratepayers were now electors, councillors were now answerable for the first time at the ballot to a representative electorate rather than a select stratum of ratepayers. The new councils were directly answerable to the L.G.B. who had powers of veto over any decisions.

The responsibilities of the guardians and the abolished grand jury transferred to the new structures. Dublin County Council now took overall responsibility for collection of the rates, managing asylums and the development and maintenance of local infrastructure, including the construction and repair of roads, bridges, piers and harbours, as well as the associated drainage and ditches, previously the responsibility of the grand jury and administered through the baronial presentments. The district councils, Balrothery and North Dublin, took responsibility for local public works, sanitation and public health and the provision of labourers' cottages. The guardians retained the healthcare and welfare duties of the poor law system. Both had implications for employment and the alleviation of poverty, with the potential for relief measures outside of the workhouse and straightforward outdoor relief. With increased road maintenance, drainage and sewage obligations came the potential for corruption in the awarding of contracts, or employment through direct labour favours. Additional responsibilities under the act included malicious injuries claims, school attendances, public lighting, libraries and the regulation of fairs and markets. The consequences and impact of the legislation would go far beyond democratic elections, representation, or the change in the membership of the council from that of the grand jury or board of guardians.

The extensive range of responsibilities and influence were themselves a revolutionary departure for those who would now take charge of their

⁷³ Mary Daly, *The buffer state: the history of the Department of the Environment* (Dublin, 1997), pp 22-26; Matthew Potter, *The municipal revolution in Ireland: a handbook of urban government in Ireland* (Dublin, 2011), p. 202.

implementation. The nominated county grand jury remained in place, limited now to a judicial role and the administration of courts and prisons. The boards of guardians, in reality a third tier, became subordinate to the relevant district council, with reduced responsibilities now confined exclusively to poor law administration, welfare reliefs and responsibility for the workhouse and dispensaries. All of these bodies were subject to oversight and inspection by the Local Government Board, in the Custom House in Dublin, on which sat the chief-secretary and under-secretary for Ireland, as ex-officio board members, and three other permanent technical members, one of whom was vice-president, effectively the head of the L.G.B.⁷⁴

Although the I.P.P. had not actively campaigned for the introduction of the Local Government Act, and many were cautious about its introduction, they broadly welcomed its introduction, with John Dillon the notable exception.⁷⁵ They broadly followed the old Parnellite line that anything other than Home Rule was an impediment to Home Rule. Redmond however claimed it ‘disestablished the old ascendancy class from its position of power and made the mass of the Irish people masters of all the finance and all of the local affairs of Ireland’.⁷⁶ Davitt proclaimed it, as previously mentioned, as ‘the greatest victory’. J.J. Clancy, the local nationalist M.P., barrister and I.P.P. spokesman on finance, land purchase and local government matters, published an extensive technical guide to its provisions and workings giving his approbation.⁷⁷ Viewed as another element in the Conservative government’s

⁷⁴ *Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898*, 61 & 62 Vict., c. 37.; *Annual report of the local government board for Ireland, twenty-sixth report under the local government board act, 35 & 36 Vic., c.69, H.C., 1900*, [c.9480]; John Joseph Clancy, *A handbook of local government in Ireland, containing an explanatory introduction to the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898: together with the text of the act, the orders in Council, and the rules made thereunder relating to county council, rural district council, and guardian's elections, with an index* (Dublin, 1899); Richard Haslam, ‘The origins of Irish local government’, in Mark Callanan & Justin F. Keogan (eds.) *Local government in Ireland: inside out* (Dublin, 2003), pp 24-28;

⁷⁵ Frank Callanan, ‘Dillon, John’, in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁷⁶ Gwynn, Denis, *The life of John Redmond* (London, 1932) p. 90. See also Paucic Travers, ‘A bloodless revolution: the democratisation of Irish local government’, in Mary Daly (ed.) *County and town: one hundred years of local government in Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), p. 12, which disputes this.

⁷⁷ John Joseph Clancy, *A handbook of local government in Ireland, containing an explanatory introduction to the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898: together with the text of the act, the orders in Council, and the rules made thereunder relating to county council, rural district council, and guardian's elections, with an index* (Dublin, 1899).

‘constructive Unionism’ policy, it was unopposed by Unionists at Westminster who saw it as the lesser evil to Home Rule.⁷⁸

When introduced in February 1898, the local government bill prompted a flurry of activity throughout the country among those poor law guardians who saw themselves as prospective county or district councillors. Balrothery guardians prioritised the preparation of updated voters and jurors’ lists, which under the new accompanying registration act extended the vote in local elections to women and appointed assistants to aid the rate collectors in this work.⁷⁹ As a new era in local administration beckoned, they made it a priority to ensure that all their accounts were in order so that no debts were outstanding at the handover of responsibilities to the new county council structures.⁸⁰ They were also mindful of their financial probity. They had a bank balance in August of £4,507, which they did not want to hand over for distribution elsewhere in the county when the new structures succeeded.⁸¹

As 1898 ended, the aspirant political elite in Fingal prepared for the forthcoming local government elections. Meetings of leading nationalist electors at the Metropole Hotel in Dublin, and at Balbriggan and Swords, convened to discuss how to secure the maximum return of nationalists to Dublin County Council, as well as on the new rural district councils. Their strategy was to contest all seats and ensure there was a representative of the labourers on each selection committee, in order to bring the labour vote into the nationalist fold. P.J and Joseph O’Neill, Charles Gallen, James Ennis, T.W. Hamlet, Frank Lawless and P.J. Kettle, all serving or future guardians were prominent.⁸² The Catholic J.P., grazier, landowner and outgoing grand juror Thomas Aungier attended all three meetings, with the intention to run.

The ex-officio guardians of Balrothery union met at the Gresham Hotel on 12 January 1899 to select candidates to represent the landowning and larger ratepayer community and by extension, the non-nationalist community. Five grand jurors were candidates for the Balrothery Rural District Council while Edward Hamilton Woods

⁷⁸ Liam Weeks & Aodh Quinlivan, *All politics is local: a guide to local elections in Ireland* (Cork, 2009), pp 14-15.

⁷⁹ *Registration (Ireland) Act 1898*, 61 Vict., c.2; Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 25 May, 8 June & 23 Nov. 1898, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/041: BG40/A104-105).

⁸⁰ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 24 Aug. & 14 Sept. 1898, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/041: BG40/A104).

⁸¹ *Drogheda Independent*, 13 Aug. 1898.

⁸² *Freeman’s Journal*, 30 Nov. & *Drogheda Independent*, 3 & 17 Dec. 1898.

contested one of the Dublin County Council seats. They decided that selection should be on strictly non-political grounds, and agreed not to nominate opponents to run against the nationalist chairman of Balbriggan Town Commissioners, William Cumisky or against Thomas Aungier, in Swords electoral district.⁸³ Aungier addressed the electors through the columns of the *Drogheda Independent*, citing labourers' housing as an issue he wished to address, having aligned himself with Thomas McLean, secretary of Swords Labourers District Defence Association. He was criticised at an election meeting by P.J. O'Neill, who had strong support from the I.P.P. hierarchy. O'Neill denounced Aungier as 'a Unionist now trying to reinvent himself as a nationalist with a newfound concern for the labourer'. He stressed that tillage farmers like himself and Andrew Kettle provided employment for the labouring class, and added how he had worked for many years with the local M.P., J. J. Clancy, to try to secure the franchise for labourers. For their part, Aungier and his labourer supporters were particularly critical of O'Neill's personal ambition, his treatment of his own workers, and the outside backing of Westminster politicians. Parish priest Fr Heffernan chaired the candidate selection meeting at Lusk and condemned the grand jury system and its sectarian Unionist bias, dismissing its former members who were now seeking council seats.⁸⁴ This was consistent with the widespread sentiment that the landlord dominated grand juries, with a history of uncontrolled autonomy were corrupt and inefficient. E.H. Woods, however, had no qualms regarding his grand jury service. He wrote to electors of the Lusk and Holmpatrick divisions in the *Drogheda Conservative* in February, highlighting his career of nineteen years on the grand jury, where he served on the finance committee, while expounding his record as an employer, promising to prioritise labourers' housing and excessive taxation if elected to Dublin County Council.⁸⁵ For Woods, the new structures were very much a continuum of the institutions on which he previously served, and where he might maintain local influence and represent the interests of his political class, albeit now taking cognisance of the needs and demands of a wider electorate.

⁸³ *Drogheda Independent*, 14 Jan. 1899.

⁸⁴ *Drogheda Independent*, 28 Jan. & 1 Apr. 1899.

⁸⁵ *Drogheda Conservative*, 18 Feb. 1899.

Nationally, the local election results produced what Pauric Travers called ‘a bloodless revolution’.⁸⁶ Unionists, who dominated grand jury membership by a margin of fifteen to one, now found themselves in the minority on county councils, where there were three nationalists to every Unionist. There were 774 nationalist and 265 Unionist county councillors elected, most of the latter in Ulster, who replaced 704 Unionist and 47 nationalist grand jurors.⁸⁷ On rural district councils and boards of guardians, they went from roughly equal membership as ex-officio guardians, to a minority of four to one.⁸⁸ Potter described the ‘displacement of old gentry by the new bourgeoisie of farmers and shopkeepers as representing a continuation of the trend whereby the ‘shopocracy’ had already taken control of town councils and boards of guardians’.⁸⁹

Very much in line with this trend, Balrothery rural electoral area returned three nationalists to Dublin County Council: merchant William Cumisky in the Balbriggan ward, unopposed; farmer Edward Rooney in Lusk, who defeated Woods with over 80% of the vote; and P.J. O’Neill in Swords who defeated Aungier with 55% of the vote.⁹⁰ The closeness of the latter contest indicated that despite the heavyweight support for O’Neill, there was strong local support for Aungier and some distrust of O’Neill, evident in the newspaper coverage.⁹¹ The North Dublin rural area also returned three county councillors: Joseph Mooney, a farmer in Castleknock, James McKenna, a publican and farmer in Howth and James J. Flood in Coolock ward, a publican based in Finglas who defeated Joseph O’Neill. Balrothery and North Dublin R.D.C.s nominated Charles Gallen and Joseph O’Neill respectively as their ex-officio representatives.

When William Field, the Irish Party M.P., chaired the first meeting of Dublin County Council at Kilmainham courthouse, symbolically in the grand jury room, on 2 May 1899, less than one third of the twenty-nine attendees were Unionists. This contrasts

⁸⁶ Pauric Travers, ‘A bloodless revolution: the democratization of Irish local government 1898-9’ in Mary Daly (ed.), *County and town: one hundred years of local government in Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), pp 12-23.

⁸⁷ Liam Weeks & Aodh Quinlivan, *All politics is local: a guide to local elections in Ireland* (Cork, 2009) p. 59.

⁸⁸ Pauric Travers, *Settlements and divisions: Ireland 1870-1922* (Dublin, 1988), p. 66.

⁸⁹ Matthew Potter, *The municipal revolution in Ireland: a handbook of urban government in Ireland since 1800*, p. 203. Shopocracy refers to the phenomenon of shopkeepers as a class aspiring to social importance, in Ireland gaining wealth and/or influence in the local society.

⁹⁰ *Drogheda Independent*, 8 Apr. 1899.

⁹¹ *Freemans Journal*, 17 Apr. 1899.

with about one in four in the rest of the country, excepting Ulster. The strong Unionist support in the townships of south Dublin and the coastal area around Kingstown would have been primarily responsible for this. The nine Unionists included six elected members and the three ex-officio representatives of the grand jury: Anthony S. Hussey, Naul, Sir Frederick Shaw, and Major H.W. Domville, the latter two serving executive members of the Irish Unionist Alliance.⁹² Col. Henry Gore Lindsay was elected Unionist councillor for Glasnevin and Drumcondra township. They co-opted two additional members at that first meeting, both nationalists, one of whom was Patrick Graves, a Rathgar victualler, a close associate of Field in the Irish Cattle Traders and Stockowners Association.⁹³ Col. Edward Vernon of Clontarf Castle (Howth ward) and E.H. Woods (Lusk) were among the high-profile Unionist candidates rejected at the polls. Over half of the thirty-two councillors were involved in farming or allied agricultural trades. There were ten representatives from the Fingal area, eight nationalists and two Unionists with an average age of fifty-two: four farmers, two landowners, two business proprietors and two publicans, almost all with some farming connection. North County Dublin had one third of the councillor representation for an area with one fifth of the county's population, and a similar share of its valuation.⁹⁴

Having unanimously elected P.J. O'Neill and John Joseph Reilly (Stillorgan) as chairman and vice-chairman for the first year, the council's first resolution recorded:

That the people of Ireland are a free people with a national right to govern themselves; that no parliament is competent to make laws for Ireland except an Irish parliament sitting in Ireland; and that we repudiate the claim of any other legislature or government to legislate for or govern the people of this country.⁹⁵

⁹² *Irish Times*, 15 Apr. 1899. Legislation provided for three co-opted grand jury representative on the first council.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 1 Sept. 1893, 1 June 1908 & 18 July 1925; Dublin County Council minute books, 2 May 1899, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/01). The other was James McCann, a publican from Inchicore and chairman of Kilmainham town commissioners, who defeated prominent Unionist, William Goulding, *Thom's Directory*, (Dublin, 1900), p. 1079. Son of the last Unionist M.P. for Cork city, Goulding headed the successful family fertiliser firm, was a director of the G.S.W.R. & the National Bank, a commissioner of Irish Lights, former president of the Irish Rugby Football Union, freemason and I.U.A. member. Pauric J. Dempsey & Shaun Boylan, 'Goulding, Sir William Joshua', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁹⁴ *Irish Times*, 8 Apr. 1899; *Census of Ireland 1901*, partly understated due to removal of Clontarf, and Drumcondra and Glasnevin to Dublin city in 1900.

⁹⁵ Dublin County Council minute books, 2 May 1899 (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/01).

This was an opening statement of intent from the new council that it was political and intended to continue as such. Additional motions called for a Catholic university, tenants' rights, land purchase, the release of political prisoners and supports for agricultural and industrial development, as the new council sought to send a message to the establishment of its nationalist intentions. At one point during the stream of political resolutions, the Unionists, Hussey and Clay, interrupted and asked how many more such resolutions were to be made before the council might get down to its proper business, in the manner of the poor law boards and grand jury.⁹⁶ They viewed this forum, as they did the boards of guardians and the grand jury, as solely for the transaction of local business and not politics. However, as we have previously seen, when it suited their own purpose, the grand jury could pass just as political a motion as any other body.

The new rural district councillors of Balrothery were automatically members of the board of guardians. Twenty former ex-officio guardians were now gone, either unsuccessful candidates or who declined to face an election.⁹⁷ Of thirty-three new councillors elected to Balrothery R.D.C., only four were Unionists, all serving guardians and magistrates. They co-opted Thomas Aungier, E. H. Woods and Richard Butler to the council for the first term, content to retain the experience and commitment of those who had served as ex-officio guardians in the past. P.J. O'Neill was elected chairman and Charles Gallen, a Balbriggan factory owner, was elected vice-chairman. Like the county council, the new rural district council took the opportunity to pass a motion supporting Home Rule, with two votes of dissent from Unionists Hussey and Forster.⁹⁸ The nationalist political class had arrived and were making a deliberate statement.

District council meetings were held immediately before those of the guardians, who re-elected the incumbents, William Boylan, Hussey, and T.W. Hamlet as officers for the coming year and their seventh consecutive year. In the following two years, Hamlet served as vice-chairman with nationalist R.J. Rooney as D.V.C. With three tiers of local government now operating, a pattern emerged whereby nationalists

⁹⁶ *Irish Times*, 3 May 1899.

⁹⁷ *Drogheda Conservative*, 8 Apr. 1898.

⁹⁸ Balrothery R.D.C. minute books, 15 Apr. 1899, (N.A.I., BG40/RA1). The four Unionists elected were Col James Forster, A.S. Hussey, both Catholic, and William Whyte & Warren St Leger Woods; *Drogheda Independent*, 22 Apr. 1899.

used such positions as a stepping-stone to higher office. In a largely consensual rotating arrangement, ambitious individuals moved from guardian to district officer roles and on to county councillor positions. The more influential, like the O'Neill cousins, held multiple offices simultaneously. P.J. O'Neill won election to both the rural district and county councils in 1899, was chairman of both until 1908 and the latter through to 1920. Joseph O'Neill was chairman of North Dublin R.D.C. from 1899 to 1920, and its ex-officio representative on Dublin County Council during the same period. Both had learned their trade as local politicians with Andrew Kettle in Malahide and remained close to him as their mentor. Rooney served successively as deputy, vice-chairman and chair of the guardians from 1900 to 1906, as vice-chairman of the rural council in 1907, then chairman from 1908 to 1911 in addition to his election to the county council for a three-year term in 1902. Hussey remained active until 1912, as a rural district councillor and on the county council, initially as a grand jury nominee, then as the representative of Balrothery R.D.C., a position he held for all but one of thirteen years.⁹⁹

Council business, the first trimester 1899-1902: 'the opportunity to prove they could govern themselves'

Close examination of the minute books shows how Dublin County Council worked effectively in its first year after quickly settling to its task. The council met forty-two times in its first year with the average attendance per councillor just under eighteen meetings. The highest attendees were from Fingal: in addition to committee meetings, chairman O'Neill attended thirty-seven meetings, alongside Mooney (38), Cumisky (37), Joseph O'Neill (35), Flood (34) and Gallen (30). It is notable that the Unionist nominees were not among this number, yet their appointments deemed necessary by the authors of the legislation who considered their experience indispensable for the council to proceed successfully. It was, however, clear that the nationalists were very capable of governing themselves. The next decade would see prominent nationalist councillors conspicuous at the various national conventions of the United Irish League (U.I.L.) and at different nationalist demonstrations, such as when Mooney, McCann and McKenna attended the Wolfe Tone demonstration

⁹⁹ Balrothery R.D.C. minute books, 1899, (N.A.I., BG40/RA1-16), Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 1899-1912, (N.A.I., BG40/A102-32); North Dublin R.D.C. minute books, 1899, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/NDRDC 78/A), Dublin County Council minute books, 1899-1920, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/01-19).

representing the council in August 1899.¹⁰⁰ By attending as representatives of the council, an official institution of state, they underlined their own political standing, but also conferred a political legitimacy if not a mandate on the event or the organisation involved. This was a tangible dimension of the growth in self-confidence experienced by nationalists in local government in the first decade of the twentieth century.

One of these organisations, the United Irish League, according to police intelligence, had two branches in County Dublin with a combined membership of seventy-two by the end of May 1900.¹⁰¹ When the I.P.P. reunited in 1900 under John Redmond, the potential existed for a coherent political movement to press for further progressive legislation and ultimately Home Rule. Dublin County Council voted to ‘record its unqualified satisfaction at the reunion of the party’ and urged it to take ‘immediate steps for equitable financial relations between Great Britain and this country’ with four Unionists dissenting.¹⁰²

Both sides of the chamber regularly proposed political motions. When Unionist members proposed a vote of sympathy to the royal family on the death of Queen Victoria, Mooney and Gallen inserted an amendment:

that sympathising with the Royal Family on the death of Her Majesty...in no way admits that Irishmen are at all satisfied with the treatment accorded to their country by the government of England.¹⁰³

Nationalists passed a motion of protest against King Edward VIII’s coronation oath that referred to Roman Catholic subjects as idolatrous, with copies forwarded to the prime minister, the chief secretary and John Redmond.¹⁰⁴ William Field went as far as to describe his religion as ‘Catholic, otherwise idolator, as per the King’s oath’, on his 1901 census return a month later.¹⁰⁵ Queen Victoria’s visit to Ireland in April

¹⁰⁰ Dublin County Council Minute books, 3 Aug. 1899 & 13 June 1900 (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/01-2).

¹⁰¹ Police returns, summary of branches of the U.I.L. in the quarter ending 31 May 1900, pp 457 & 458 (N.A.I., CO 904/20, part 2).

¹⁰² Dublin County Council minute books, 1 Feb. 1900, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/01).

¹⁰³ *Drogheda Independent*, 24 Jan. 1901.

¹⁰⁴ Dublin County Council minute books, 28 Feb. 1901, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/02).

¹⁰⁵ *Census of Ireland 1901*, N.A.I., online at http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Dublin/Blackrock/Main_Street_Part_of_/1312663/ accessed 8 Aug. 2021.

1900 and the ongoing Boer war provided opportunities to harness nationalist public feeling, reflected in a series of motions passed at local council level. P. J. O'Neill and Thomas Luke Plunkett exchanged mutually critical correspondence in the press over Plunkett's exhortation of his fellow Catholics to welcome the visit. O'Neill pointedly referred to Plunkett's failure to win a seat at the district elections and sarcastically questioned whom he purported to represent.¹⁰⁶ Motions of this nature were important public statements with the minutes of the council meetings published in the newspapers, widely read and circulated, as had been with guardians' meetings. They afforded the opportunity to ensure maximum coverage for political messaging by copying such resolutions and decisions to other public bodies, where they would often adopt the same or similar motions, all reported in the press again. A regular contentious issue was that of taxation and the levying of charges on local ratepayers for the upkeep of external entities such as the police or asylums, where the council had limited influence over administration or expenditure.¹⁰⁷ In 1901, the council raised objections to the annual charge on it from Richmond lunatic asylum of £18,558 15s. 6d. an increase of £7,000 on the previous year. The following year it increased to £23,053 17s. 8d. with total costs to run the asylum exceeding £102,150 by 1902.¹⁰⁸ The costs continued to increase and remained an ongoing issue but brought marked cooperation among all the councillors. Major Domville for instance strongly supported the chairman's call for imperial funding for the asylum instead of further increasing the ratepayer burden.¹⁰⁹ The other side of the council's work involved expenditure, such as contract work on roads and infrastructure, and some £41,544 was budgeted for maintenance spending in 1903, £19,644 of it, almost half, in the north county area.¹¹⁰

While P.J. O'Neill was unanimously re-elected as chairman for the coming year in June 1901, there was debate as to whether a Unionist should be vice-chairman, as 'a graceful act on the part of nationalists as the Conservative majority on the South

¹⁰⁶ *Evening Herald*, 4 Apr. 1899, *Freeman's Journal*, 26 Mar. & *Drogheda Independent*, 31 Mar. 1900. O'Neill objected to Plunkett's claim to speak on behalf of Catholics in welcoming the monarch.

¹⁰⁷ Dublin County Council minute books, 20 June 1901, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/03). The council opposed charges sought by the Dublin Metropolitan Police, where the council paid towards its costs, but, unlike in Britain, with no representation on any police boards.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 13 Feb. 1901, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/03).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 5 Mar. & 21 Nov. 1901, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/02).

¹¹⁰ Dublin County Council minute books, 4 Mar. 1902, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/04).

Dublin Union had done for many years'.¹¹¹ Vere Ward Brown took offence, stating that he thought they were all in the business of working together. He was the head of the Brown Thomas firm in Grafton St. Dublin, and prominent on numerous Unionist, business and philanthropic committees.¹¹² Eventually Unionist solicitor, Robert Keating Clay, chairman of Dalkey Urban District Council, was elected.¹¹³ Notwithstanding his political allegiances, Keating Clay, as a parliamentary solicitor, would work closely with Drumcondra U.D.C. in opposing the Dublin Corporation boundary extension bill, with the nationalist chairman of that district, Maurice Butterly.¹¹⁴

The single biggest challenge that faced the council in its first triennial term was the continuing efforts of Dublin Corporation to annex to itself portions of the townships and rural districts close to the city. Dublin's expanding population presented serious funding problems for the corporation, with not enough ratepayers to meet the demands for services. Those living in the suburbs around the city worked in and availed of the city's amenities and services, but paid their residential rates to the township or urban district council where they lived, and thus into the accounts of Dublin County Council. In 1900, the Dublin Boundaries Act brought the more middle class and Catholic townships of New Kilmainham and Drumcondra, Clonliffe and Glasnevin into the city, by negotiation, as the Unionist councils and ratepayers of Pembroke, Rathmines, and Clontarf grew anxious at the prospect of their annexation. Clontarf, as a township of few ratepayers, and lacking the ability to finance its own drainage and water supply, was eventually included in the city expansion.¹¹⁵ A small Protestant elite governed Dublin city in the eighteenth century until reform legislation facilitated a Catholic municipal majority from the 1840s, prompting a Protestant migration to self-governing townships in the growing suburbs outside of the city and its poorer inhabitants. The number of townships south of the city grew,

¹¹¹ Dublin County Council minute books, 6 June 1901 (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/03).

¹¹² *Irish Times*, 12 Feb. 1891, 29 Mar. 1895 & 4 June 1897, *Evening Herald*, 12 Aug. 1907. Brown was a town councillor and later urban district councillor in Rathmines, on the executive of the South County Dublin Unionist Registration Association, a member of the committee to address Queen Victoria on her visit to Dublin, treasurer of the Dublin Mercantile Association, and a board member of the Meath hospital and County Dublin infirmary.

¹¹³ *Irish Times*, 22 June 1901 & 15 Sept. 1900. Keating Clay was chairman of the South County Dublin Loyalist Registration Association in 1900.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18 Feb. 1899.

¹¹⁵ Ciaran Wallace, 'Fighting for Unionist home rule: competing identities in Dublin 1880-1929', in *Journal of Urban History*, xxxviii (2012), p. 936.

joined on the northern fringe by Clontarf in 1869 and Drumcondra in 1878.¹¹⁶ They valued their political, social and financial independence from the city, but despite vocal opposition, the townships of Drumcondra, Clontarf and Kilmainham were incorporated into the city. This threat of further annexation stiffened the resolve of the Unionist suburbs in the south city to remain independent, but served merely as a delay in the city's expansion.¹¹⁷

The influence of the county council spread beyond its immediate remit as it appointed its representatives to various boards and committees in Dublin, including the Meath hospital, Richmond lunatic asylum and the County Dublin committee of the department of agriculture and technical instruction (D.A.T.I.). The latter included non-councillors such as Major Domville, Charles Gallen, Count Plunkett and Patrick Kettle from Fingal, D.V.C. of Balrothery guardians.¹¹⁸

Normal politics? Local government and local business: 1902-1914

The fact that local government politics in Fingal and on Dublin County Council for most of the next decade was largely uneventful is testament to the successful transition to the mechanics of a more representative, responsible and accountable structure. Those in power strengthened their position and echoed the closed hegemonic nature of the Conservative and landed guardians and grand jurors of the previous generation.

By early 1902, the independent minded, enthusiastic and ambitious young nationalist, Patrick J. Kettle had just turned thirty. A farmer in Swords, he was a nephew of the respected Andrew Kettle and cousin of the equally ambitious Tom Kettle. The U.I.L. national conventions held to discuss the political matters of the day regularly had the experienced Andrew Kettle in attendance on the platform, ensuring a direct line of communication between the nationalist elite in Fingal and the higher echelons of the I.P.P. Both were present in Swords in May 1900 to take steps to set up a local branch of the U.I.L. P.J. Kettle became president with close

¹¹⁶ Kingstown existed from 1828, joined by Rathmines in 1847, and Blackrock, Pembroke, Dalkey, Killiney and New Kilmainham townships respectively in the 1860s. See Séamus Ó Maitiú, *Dublin's suburban towns, 1834-1930: governing Clontarf, Drumcondra, Dalkey, Killiney, Kilmainham, Pembroke, Kingstown, Blackrock, Rathmines, and Rathgar* (Dublin, 2003) & James H. Murphy, *The politics of Dublin Corporation, 1840-1900: from reform to expansion* (Dublin, 2020).

¹¹⁷ Ciaran Wallace, 'Civil society in search of a state: Dublin 1898-1922', in *Journal of Urban History*, xlv, 3, (2018) pp. 432-5.

¹¹⁸ Dublin County Council minute books, 7 June 1902, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/04).

supporter and neighbour Frank Lawless, vice-president and Nicholas Long as treasurer. When a vacancy occurred on Balrothery R.D.C. in February 1901, Kettle successfully proposed the co-option of Frank Lawless.¹¹⁹ Andrew Kettle chaired the inaugural meeting of the North Dublin executive of the U.I.L. in 1902, while P.J. and his own son Tom were elected treasurer and secretary respectively.¹²⁰ However, the organisation did not expand any further. The Fingal area, despite the high profile of local nationalists at county council level and beyond, remained relatively apathetic in terms of grassroots political organisation, and John Redmond told them as much. At a political meeting chaired by Fr Byrne at Lusk in February 1904, Redmond, accompanied by J.J. Clancy and joined on the platform by P.J. O'Neill and Richard Rooney, predicted that Home Rule was now inevitable, following upon the gains of the local government and land acts. Whilst there were now 1,400 U.I.L. branches throughout the country some areas were poorly organised and weak, and Fingal was one of these.¹²¹ Farmers in Fingal were content to occupy themselves with their own business, to the exclusion of politics, as described by regular R.I.C. intelligence reports to this effect. Police intelligence reports regularly refer to matters in the county as 'quiet and peaceable' and that 'relations between landlords and tenants are good'. In June 1898, the County Inspector reported that 'farmers in County Dublin seem to take very little interest in politics'.¹²² Politics in R.I.C. terms meant attendance at public political meetings, involvement in land agitation or the Home Rule movement, and later in cultural nationalist organisations such as the G.A.A. and the Gaelic League.

In the second local elections in 1902, three of the Dublin county councillors from the Fingal area, Charles Gallen (the ex-officio representative of Balrothery R.D.C.), Edward Rooney and William Cumisky, declined to put themselves forward again, citing personal and business pressures. Richard J. Rooney of Wyanstown House, Oldtown, a brother in law of Frank Lawless and vice-chairman of Balrothery R.D.C. succeeded Edward Rooney, a distant relative. Thomas W. Hamlet, long active as a P.L.G., who now described himself as a Protestant Home Ruler, was elected to

¹¹⁹ *Drogheda Independent*, 27 Oct. 1900 & 16 Feb. 1901

¹²⁰ Minute book of the North Dublin executive of the United Ireland League; (Thomas Kettle, Secretary), 17 July 1902 - 17 Sept. 1903, p. 1 (U.C.D Archives, Curran Papers, MS 24).

¹²¹ *Drogheda Conservative*, 4 Feb. 1905.

¹²² R.I.C. Inspector General and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports, *The British in Ireland* CO 904, POS 8320: Feb-Jul 1898.

Dublin County Council in 1902 for Balbriggan, in place of Cumisky. He had been a delegate to the Unionist Convention in Dublin in 1892.¹²³ The business focus of the council was noticeable when in resisting Gaelic League requests to support a national exhibition in Dublin, they unanimously adopted a policy of supporting an international exhibition in Dublin as it would 'be of more benefit than a national one', although they did agree to close the council offices to mark St Patricks Day.¹²⁴ They agreed, however, to appoint delegates to the Gaelic League conference on forming an industrial development association.¹²⁵

As the 1905 local elections approached, the ambitious P.J. Kettle stood against P.J. O'Neill for the Swords seat on the county council despite his uncle Andrew exhorting him otherwise. He won narrowly by 561 votes to 540, with an endorsement from Thomas McLean helping to capture the labourers' vote. Subsequently co-opted, O'Neill was re-elected chairman and regained his seat in the following election in 1908. This co-option caused some dissension among councillors who saw it as usurping the electorate. Kettle came from the same area west of Swords as Thomas Aungier, so it likely that he had the support of the same vote.¹²⁶ Through 1906, he took up the cause of the labourer, appearing at demonstrations at Oldtown and Swords, organised by the Labour League, against the allocation of lands to graziers and calling for one-acre plots for labourers.¹²⁷ On Dublin County Council Kettle was prominent as a proposer and seconder of many standard motions relating to payments, adoptions of reports and procedures, and politically popular ones such as one lamenting the passing of Michael Davitt, which may give an indication of his own character and self-importance.¹²⁸

When O'Neill won back his seat in 1908, Balrothery R.D.C. voted not to co-opt any members so denying P.J. Kettle a second chance, and he transferred his energies to his involvement in the Gaelic League, U.I.L., and County Dublin Farmers

¹²³ *Drogheda Independent*, 26 Apr. 1902; Irish Unionist Alliance, *Unionist convention for Leinster, Munster and Connaught proceedings*, (Dublin, 1892); Marriage record, Richard Rooney & Julia Lawless, (G.R.O., Balrothery, 1894, Q1/2/371).

¹²⁴ Dublin County Council minute books, 11 Feb. 10 & 24 Mar. 1904, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/06).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 12 & 26 Jan. 1905, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/07).

¹²⁶ *Drogheda Independent*, 13 & 27 May 1905, 9 June 1906.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 31 Mar. & 28 Apr. 1906.

¹²⁸ Dublin County Council minute books, 31 May 1906, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/08).

Association.¹²⁹ E.H. Woods was similarly excluded, but offered to continue to serve on hospital boards, if requested. A presentation made to Kettle by his supporters, at his home, in recognition of his nine years of public service, appeared to signal the end of his political career. Whilst those close to him including Frank Lawless were present, there were no notable members of the Kettle family mentioned.¹³⁰ By 1910, P.J. O'Neill was one of the Fingal nationalist cohort with a national profile, who as Paseta has described, expected to move into influential positions in a Home Rule administration when it came into being. Chairman of Dublin County Council since its formation in 1899, he gained a measure of national prominence as chairman of the General Council of County Councils, lobbying on issues such as the national roads building programme, a fairer taxation burden for Ireland and on old age pensions committees.¹³¹ A full time politician, he was unmarried and lived with his brother and sister who ran the family farm. They too were unmarried.¹³² He was also involved in the temperance movement, and a key speaker at the Total Abstinence Congress, held in Sackville St, Dublin, in June 1914, where an estimated fifty thousand people attended its main event. He eschewed the 'influence of temperance in achieving Ireland's freedom', citing the poverty, hardship and sorrow which abuse of drink caused in Irish life.¹³³

The national election atmosphere of 1910 continued through to the triennial council elections in 1911. Differences between nationalist representatives now started to manifest themselves in the council rooms, after years of polite consensus. Frank Lawless ran as a Sinn Féin candidate in the 1911 local elections for a seat on Balrothery R.D.C., and lost by a margin of only eight votes in Swords West to the outgoing Patrick Reilly. This was the first time Sinn Féin had contested an election in Balrothery. At the first meeting of the district council in June, he was defeated 15-3 by his former political ally P.J. Kettle for a co-opted seat, made vacant by J. P. Cuffe who contested two seats. This meeting was a stormy affair. R.J. Rooney accused an 'All for Swords League' clique of combining against Lawless, and Kettle expressed

¹²⁹ Kettle only ran for the Dublin County Council seat, which he lost, perhaps highlighting his over confidence if not arrogance.

¹³⁰ *Drogheda Independent*, 13 June, 11 Jul. & 3 Oct. 1908.

¹³¹ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 2 Feb. 1910.

¹³² N.A.I. 1911 Census, online at

<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Dublin/Kinsaley/Kinsaley/2871/> accessed 8 Aug. 2021.

¹³³ *Belfast Newsletter*, 29 June 1914.

his personal regret that Lawless had opposed him. Michael Dunne, who proposed Kettle, referred to Lawless as an ‘out and out Sinn Féiner’. Cuffe then joined in, rounding on Rooney for double jobbing as a supplier of roadbuilding stone to the county council. Rooney defeated Michael Dunne 17-12 for the chair, and then pressure put on him to withdraw from the contest for vice-chairman and representative on Dublin County Council in favour of Hussey, with this described as a sensible and magnanimous gesture with Home Rule on its way. Anthony Hussey retained the vice-chair unanimously, but the debate indicated that it was little more than a token gesture to a Unionist, though an experienced and able servant.¹³⁴

Nationalist Charles Graham spoke strongly at a meeting of Balbriggan town commissioners in May 1911, against giving a welcome address to the king on the forthcoming royal visit. Other members thought this would only give an advantage to the Unionist townships in south Dublin, who were presenting addresses themselves. His brother Archdale Graham, the chairman, withdrew the motion after David Ellis, who described himself as a Labour Unionist, said he could not support the address if it were not unanimous.¹³⁵ The dilemma for this class of constitutional nationalists was how to reconcile their political identity and calls for Home Rule with the social attraction and commercial benefits of union and empire. The more ambitious local politicians used every opportunity to present themselves as part of the parliamentary nationalist movement. When Anthony Hussey retired in June 1913 from both the board of guardians and R.D.C., he was succeeded by Michael Dunne, now Balrothery chairman, as their representative on Dublin County Council, a position Hussey had held almost continuously since 1902.¹³⁶ Dunne ensured he was conspicuously prominent whenever high profile politicians visited.¹³⁷ When the Irish Taxpayers Association wrote to all the councils in Ireland expressing concern about the reduction or potential removal of imperial exchequer grants to local government bodies, as outlined in the Home Rule bill then before parliament, both Dublin County Council and Balrothery R.D.C. followed J.J. Clancy’s advice not to offer them any

¹³⁴ *Drogheda Independent*, 3, 10 & 17 June 1911; *Drogheda Advertiser*, 17 June 1911.

¹³⁵ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 13 May 1911.

¹³⁶ Balrothery R.D.C. nominated A.S. Hussey as ex-officio representative to Dublin County Council every year except 1907-8 when John P. Cuffe from Swords served.

¹³⁷ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 30 Apr. 1913, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/046: BG40/A133); Balrothery R.D.C. minute books, 23 Apr. 1913, (N.A.I., BG40 RA16); *Freeman’s Journal & Cork Examiner*, 1 May 1913. Joseph Devlin M.P. gave an address in Balbriggan in May 1911 as head of the Ancient Order of Hibernians and Dillon visited Swords in April.

support. They went further and publicly questioned their identity and their motives.¹³⁸ The willingness of the local representatives to abide by party instructions matched the party's desire to control both the political agenda and discourse.

Much of the business of Dublin County Council in the first half of 1913 was of a routine nature, influenced and largely controlled by the chairman, P.J. O'Neill, who chaired three quarters of the twenty-eight regular meetings held in 1913. Under council patronage, members of the Fingal farming community continued to access positions of influence. Christopher Dodds, Cloghran and William Fagan, Finglas were appointed to the county committee of agriculture and Dr M.J. Cuffe of Swords was appointed medical superintendent of the Central Tuberculosis Dispensary.¹³⁹

Unionists maintained familial continuity when Colonel Richard Woods replaced his brother E.H. Woods on the finance committee of Balrothery R.D.C. Attendances at guardians meetings declined when increasingly cancelled due to the lack of a quorum, with the traditional attendees, such as the philanthropic Colonel Forster of Swords being the notable exceptions.¹⁴⁰ The reduced status of poor law guardians' responsibilities in local government undoubtedly carried less interest for nationalist members. Often they would attend the rural council meeting first but not stay for the guardians' meeting that followed. Lee maintained that the new local political elite 'became as corrupt as the old one', with favouritism commonplace. He attributed a lack of candidates of vision or ability graduating to national politics to such a system of appointments.¹⁴¹ This however misses the point that there was no formal fully connected party political structure among nationalists. The I.P.P. was a separate, independent body focussed on its Westminster membership. The nature of the relationship between the U.I.L., and the I.P.P. was of a support organisation. National conventions were for listening or dissemination but the decisions on policy and strategy lay with the small group at the top. Local representatives were primarily local representatives, representing their local community and their own family, class

¹³⁸ Balrothery R.D.C. minute books, 28 May 1913, (N.A.I., BG40 RA16); *Irish Times*, 3 May & 6 June 1913; *The Irish Taxpayer*, May 1913, (N.L.I. Special collections, EPH E141). The Irish Taxpayer's Association produced their own newspaper in 1913, highlighting fiscal and taxation issues, and largely critical of the position of the I.P.P. and mainstream nationalist press on the matter. The group consisted mainly of concerned Unionist ratepayers in Dublin.

¹³⁹ Dublin County Council minute books, 16 Jan. & 13 Feb. 1913, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/13).

¹⁴⁰ *Drogheda Independent*, 9 Apr., 11 June & 10 Dec. 1910.

¹⁴¹ Joseph Lee, *The modernisation of Irish society: 1848-1918* (Dublin, 1973), pp 127-8.

or regional interests first, whether for personal gain or civic responsibility. They were no more self-serving than the senior members of the I.P.P were, and just as ambitious for advancement. Both took the opportunities that presented themselves and many appointments bear this out.¹⁴² In 1913, R.J. Rooney, Archdale Graham, chairman of Balbriggan town commissioners, and Thomas Smyth, were appointed magistrates. In May 1914, the council appointed Rooney as poor rate collector for Dublin, but he had to delay taking up the post until his membership of the county committee of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction expired.¹⁴³ This was a prestigious and desirable position with attractive income and influential political networking potential. This is borne out by examining the list of politically connected family members among the defeated candidates for rate collector, which included Daniel McAllister, Donabate, Edward Rooney, Lusk, Charles Kettle, and the Balbriggan town clerk, William Bannon.¹⁴⁴ Laurence O’Neill, son of Joseph O’Neill, was solicitor to Balrothery R.D.C., and electoral returning officer for Dublin County Council. By the end of 1914, P. J. Kettle and Michael Dunne had joined the O’Neill cousins on the magistrates’ bench.¹⁴⁵

Local elections 1914, a sign of things to come: Labour eclipsed and Sinn Féin’s first councillor

The 1914 local elections in Fingal were in some ways a precursor for what was about to happen in the Irish political landscape, and revealed the depth of local class and political division. We saw in the previous chapter how the agricultural labourers of Fingal became unionised and politically mobilised during the strike and lockout of 1913. In the local elections in 1914, the labour movement ran five candidates in the Balrothery area, whom the newspapers described as ‘Larkinites. This was a popular term at the time to describe Larkin and Connolly’s combination of socialism, republicanism and trade unionism at the time, in their attempt to merge the class question with the national question. Following the affiliation of the Irish Trade Union

¹⁴² Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: politics and war* (Oxford, 1999), pp 152-3.

¹⁴³ *Magistrates (Ireland) A return showing the names, addresses, occupations or descriptions of the persons appointed to the commission of the peace in Ireland since the 30th day of November, 1912, the date of the last return (parliamentary paper, no. 396, of session 1912-13), including all appointments to the end of 1913*, H.C. 1914, (461) lxxvii.1003; *Irish Times*, 22 May 1914.

¹⁴⁴ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 13 May 1914, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/046: BG40/A135).

¹⁴⁵ E. McDowel Cosgrave & W. T. Pike, *Dublin and County Dublin in the twentieth century* (Brighton, 1908), p. 173; *Thom’s Directory* (Dublin, 1915), p. 1895.

Congress and the Labour party in 1914, the term was often loosely applied to any Labour party or trade union candidates. Newspapers reported the results of the 1914 local elections for Balrothery R.D.C. as a defeat for socialism. All five candidates were defeated, and Thomas McLean lost to P.J. O'Neill in the contest for a county council seat by 927 votes to 342 in Swords. The *Drogheda Advertiser* made no secret of its allegiance on the declaration of the result, describing the victor as 'admittedly one of the ablest public men in Ireland', and his defeated opponent as a "Larkinite labourer", adding that 'despite the advocacy of the *divine missionary* and his satellites, P.J. O'Neill had prevailed'. Continuing to reflect the triumphalism that followed the divisive dispute of 1913, Michael Dunne claimed it as a victory for 'Faith and Fatherland' the catch-cry of the I.P.P., as well as the banner of the *Drogheda Independent*.¹⁴⁶

Frank Lawless was successful for Sinn Féin, finally topping the rural council poll in Swords West. Molly Adrian, later an active member of Cumann na mBan, was elected as the first lady guardian in Balrothery in 1914, and cheered on her entry to the meeting room for the first time. A vigorous campaign on the town tenants issue in Skerries with a progressive Labour nationalist message helped Patrick Mathews top the poll there, where almost half the voters were women.¹⁴⁷ A victory reception for the founder of the Black Raven pipe band John Rooney, elected for Lusk, commended the elections of fellow councillors Lawless and Mathews. All three were involved with the Gaelic revival, the Irish Volunteers, sympathetic to labourers' issues, and a challenge to the traditional nationalist majority on the council, although only Lawless was a member of Sinn Féin. The editor of the *Drogheda Advertiser* particularly noted the complacency of the defeated outgoing candidates and their limited campaigning. There was a long tradition of uncontested seats in the Balrothery area, and in 1914, the county council candidates in Balbriggan (Archdale Graham) and Lusk (R.A. Butler) seats were unopposed.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ *Irish Independent*, 10 June 1914; *Drogheda Independent*, 13 June & 11 July 1914; *Drogheda Advertiser*, 10 & 17 June 1914. The 'divine missionary' is presumably a reference to Larkin.

¹⁴⁷ Mathews ran as a nationalist with a Labour message, rather than as a Labour candidate.

¹⁴⁸ *Evening Herald & Irish Independent*, 10 June 1914; *Drogheda Independent*, 13 & 20 June & 11 July 1914; *Drogheda Advertiser*, 10 & 17 June 1914; *The Irish Volunteer*, 31 Oct. 1914. In Skerries, women cast 259 of the 567 votes. Ten of the Dublin County Council seats were uncontested. John Rooney was a son of Edward Rooney, elected to Dublin County Council in 1899.

An indication of the depth of antagonism to Sinn Féin among some nationalists manifested itself in the reaction to a request to Balrothery P.L.U. in April 1914 for support for a Sinn Féin resolution opposing partition in the event of Home Rule. Amid laughter, chairman Hartford suggested that such a resolution was only fit for burning, and instructed the clerk to throw the resolution in the fire. The episode highlights the extent of the naivety and smugness of some nationalists regarding the threat of partition and the resolve of Ulster Unionists to oppose Home Rule, and mirrored the attitudes of the I.P.P. leadership.¹⁴⁹ Redmond's insistence on appointing his nominees to the executive of the Volunteers was a further example of the party tendency to attempt to control any potential nationalist mass movement in Ireland. This was now more pertinent as Home Rule was imminent and there was a fear of anything that might compromise or impede its introduction, as police reports had indicated for some time.¹⁵⁰ Maume explains that Redmond 'saw himself as leader of the nation with a national cause, rather than as party leader'.¹⁵¹ His supporters at national and local level likewise saw themselves as part of a government in waiting, as Pasetta has argued. They were not to be denied by either Unionist or extreme nationalists.¹⁵²

Conclusion

The evolution of local politics in Fingal from 1870 to 1914 was a slow progression from Protestant, Conservative-Unionist and landlord controlled, largely independent, highly locally oriented bodies to those controlled by Catholic nationalist tenant farmers who were part of a greater national cause. As these bodies became more democratic and representative, there was greater central government control, but increased local reach and responsibilities. Periods of heightened national political activity influenced these local political structures and accelerated change, especially in the 1880s through the influence of Parnellite Home Rule. Examining the career trajectories of the prominent actors that emerged and served on these bodies help us chart these changes. National politics helped give local nationalists a cause and a

¹⁴⁹ *Drogheda Independent*, 18 Apr. 1914.

¹⁵⁰ R.I.C. Inspector General and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports, Oct 1912 & May 1913, (N.A.I., *The British in Ireland*, CO 904/88, POS 8339 & CO 904/90, POS 8341).,

¹⁵¹ Patrick Maume, *The long gestation: Irish nationalist life, 1891-1918*, (Dublin 1999), p. 141.

¹⁵² Senia Pasetta, *Before the revolution: nationalism, social change and Ireland's Catholic elite, 1879-1922*, (Cork, 1999).

message while local government presented the platform and the networks to further political messaging and ideologies.

The Local Government Act was the significant accelerator in terms of representative balance and increase in responsibilities and power. It presented the opportunity for a level of self-administration if not self-government for the first time, and a step, as P.J. O'Neill declared in 1898, on the road to Home Rule. Access to committees and departments of state, especially in agriculture, gave local politicians an unprecedented opportunity for admission to, engagement with and participation in national government structures.

The changes that took place in local government in 1898 strengthened the support structures for the advance of constitutional nationalism before 1916, and provided the organizational vehicle that was crucial to the successful prosecution of the revolutionary nationalist struggle in 1920. Roy Foster described popular nationalism as 'a matter of Catholic self-assertiveness and a search for material benefits rather than any yearning for constitutional change'.¹⁵³ The new local government bodies were a vehicle for this self-confidence and self-advancement. The importance of local government lay in its proximity and relevance to people's everyday lives and experience, as providers of services and supports, as regulators and as the collectors of taxes through the rates. This conferred an authority and status to the local political representatives who facilitated these services. Mary Daly described the Local Government Board as 'the most prominent manifestation of Britain's presence in Ireland', but one can say the same of the local government bodies that were within its remit.¹⁵⁴ The importance of local government in managing the state was as important as its role in public engagement with the state. The gatekeepers in this respect were the political personalities that held the key positions in this layer of government.

¹⁵³ R. F. Foster, 'Anglo Irish literature, Gaelic nationalism and Irish politics in the 1890s', in E. O'Halpin (ed.), *Ireland after the anion: proceedings of the second joint meeting of the Royal Irish Academy and the British Academy London, 1986* (Oxford, 1989) p. 64.

¹⁵⁴ Mary Daly, *The buffer state: the history of the Department of the Environment* (Dublin, 1997), p. 44.

Chapter 4

The rise of new nationalism: from cultural revivalists to republican revolutionaries

The term ‘new nationalism’ can be used to describe the alternative expressions of nationalist identity and sentiment that developed in the cultural, political, and revolutionary movements that emerged as rivals to the Westminster focussed constitutional political party machine in the quarter century up to 1914.¹ These movements gave rise to a more forceful, distinctive and independent sense of Irish identity. Looking to a Gaelic and Irish past for a better future was seen as superior to embracing Anglicisation. The Gaelic Athletic Association, Gaelic League and the literary revival movements championed a cultural revival in sport, language, music and dance, dress and literature. A political awakening encouraged by the 1798 centenary, the Boer War and opposition to royal visits preceded the formation of the radical nationalist Sinn Féin movement by Arthur Griffith in 1905. In the background, a rejuvenated Irish Republican Brotherhood saw the opportunity to use all these groups to recruit and infiltrate for their separatist cause. Alvin Jackson describes the concept of ‘new nationalism’ in terms of alternatives to the Irish Parliamentary Party brand of nationalist politics amid the ‘Irish political and cultural efflorescence of the 1890s and beyond’.² He emphasises that there were longer and deeper roots to the cultural and political alternatives that emerged in that decade than a mere reaction to the demise of Parnell. The energy and enthusiasm generated by the land and Home Rule campaigns were in decline before the demise of Parnell in 1890. The factionalism that followed the split in the Parnellite movement and the disappointment and despondency that followed the defeat of the second Home Rule bill in 1893 contributed to an apathy towards the machinations of the I.P.P. style and form of politics, both nationally and locally. D.G Boyce has concluded that the Parnellite movement had exhausted itself and its potential to deliver the national

¹ S.J. Connolly, ‘New nationalism’, in S.J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* (2nd edition, Oxford, 2002) available online at <https://www-oxfordreference-com.jproxy.nuim.ie/view/10.1093/acref/9780199234837.001.0001/acref-9780199234837-e-1339> accessed 6 Feb. 2022.

² Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: politics and war* (Oxford, 1999), p.168.

regeneration it promised.³ The extent of British and Unionist opposition to granting Irish self-determination in the two Home Rule bills defeated in 1886 and 1893 and the Liberals' treatment of Parnell over the divorce case contributed to a realisation that the dream of Home Rule might not be delivered through Westminster. For some this was the basis of their motivation for embracing new alternatives.

This chapter will examine the rise of this new nationalism in Fingal through the branches of the cultural, political and revolutionary movements established there and through the personalities that drove their growth and built the networks used to recruit and develop their membership, activities and influence. While many of these organisations were openly nationalist, they were not revolutionary and not all were separatist, but they often had leading members who were, and there was often significant overlapping memberships. Particular attention will focus on the activities and political evolution of personalities such as Frank Lawless, who was the driving force behind the G.A.A. and the Gaelic League in the Swords area, and who founded a local Sinn Féin branch and used these organisations as cover for his I.R.B. activities. Fingal had G.A.A. clubs established from 1884 and Gaelic League branches from 1899. There was a Sinn Féin presence from 1906 and reports of I.R.B. activity from 1908. The political relationship that these groups and individuals experienced with the local constitutional elite, on the board of guardians and the district and county councils, to whom they were potential political rivals, will be examined in the context of the evolution of local politics.

The G.A.A. in Fingal

Michael Cusack and Maurice Davin, who believed that the spread of English games was undermining Ireland's national identity, were amongst those who founded the Gaelic Athletic Association in Thurles in November 1884. The Association concentrated on the promotion of athletics, Gaelic football and hurling, and immediately attracted support from the I.R.B. who saw it as a potential recruiting ground and who, by 1886, dominated its executive. The G.A.A. soon developed as an openly nationalist organisation, excluding from membership those who watched or

³ D.G. Boyce, 'One last burial: Culture, counter-revolution and revolution in Ireland, 1886-1916', in D.G. Boyce (ed.), *The Revolution in Ireland, 1879–1923* (Dublin, 1988), p.115.

played ‘imported’ games and all members of the police or British armed forces.⁴ One of the founder members and one of its secretaries was the editor of the *Leinster Leader*, John Wyse Power, imprisoned during the Land War and reputedly a member of the I.R.B. He established the Dublin County Board of the G.A.A. in October 1886 and was its first president.⁵ There was a long tradition of playing football and hurling in Fingal, and by 1888 there were 114 clubs affiliated to the county board, of which twenty-three were in the north county, including Fingallians at Swords, Round Towers at Lusk, Binn Édar at Howth and Gladstonians in Balbriggan. The last named club gives an indication of where its Parnellite members’ political affiliations lay. The clubs attracted immediate attention from the Royal Irish Constabulary, evidenced by the fact that much of William Nolan’s information on the early history of Dublin clubs came from police intelligence and surveillance reports.⁶ However, the new organisation was entering a troubled period. The Parnellite split almost destroyed the G.A.A in Dublin; although the county board officers supported Parnell there was opposition from many of the clubs, particularly where there was clerical involvement.⁷ Membership in Dublin fell in the early 1890s due to internal divisions arising from the split and individual disagreements with the county board with many clubs disaffiliating. The Dublin County Board itself declined to affiliate with the G.A.A. for the season 1893-94.⁸ By 1896, there were only eight clubs in Fingal still affiliated to the Dublin County Board. Their records for the period are incomplete and their fragmented condition partly reflects how disorganised the G.A.A. was in Dublin. Without organised competitions games were irregular and often only played as part of a wider cultural event or for fundraising purposes.⁹ The G.A.A. nationally remained diminished throughout the remainder of the decade, with little popular

⁴ See Marcus de Burca, *The GAA: A history* (Dublin, 1980). Soccer, rugby and cricket were games viewed as imported by the British.

⁵ Owen McGee, ‘Power, John Wyse’, in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁶ William Nolan (ed.), *The Gaelic Athletic Association in Dublin 1884-1959 vol. i*, (Dublin, 2005), pp 11-19 & 29.

⁷ William Nolan (ed.), *The Gaelic Athletic Association in Dublin 1884-1959 vol. i*, (Dublin, 2005), pp 33-34.

⁸ Marcus de Burca, *The GAA: a history* (Dublin, 1980), pp 41-47; William Nolan (ed.), *The Gaelic Athletic Association in Dublin 1884-1959 vol. 1*, (Dublin, 2005), p.25.

⁹ *Dublin County board minute book, 1896-8*, p. 3, & 21 Oct., 15 Nov. 1893, pp 102-3, (G.A.A. Archives, GAA/DUB/01/01); William Nolan (ed.), *The Gaelic Athletic Association in Dublin 1884-1959 vol. i*, (Dublin, 2005), p. 29. The clubs were Balscadden Blues and Fearnots (Balbriggan), Magh go Bragh (Naul), Fingallians (Swords), Innisfails (Coolock), Sarsfields (Lucan), Hugh O’Neills (Glasnevin), and the Parnell Volunteers in the north city.

enthusiasm and less resources, having accumulated debts from an extended promotional playing tour to USA in 1889. Its playing numbers were decimated by rural emigration due to the agricultural depression as the number of clubs fell from about 1,000 in 1890 to 220 in 1892.¹⁰

One of the clubs that remained affiliated in Dublin was the Fingallians club in Swords, where Frank Lawless was president and Thomas Lowndes was secretary. Thomas was a cousin of John Lowndes, the first Catholic chairman of Balrothery board of guardians.¹¹ Fingallians were one of the nineteen Dublin clubs officially represented at Parnell's funeral.¹² There are newspaper reports of Frank Lawless playing football for the club and participating in athletics meetings as early as 1891, and by 1894 he was the club's delegate to the Dublin County Board and a member of the county executive committee.¹³ Other prominent local nationalists became involved in the G.A.A. at an early stage in Fingal. Police reports in 1890 identified James Ennis and Nicholas Markey as president and vice president of the Magh go Bragh club in Naul.¹⁴ The records of the Dublin County Board in its initial years are sparse and newspaper reports infrequent, but the evidence of Fingallians and Magh go Bragh appear to indicate an immediate involvement of local political figures in the officer roles in these clubs. In the first decade of the new century, the G.A.A. in Fingal reorganised and expanded. By 1909, there were sufficient G.A.A. clubs in Fingal to set up its own leagues, independent of the Dublin city leagues, in both hurling and football and the following year they received permission from the county board to start a schools' competition.¹⁵ The G.A.A. in Fingal provided a social outlet for physical activity and a network for meeting and fundraising, which often brought its clubs into contact with those frequented by more radical nationalists in the city.

¹⁰ W.F. Mandle, 'The G.A.A. & popular culture, 1884-1924', in Oliver McDonagh, W.F. Mandle and Pauric Travers (eds.), *Irish culture and nationalism, 1750-1950*, (Basingstoke, 1983), p. 187; Richard McElligott, 'Richard Blake and the resurrection of the GAA: 1890-98', in *Ríocht na Midhe, Records of the Meath Archaeological and Historical Society*, xxiv (2013), pp 256-269; *Census of Ireland, 1901. Part I. Area, houses, and population: the ages, civil or conjugal condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion, and education of the people. vol. 1, Province of Leinster*, H.C. 1902 [Cd. 847] cxxii, cxxiii, County Dublin saw a population increase by three per cent in this decade.

¹¹ *Drogheda Independent*, 3 Aug. 1895.

¹² William Nolan (ed.), *The Gaelic Athletic Association in Dublin 1884-1959 vol. i*, (Dublin, 2005), p33.

¹³ *The Nation*, 28 Feb. 1891; *Freeman's Journal*, 21 July 1891 & 27 Jan. 1894.

¹⁴ William Nolan (ed.), *The Gaelic Athletic Association in Dublin 1884-1959 vol. i*, (Dublin, 2005), p. 29.

¹⁵ *Dublin County Board minute books: (G.A.A. Archives, GAA/DUB/01/02)*, 23 Mar. 1909, pp 20-22, Feb. 1910, p. 72.

For political figures like Ennis, Markey and Frank Lawless, it was another network of contacts that could be utilised for political exposure and opportunity. The officer positions in local G.A.A. clubs conferred modest community status, and committee membership gave an opportunity to learn administrative, collaborative and debating skills. Such an education would be of benefit in later organisations and institutions.

The Gaelic Revival movement

The long-standing interest of academics and antiquarians in Irish heritage and archaeology was supplemented by a more popular enthusiasm for Irish folklore, mythology and history when the National Library of Ireland and the National Museum of Ireland opened in 1877. The spread of English popular culture concerned Irish language and cultural revivalists who feared the complete disappearance of the language and with it Irish identity and culture. Douglas Hyde's 1892 lecture *The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland* articulated this and prompted the founding of the Gaelic League in Dublin in July 1893 by Eoin Mac Néill with Hyde's support. It became the leading organisation in the Gaelic Revival movement, placing a particular emphasis on encouraging the speaking of Irish through organising language classes and publishing modern literature in the language.¹⁶ It published tracts and initiated debates and lectures, often reported in its own bilingual newspaper *An Claidheamh Soluis* (the sword of light). By 1903, the League had 600 branches. Hyde insisted that the league should remain non-political, but it quickly attracted the politically minded. The Gaelic League was rooted in a deeper mind-set than that of merely resurrecting a declining language. Promoting Ireland's distinct linguistic and cultural tradition and its pre-colonial history provided a powerful argument in favour of full independence and nationhood. As with the G.A.A., the I.R.B. used the movement as a recruiting ground and it became the preferred vehicle as a cover for revolutionary discourse and networking. By 1914, this revolutionary wing had taken control over the League and they later forced Hyde's resignation as president in August 1915.¹⁷

¹⁶ See P. J. Mathews, *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, the Gaelic League and the Co-operative Movement* (Notre Dame, 2003).

¹⁷ Patrick Maume, 'Hyde, Douglas (de hÍde, Dubhghlas)', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

A literary movement of predominantly Anglo-Irish artists, writers and intellectuals emerged as Celtic revivalists concerned with furthering Ireland's cultural identity. The poet and playwright, William Butler Yeats was the figurehead, and founded the Irish National Theatre, the Abbey, along with Lady Augusta Gregory in 1904. Inspired by Hyde's message on de-Anglicization, the journalist, and sometime contributor to *An Claidheamh Soluis*, D.P. Moran, started a new weekly newspaper in 1900, *The Leader*, and extended the philosophy to business and all aspects of Irish life with his articles on how to promote an 'Irish Ireland'. His support for cultural nationalism and 'buy Irish' campaigns underpinned a belief in Catholic values and criticism of English and Protestant influences. This appealed to the clergy and the middle classes and helped recruitment to the Gaelic League.¹⁸ His regular criticism extended to the Irish Parliamentary Party, the literary revivalists, republicans and his journalistic competitor Arthur Griffith.¹⁹ The literary and cultural output of both Celtic and Gaelic revivalists found a vehicle in local newspapers, where the stories of Ireland's cultural and political past often emphasised its subjugation at the hands of the coloniser, and lauded its religious and cultural heroes from mythology and history. Such messages were entirely consistent with those who sought separatism and independence from Britain, portrayed as Ireland's enduring enemy and the cause of all its political, social and economic ills. This brought the messaging of the Gaelic Revival beyond its membership and fully into the community.

Although founded in Dublin in 1893, there is little evidence of any significant penetration of the Gaelic League into the rural north county during the years up to 1898. Séamas Ó Maitiu contends that the Gaelic League really only took hold after the renewed popular nationalist enthusiasm around opposition to the Boer War and the 1798 centenary commemorations.²⁰ *An Claidheamh Soluis* announced the formation of the Naul branch in November 1899. The proceedings that night illustrates how political and social connections came together in the cause of Irish identity and culture, if not politics and the maintenance of the local social hierarchy. Over thirty men and boys attended the meeting addressed by a representative of the

¹⁸ Owen McGee, *The I.R.B.: the Irish Republican Brotherhood, from the Land League to Sinn Féin* (Dublin, 2005) p. 276.

¹⁹ Patrick Maume, 'Moran, David Patrick (D.P.)', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

²⁰ Séamas Ó Maitiu, 'A spent force? *An Claidheamh Soluis* and the Gaelic League in Dublin 1893-1913' in Francis Devine (ed.), *A capital in conflict: Dublin city and the 1913 lockout* (Dublin, 2013) pp 285-6.

central committee, Patrick Archer, a customs official, originally from the locality. He was a founder member of the Wild Geese G.A.A. club in nearby Oldtown. The meeting elected the parish priest, Fr Francis O'Neill, as president, local Balrothery district councillor Michael Ennis, as vice president, and the local national schoolteacher, J. J. Lehane, as secretary.²¹ The Gaelic League took advantage of any opportunities to promote support for the language from public bodies, reporting that Dublin county councillor and vice-chairman at Balrothery guardians Charles Gallen had supported calls for the teaching of Irish in national schools. Reality was somewhat different. A memorial of 196 school managers, representing over 1,000 schools, published in March 1900, supporting the teaching of Irish in schools, was notable for not including any schools from north county Dublin.²² Political bodies were happy to be passively but publicly associated with the Irish language cause and the Gaelic League was happy with the publicity. The movement continued to grow and by 1901, the league boasted thirty branches in Dublin and its suburbs.²³ A couple of years later there were forty-eight branches in the county, including ten in the Fingal area, located from Naul, Skerries, Lusk and Swords to Drumcondra, Finglas, Howth and Clontarf.²⁴

Central branch had been anxious from 1900 to expand in north Dublin. Pearse and Kent discussed setting up branches at Clontarf, Malahide and Howth, with help from James Lawless and the scholar Kuno Meyer. Within a couple of months Clontarf and Howth were running Irish classes, with one hundred and fifteen attending at Clontarf, and within a couple of years branches started at Skerries, Swords and Lusk.²⁵ They provided an alternative for young people to the influence of English popular culture and, it was believed, the 'the national curse of Ireland', excessive drinking, something which encouraged the Catholic Church to lend its support. Skerries branch promoted the benefits of Irish classes as a wholesome activity for younger people, endorsed by the parish priest, mindful of the opportunity for religious instruction afforded by the teaching of Irish and Christian history.²⁶ John Rooney, the son of

²¹ *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 4 Nov. 1899. Ennis was the son of former poor law guardian and local grazier, James Ennis.

²² *Ibid.*, 3 & 17 Mar. 1900.

²³ Gaelic League, *Annual Report of the Gaelic League, 1901* (Dublin, 1901), p. 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1902-3 (Dublin, 1904), pp 150-52.

²⁵ *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 10 Nov. 1900, 5 Jan., 19 Oct. 1901, 8 Feb. & 25 Oct. 1902.

²⁶ *Freeman's Journal*, 18 June 1901

former county councillor Edward Rooney, was treasurer with Lusk Gaelic League, where the local parish priest, Fr Thomas Byrne, included the rosary for children as an activity.²⁷

P. J. Kettle and Frank Lawless worked closely in developing the Gaelic League in Swords, and throughout Fingal.²⁸ As president of the Fingallians G.A.A. club in Swords and a member of the county board, Lawless had a wide network of contacts, which were particularly useful for developing a similar network for the Gaelic League. Political lectures from guest speakers were popular and used to attract audiences. In December 1903 leading I.R.B. figures, P.T. Daly and James Egan spoke in Swords on 'The life and works of Thomas Davis', with attendees from other league branches and G.A.A. clubs across the county and city.²⁹ Other speakers at Swords included P.H. Pearse, as editor of the Gaelic League newspaper, *An Claidheamh Soluis*, on a number of occasions and Belfast writer Alice Milligan, editor of *An Shan Van Vocht*.³⁰ These talks and open-air Gaelic cultural festivals, known as Aeríocht, enabled the building of networks of cultural and nationalist groups while providing leisure and educational events for the wider public. In 1904, Eoin MacNeill, living at Hazelbrook, Malahide served as president of the Fingal Feis committee alongside P.J. Kettle.³¹

Swords became one of the most active branches in Fingal, run by members of the Lawless and Coleman families. Throughout 1904, it held regular classes, concerts, recitals, dances, and festivals. By the year-end, there were new branches at St Margarets, Balbriggan and Ballyboghil, who cooperated with each other for competitions and cultural meetings, providing the networking opportunities for cultural nationalism. It was common to play football or hurling games as part of a joint programme of events, as the local G.A.A. clubs and Gaelic League branches often had overlapping memberships.³² In early 1905, new league branches formed at Garristown and Donabate, and a Fingal Comhairle Cheantar, (regional executive)

²⁷ *Drogheda Independent*, 18 June 1904.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1 Mar & 6 Dec 1902, 7 Jan. 1905.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 12 Dec. 1903; Desmond McCabe & Owen McGee, 'Daly, Patrick Thomas' & 'Egan, James Francis', in James McGuire & James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009). Daly was a prolific speaker and under police surveillance at this time, Leon O'Broin, *Revolutionary underground: The story of the Irish Republican Brotherhood: 1858-1924* (Dublin, 1976) pp 124-5.

³⁰ *Drogheda Independent*, 17 Dec. 1904, 28 Jan. & 18 Feb. 1905.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 21 May 1904.

³² *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 7 May, 2 July, 3 Sept. & 29 Oct. 1904, all events hosted by Swords branch.

formed under Eoin McNeill, with Pearse and P.J. Kettle. It proceeded to organise a major regional feis in Skerries in June 1905, which also included industrial competitions in woodwork, ironwork, leatherwork, tailoring, bread making, cooperage, needlework and lacemaking, broadening the league's appeal, but also cognisant of the campaigns to promote Irish made goods.³³ In 1906, the Gaelic League members on Balrothery R.D.C. took up the request that any librarians appointed to posts in the council's library service, should have as a prerequisite a working knowledge of Irish.³⁴ In 1908, the sensitive relationship between cultural principles, political expediency and patronage played out in a dispute in the correspondence columns of *An Claidheamh Soluis*. P.J. Kettle, now a county councillor, claimed that he supported a candidate for the position of relieving officer in Balrothery union, as he was a Gaelic League member, but this was contradicted by Padraig O'Mahony from Lusk who claimed the man in question never attended classes and had little knowledge or use of the language.³⁵

The success of the wider Gaelic Revival and Irish Ireland movements was in providing an outlet for the increased desire for an alternative identity, culture, and philosophy. The branch meetings, classes, pageants and *feiseanna* of the Gaelic League were educational and provided a forum to debate Irish history and the concept of a different, unique and independent Irish identity. They were a place where men and women met on equal terms, often attracted by music, Irish dancing and entertainment. A better-educated young population, with a little more leisure time and seeking alternatives to the pastimes of their parents' generation were drawn to the energising and empowering potential of the league. The building and funding of libraries through the country helped the growth of the Gaelic League despite some opposition to the holding of classes in public buildings. Arthur Clery emphasised the predominantly middle class cross section of civil servants, teachers, and local politicians who joined.³⁶ The networks and contacts within the Gaelic League are informative for tracing the rise and development of cultural nationalism, but also an indication of the proximity, accessibility and potential familiarity of individuals

³³ *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 18 Feb. 1905.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 22 Sept. 1906.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 17 & 22 Feb. 1908.

³⁶ See Arthur E. Clery, 'The Gaelic League, 1893-1919', in *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 8, no. 31 (1919), pp. 398-408.

involved in local Irish political life. M.P.s William Field and William Redmond regularly attended the same meetings as activists Patrick Pearse and Edward Kent (later Eamonn Ceannt).³⁷ The Gaelic League had the structure of a political organisation, used nationalist historical and political content in its classes and lectures, and was a very attractive vehicle for the politically active of all shades of the nationalist spectrum.

The Gaelic League and politics

Although avowedly non-political, the Gaelic League had little hesitation in getting involved in political issues when related to the language or education. By 1908, there were tensions at senior level over the university bill, particularly when Douglas Hyde and Eoin McNeill accepted senate positions at the National University of Ireland senate positions by, without any guarantees on the obligatory teaching of Irish. Criticism of the move from Sinn Féin newspapers compromised some of their own leading party members such as Ceannt, Edward Martyn and John Sweetman, who were also prominent Gaelic Leaguers.³⁸ A proposal before Dublin County Council in November 1908, calling for Irish to be compulsory for entry to the national university was defeated, with the chairman, P.J. O' Neill, voting with the majority. The league, through its newspaper, was critical of the sincerity of O'Neill's support for the language, as a nationalist public representative. O'Neill responded that he was misrepresented in the press and what he termed the 'snowballing resolutions' of the Gaelic League. He maintained his support for facilitating Irish in the university, but that not all candidates should be compelled to have a competency in Irish for matriculation. Subsequent correspondents attacked O'Neill without mercy. Seaghan MacEnrí, questioned the value of a university that was a 'machine for the manufacture of briefless barristers and sixpenny doctors for the English slums'. The anonymous 'An Buailteoir' wrote that 'P.J. O'Neill is a puppet in the hands of men more designing', referring to his closeness to the I.P.P. hierarchy, and calling him 'snowball O'Neill'. *An Claidheamh Soluis* followed up by publishing lists of all the public bodies who did and did not support their calls on the teaching of Irish in the

³⁷ *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 28 July, 29 Sept. & 20 Oct. 1900. Field was chairman of the Lord Edward Fitzgerald branch, in Blackrock, Co. Dublin. Pearse and Ceannt were still using the English versions of the names at this time.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 9 & 16 May, 20 & 27 June 1908. By this stage Edmund Kent was using the name Eamonn Ceannt.

university.³⁹ The opinions expressed by language activists about these local politicians and representatives of the Home Rule movement serve to highlight some of the tensions that existed, and the resentment at attempts to appropriate Irish cultural identity for political gain. An increasingly militant league also drew opposition from some of the clergy. At Swords the parish priest Fr Mulcahy, a strong supporter of the I.P.P., was chairman of the council library committee in Swords. He was suspicious of the Gaelic League in Swords and its connections to Sinn Féin and Frank Lawless, and withdrew permission for weekly language classes and a fundraising concert at the local Carnegie library. The issue was raised at Balrothery R.D.C. Fr Mulcahy sought a meeting with the council to confirm the autonomy of the library committee in the matter, and there was a disagreement with the chairman, R.J. Rooney, a brother in law of Frank Lawless over the matter. Fr Mulcahy claimed he had withdrawn the permission as it was granted while he was away, and he had never approved it, but the council overturned his decision.⁴⁰

By 1911, Frank Lawless and schoolteacher Thomas Coleman were the Fingal representatives on the general council of the Gaelic League, with Ceannt, Pearse, Sean T. O’Kelly and Thomas McDonagh. The more militant Thomas Ashe, Diarmuid Lynch and The O’Rahilly later joined them. The most publicly militant was the playwright Sean O’Casey, who criticised local politicians for paying lip service to supporting the Irish language, but trying to gain credit for the limited support and patronage.⁴¹ The less public members were the most militant of all, such as Sean MacDiarmada and Thomas Clarke whom Leon Ó Broin described as the ‘revolutionary underground’ of the I.R.B.⁴² They used these informal educational gatherings as covert networking opportunities, preparing for a day when their opportunity to strike might come again. Frank Lawless had moved from president of his G.A.A. club to the county board, and from Swords Gaelic League and Fingal county executive to the general council of the Gaelic League, increasing his exposure to and engagement with a growing circle of radicals and militants.

³⁹ *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 28 Nov., 5 & 19 Dec. 1908. MacEnri was an ophthalmic surgeon in Dublin, and later Professor of Modern Irish at University College, Galway, *Thom's Irish Who's Who*, 1923 (Dublin, 1923), p. 109.

⁴⁰ *Drogheda Independent*, 4, 11 & 25 Nov. 1911.

⁴¹ *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 25 Mar. & 29 July 1911.

⁴² Leon O’Broin, *Revolutionary underground: The story of the Irish Republican Brotherhood: 1858-1924* (Dublin, 1976).

Sinn Féin and a rejuvenated I.R.B.

Arthur Griffith was a prolific journalist whose experiences working in South Africa shaped his views on imperialism and Irish nationalism. He returned in 1898 and founded *The United Irishman* newspaper to express his political views.⁴³ A member of the Gaelic League and the I.R.B., he became involved in protests against the Boer war and the royal visits in 1900 and 1903. Matthew Kelly described Griffith as an ‘unorthodox nationalist, neither devolutionist nor separatist’, and this probably reflected the political position of the developing alternative nationalism in Ireland at that time.⁴⁴ Sinn Féin emerged when Griffith’s National Council political group, founded in 1903, announced its ‘Ourselves Alone’ policy in November 1905 and then merged with Cumann na nGaedheal and the Dungannon Clubs in 1907. Initial policy centred on self-sufficiency and a withdrawal from Westminster, with Griffith proposing numerous imaginative solutions through the party newspaper *Sinn Féin*. The organisation became more republican as members of the I.R.B. came to occupy executive positions, but it remained under Griffith’s leadership. When constitutional politics moved away from its association with radical activity and the Fenians, the I.R.B. retreated even further. An ageing organisation had spent itself on the agrarian struggle and now had left itself with no immediate cause.⁴⁵ The resurgence of national sentiment generated by the cultural revival, the commemorations of 1798 and the protests against the Boer war and royal visits helped create the conditions for the rejuvenation of the I.R.B. itself. In 1907, the hardened and dedicated Fenian, Tom Clarke returned from America, at John Devoy’s request, to undertake that task. He recruited Sean MacDiarmada as his deputy who travelled the country, to recruit suitable candidates into the I.R.B. They began to restructure the oath bound secret society as a small, well-disciplined secret organisation that could infiltrate the branches of cultural nationalism. It would recruit from those ranks as they prepared for the next phase in their revolutionary struggle.

F.S.L. Lyons called the period from 1903 to 1907 ‘the watershed’ during which ‘matters moved not only sedately, but in a variety of directions that at first sight seem

⁴³ See Michael Laffan, ‘Griffith, Arthur Joseph’, in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.) *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (Cambridge, 2009) for a brief overview of Griffith’s career.

⁴⁴ Matthew Kelly, ‘Radical nationalisms, 1882-1916’, in Thomas Bartlett, (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Ireland, vol. iv, 1880 to the present* (Cambridge, 2018), pp 33-61 at p. 49.

⁴⁵ Tom Garvin, *Nationalist revolutionaries in Ireland, 1858-1928* (Dublin, 1987) p. 48.

if not random at least to have little obvious connection with each other'. After this period, he contends that 'many paths begin perceptibly to converge' as the 'pace quickens and complexity deepens almost year by year.'⁴⁶ The story of Frank Lawless typically fits Lyons' theory. Lawless, who was a close supporter of P.J. Kettle, was an unsuccessful candidate in the local district elections in 1905, not subsequently co-opted and failed again at the polls in 1908.⁴⁷ His nationalism was becoming more militant. In addition to his farm at Saucerstown, he ran a butcher's shop in Swords and was fined for having his name on his butcher's delivery cart in Irish only, which was illegal. When he refused to pay the fine, the police confiscated a sofa from his family home to recover the fine by 'distress of goods'.⁴⁸ *Sinn Féin Weekly* reported a meeting in Swords in October 1906, chaired by Lawless, to establish a Sinn Féin branch. The speakers from Dublin included Sean T. O'Kelly, and the *Sord Colmcille* pipe band paraded beforehand. At this meeting, Lawless professed that he 'was a member of the Land League and later the U.I.L., but since Parnell's death, every year that passes strengthens my belief that no good can come to this country through parliamentarianism'.⁴⁹ He soon moved on to the Dublin executive of Sinn Féin, representing the Swords branch, under his Gaelic name P.S. Ó Laoidhleas and by 1908 to the national executive, where records show he remained the north Dublin representative, contributing on agricultural matters.⁵⁰ Frank's brother, James V. Lawless, represented the Glasnevin and Drumcondra branch and was chairman of the trade subcommittee of the national council, promoting Sinn Féin policy to trade unionists. In September 1907, James was appointed assistant secretary of Dublin County Council, from forty-three applicants, on the casting vote of the chairman, P.J. O'Neill, who had served as a poor law guardian at Balrothery alongside his father Joseph Lawless.⁵¹ He had previously applied for the position seven years earlier but was unsuccessful.⁵² Ó Luing described Frank Lawless as among the important members of Sinn Féin in 1908, alongside Thomas Clarke, Seán MacDiarmada and

⁴⁶ Lyons F.S.L., 'The watershed: 1903 -7', in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland VI: Ireland under the union II, 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996), p. 81, pp 111-122.

⁴⁷ *Drogheda Independent*, 10 June 1905, 6 June 1908.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 23 Dec. 1905.

⁴⁹ *Sinn Féin Weekly*, 26 Oct. 1907.

⁵⁰ Richard P. Davis, *Arthur Griffith and non-violent Sinn Féin* (Dublin, 1974), pp 173-77; *Sinn Féin minute books*, 23 Jan. 1913, (U.C.D. Archives, Sinn Féin collection, IE UCDA P163).

⁵¹ *Sinn Féin Weekly*, 4 Apr., 9 May & 13 June 1908. *Irish Times*, 20 Sept. 1907.

⁵² *Dublin County Council minute books*, 8 Feb. 1900, (Fingal Archives, Dublin County Council Minutes, FCCA/CC/01/01).

Countess Markievicz, when Sinn Féin was discussing running candidates in local elections.⁵³ Clarke had been a sales agent for Griffith's *United Irishman* newspaper in New York, and when he returned to Ireland in 1907, he became active in Sinn Féin and was chairman of the North Dock branch by 1909.⁵⁴ John Devoy and Clan na nGael in the United States provided funds for Griffith's newspapers when necessary and were happy to use him as a propaganda and recruitment vehicle. MacDiarmada, had been a travelling organiser for Sinn Féin since 1907. Countess Markievicz joined in 1908, at the same time she got involved with Inghinidhe na hÉireann (Daughters of Ireland), the radical Irish nationalist women's organisation founded by Maud Gonne.⁵⁵

Frank and James Lawless were members of the city-based Keating branch of the Gaelic League with Clarke and MacDiarmada, as well as being members of its related I.R.B. circle.⁵⁶ The branch network structures of Gaelic League and the G.A.A. provided perfect cover and possibilities for recruitment for the Irish Republican Brotherhood. The Keating branch, which met at Parnell Square, in Dublin, was also a G.A.A. club.⁵⁷ It was closely associated with the Teeling Circle (named after an executed United Irishman and French army officer, Bartholomew Teeling) of the I.R.B. with many members common to all three. The large and central Keating Branch comprised mostly civil servants and teachers, and included Michael Collins, Cathal Brugha, Gearóid O'Sullivan, Thomas Ashe, Richard Mulcahy and Diarmuid Lynch.⁵⁸ A number of sources cite Frank Lawless as the head centre of an I.R.B. group in Swords, who reported to Bulmer Hobson and was a member of the Centre's Board that met monthly in Parnell Square in the city.⁵⁹

⁵³ Seán Ó Luing, *Art Ó Griofa* (Ath Cliath, 1953), p. 179.

⁵⁴ Brian Maye, *Arthur Griffith* (Dublin, 1987), pp 115-6.

⁵⁵ Lawrence William White, 'Mac Diarmada (MacDermott), Seán' & Senia Paseta, 'Markievicz, Constance Georgina Countess Markievicz Gore-Booth', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (Cambridge, 2009). For accounts of early Sinn Féin, see Brian Feeney, *Sinn Féin: a hundred turbulent years* (Dublin, 2002) & Michael Laffan, *The resurrection of Ireland: the Sinn Féin party, 1916-1923* (Cambridge, 1999). Also Alvin Jackson, chap. 5 'Greening the red, white and blue', in *Ireland 1798-1998: politics and war* (Oxford, 1999), pp 142-274.

⁵⁶ Brian Feeney, *16 Lives: Seán Mac Diarmada* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2015), p. 110; *Irish Independent*, 5 Feb. 1964, article by Piaras Béaslaí.

⁵⁷ William Nolan (ed.), *The Gaelic Athletic Association in Dublin 1884-1959 vol. 1*, (Dublin, 2005), pp 72-7.

⁵⁸ Martin McGuire, *The civil service and the revolution in Ireland, 1912-38: 'Shaking the blood-stained hand of Mr Collins'* (Manchester, 2008) p. 30.

⁵⁹ John Shouldice; Joseph V. Lawless, pp 1-11; Valentine Jackson; Frank Gaskin & Sean Kennedy witness statements (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 162, 1043, 409, 386 & 842);

Swords Sinn Féin branch regularly hosted political lectures with eminent speakers such as Irish language enthusiast and senior I.R.B. member James Deakin and invited local U.I.L. and Labour Union members to debate Sinn Féin policy. They were promoting the message of self-reliance, emphasised by its leader Arthur Griffith, ‘to make England take one hand from Ireland’s throat and the other out of Ireland’s pocket’.⁶⁰ These events were a perfect vehicle for inviting discourse. In 1909, Lawless welcomed a new enthusiast, Thomas Ashe to the Fingal Gaelic League who would also collaborate with him in the G.A.A., Sinn Féin, the I.R.B., and the Irish Volunteers. Ashe was the recently appointed national schoolteacher in Lusk. An accomplished piper he soon joined with John Rooney, son of the former county councillor Edward Rooney, in setting up the Black Raven pipe band, another recruitment vehicle for the I.R.B.⁶¹

Sinn Féin presented an intellectual alternative to those disaffected or disillusioned by the tight and the seemingly closed elite cohort of large farmers in Fingal who were members of the U.I.L., loyal supporter of the I.P.P. and dominated Balrothey R.D.C. and Dublin County Council.⁶² Frank Lawless had once been part of that closed group. His father had been a poor law guardian and a disciple of Andrew Kettle. Frank, while co-opted was never elected to the guardians or council, and despite once being close to P.J. Kettle, it is debatable whether he ever did fit in politically with that group. Exposed to the energy and stimulation offered by Griffith and the other personalities in Sinn Féin, he advanced his political philosophy in the network of nationalist organisations in which he was involved. When Sinn Féin contested their first election in Fingal for a seat on Balrothey R.D.C. in the 1911 local elections, Frank Lawless was defeated by a margin of eight votes. Frank and James Lawless were at the heart of the emerging revolutionary elite who were at the early stage of restructuring the underground movement that would take advantage of the opportunities that would present themselves over the coming years. Their multiple

⁶⁰ *Sinn Féin Weekly*, 2 May & 13 June 1908; *Drogheda Independent*, 29 Feb. & 14 Mar. 1908; Donnchadh Ó Corráin & Tomás O’Riordan (eds.), *Ireland, 1870-1914: coercion and conciliation* (Dublin, 2010), p. 35; Lawrence William White, ‘Deakin, James Aubrey’, in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2011).

⁶¹ C. J. Woods, William Murphy, ‘Ashe, Thomas (Tomás Aghas)’, in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.) *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (Cambridge, 2009).

⁶² *Drogheda Independent*, 21 Nov. 1908; Eugenio F. Biagini, *British democracy and Irish nationalism: 1876-1906* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 372.

memberships of overlapping and interconnected organisations and the circles in which they moved marked them out as key players at that time. Frank Lawless was also the key organiser and undisputable leader of the republican movement in Fingal where he fully exploited his G.A.A. and Gaelic League connections for political purposes.

The Irish Volunteers

When the third Home Rule bill passed its third reading in the House of Commons in January 1913 congratulatory motions at local councils followed for Redmond and the I.P.P. Home Rule would become law the following year. Police reports in County Dublin indicated that matters were peaceful and while noting the number of ‘disloyal’ organisations in existence, doubted their activity. There were twelve U.I.L. branches, thirteen Ancient Order of Hibernians (A.O.H.), six Gaelic League, six National Foresters, two Town Tenants League, six Land and Labour League, three Fianna Éireann boy scout troops and a Sinn Féin branch, most of which were located in Fingal.⁶³ Events in Ulster were very different with ever-increasing opposition to Home Rule, which took on a military character when the Ulster Volunteer Force formed. It was almost the end of the year before there was a nationalist response, but this presented the opportunity for those in the I.R.B. to step up their own preparations for a military intervention.⁶⁴ Bulmer Hobson started to drill I.R.B. members in July 1913 and encouraged Eoin MacNeill who was not an I.R.B. member to replicate what was happening in Ulster. MacNeill articulated this in his article, ‘The North Began’, published in *An Claidheamh Soluis* on 1 November 1913. The broad range of like-minded nationalists that came together to form the Irish Volunteers later that month, included Laurence and Tom Kettle, sons of Andrew, both members of the original provisional committee. Laurence was joint secretary with Eoin MacNeill. Tom was unable to attend the inaugural meeting on 25 November at the Rotunda in Dublin, due to illness. The Dublin lockout was at its height and a number of strikers who had gained entry to the meeting, heckled and booed Laurence Kettle when he arose to speak. The farm labourers strike in Fingal was still ongoing, and the Kettle

⁶³ R.I.C. Inspector General and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports, Mar 1913, (N.A.I., *The British in Ireland* CO 904/89, POS 8340).

⁶⁴ See F. X. Martin, (ed.), *The Irish Volunteers, 1913–1915: recollections and documents* (2nd edition, Dublin, 2013) which is a collection of memoirs and documents relating to the founding and early history of the Irish Volunteers.

name had an unpopular reputation among strikers.⁶⁵ Andrew Kettle led the farmers' response to the strike and had imported outside labour to save the harvest. Jack Shouldice joined the Irish Volunteers at the meeting, and remarked in his Bureau of Military History witness statement that 'half of the company were members of the Gaelic League and about one third were members of the G.A.A.'⁶⁶ Clarke and MacDiarmada's inner circle of the supreme council of the I.R.B. quickly infiltrated the committee. The documents in F.X. Martin's collection detail the changing membership of the organising committee and executive of the Irish Volunteers, which helps identify those who were also involved in the network of cultural nationalist circles and how they formed the core group of advanced nationalists that took control of the Irish Volunteers after the split in September 1914. By the end of the year, Frank Lawless joined the general council as the Irish Volunteers representative for County Dublin.⁶⁷

Recruitment for the Irish Volunteers in Fingal reflected the political differences and personal rivalries that we have already seen at local government council meetings. Thomas Coleman's son, Richard, also a Gaelic League activist, formed a Volunteer company in Swords in April 1914, with fifty-five men, and in May, a company formed in Skerries with similar numbers, with a committee comprised of the same men who made up the town tenants' committee.⁶⁸ In March, James Connolly and Countess Markievicz had addressed a meeting of around 500 people in Swords to raise a company of the Irish Citizen Army (I.C.A.) with recently released striker and local union leader, Frank Moss.⁶⁹ The I.C.A. was formed by the I.T.G.W.U. in 1913 to protect strikers during the Dublin lockout from attacks by the Dublin Metropolitan Police. In June, the R.I.C. reported the defections of I.C.A. members to the Irish Volunteers, apparently encouraged by Tom Kettle, R.J. Rooney and James Lawless.⁷⁰ The suspicion of 'Larkinites' that we have already observed had not

⁶⁵ F. X. Martin, (ed.), *The Irish Volunteers, 1913–1915: recollections and documents* (2nd edition, Dublin, 2013), pp 40-43, 81-82 & 100; *Freeman's Journal*, 17 Nov. 1913.

⁶⁶ John Shouldice witness statement, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 679).

⁶⁷ F. X. Martin, (ed.), *The Irish Volunteers, 1913–1915: recollections and documents* (2nd edition, Dublin, 2013), p. 211

⁶⁸ *Irish Times*, 8 Apr. & *Drogheda Advertiser*, 13 May 1914.

⁶⁹ *Drogheda Independent & Drogheda Advertiser*, 21 Mar. 1914; Ann Matthews, *The Irish citizen army* (Cork, 2014), p. 36. Moss was on the army executive committee of the I.C.A.

⁷⁰ R.I.C. Inspector General and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports, June 1914 (N.A.I., *The British in Ireland* CO 904/93, POS 8536); Shane MacThomáis, *An Phoblacht*, 12 Dec. 2005.

subsided. The small rival armies were competing for the same pool of recruits. P.J. Kettle and Michael Dunne of Balrothery R.D.C. appeared on volunteer recruitment platforms with local clergy. At Donabate they spoke of supporting Redmond and Home Rule, but Frank Lawless talked of the right to bear arms in Ireland's cause, calling out the U.V.F.'s gunrunning at Larne and Donaghadee in April.⁷¹ By May 1914, the numbers had grown to 75,000, and the I.P.P. had moved to establish party control by imposing nominees on the organising committee. The formation of a volunteer company in Balbriggan in July exposed divisions in the movement, over the attempted takeover by John Redmond amid the confused circumstances of the militarisation of politics and the politicisation of the volunteers. At the meeting the central organiser Michael Judge, took exception to the succession of speeches that praised Redmond but neglected the role and purpose of the volunteers.⁷²

Thomas Ashe went to the United States in January 1914 with Diarmuid Lynch to raise money for the Gaelic League. Ashe returned to Ireland at the outbreak of the war while Lynch remained, engaged in I.R.B. duties with Clan Na Gael.⁷³ Popular locally, with striking looks and a good singer and sportsman, Ashe did not get on with Fr Byrne, president of Lusk Gaelic League and a supporter of I.P.P., who had appointed him as a teacher in Lusk national school. Ashe viewed Byrne as 'interfering in politics' and the priest thought Ashe was 'modernist and anti-clerical.'⁷⁴ Although not a socialist, Ashe defended workers' rights and espoused rural cooperatives, in what Yeates described as his 'battle for the social leadership of the community' with Fr Byrne.⁷⁵

The Home Rule bill was due to become law in the summer of 1914. The U.V.F. landed guns and ammunition at Larne and Donaghadee in April, and the Irish Volunteers did the same at Howth on 26 July 1914. The arming of two paramilitary forces added a new and explosive dimension to the sectarian politics. Civil war in Ireland loomed just as war in Europe seemed inevitable.

⁷¹ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 24 June 1914; R.I.C. Inspector General and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports, Apr. 1914, (N.A.I., *The British in Ireland* CO 904/93).

⁷² *Irish Times*, 6 July 1914

⁷³ Diarmuid Lynch, *The IRB and the 1916 insurrection* (Cork, 1957), p. 24

⁷⁴ Seán Ó Luing, *I die in a good cause* (Tralee, 1970), pp 36-38.

⁷⁵ Padraig Yeates, *A city in wartime: Dublin 1914-18* (Dublin, 2011), p. 40.

Conclusion

The relevance and importance of new nationalist alternatives to the evolution of local politics in Fingal lies in the challenge they presented to the existing hegemonic nationalist political elite of U.I.L. members of Balrothery R.D.C. and Dublin County Council, drawn from the strong farmer class. Their memberships were of a different class and generation and did not conform to the conventions of the local constitutional nationalist hierarchy. The local political elite had overcome Unionism on the councils in 1898, defeated 'Larkinism' in the Lockout in 1913, but aside from the modest electoral threat from Sinn Féin, the I.R.B. were not visible, and they had failed to influence the Gaelic League. The small but dedicated leadership of the I.R.B. before 1914, many of whom, as we have seen in this chapter, were regular associates of Frank and James Lawless, successfully directed and implemented the infiltration of the G.A.A and the Gaelic League, recruiting their members and using their sporting and cultural activities as cover. The rejuvenated I.R.B. infiltrated and appropriated the vehicles of cultural nationalism and thus recruited many who were prepared to take up arms. Military action was not inevitable, but circumstances had presented themselves that were exploited to the point where it was possible. Revolutionary republicanism developed the potential to eclipse the early apolitical aspirations of cultural nationalism by using its networks and messages to recruit and organise for an armed uprising. Without the cultural renewal and awakening, the means to educate and recruit the revolutionary generation would not have existed, but neither the revival itself, nor its institutions, nor the bulk of its members were responsible for or involved in the events of 1916. They were but a conduit for the designs of others. Constitutional nationalists attempted and failed to appropriate elements of the cultural movement into its wider Home Rule campaign. In Fingal, the political journey of Frank Lawless mirrored these developments. The account here of his contacts and involvement at the higher levels of the County Dublin G.A.A., the Gaelic League, Sinn Féin, the I.R.B. and the Irish Volunteers marks him out as one of the leaders of the revolutionary generation. He moved along a political trajectory from disillusionment with constitutional politics, learned from his involvement in the organisations of cultural nationalism, and moved closer to a political and revolutionary destination with Sinn Féin, the I.R.B. and ultimately the Fingal battalion of the Irish Volunteers.

Chapter 5

Difficulties and Opportunities: Wartime 1914-18

Within a few days of the landing of guns at Howth 26 July 1914, Germany declared war on France on 3 August and invaded Belgium the following day, prompting Britain's declaration of war on Germany. The war in Europe averted a potential civil war in Ireland and changed the dynamics of life and politics in Ireland. Initially, there was muted public reaction in Dublin, with events overshadowed by the Bachelors Walk killings and funerals, but this soon changed.¹ The Defence of the Realm Act 1914 (4 & 5 Geo. V, c.29) was quickly passed, press censorship introduced, troops mobilised and new army divisions formed. The 36th Ulster Division was formed from the already established structures of the Ulster Volunteer Force, and plans were put in place for further Irish divisions, eventually becoming the 10th and 16th Irish Divisions, drawn from recruits elsewhere in Ireland. The initial excitement of 'the war to end all wars' soon subsided, replaced by shortages of food and fuel, the diversion of resources from supports and services to the war effort, curfews, limits on travel and everyday activities, and more pronounced political division. Food prices quickly increased, bringing benefits for producers, hardship for consumers and demands for higher wages. Westminster voted the long-awaited Home Rule onto the statute books on 18 September, and then suspended its implementation until the war ended.² Grief and mourning were soon commonplace throughout the country as news of men killed and wounded at the front filtered through from the press and telegrams. The horrors of war were more visible when the injured returned home. Ireland lived through wartime conditions of one form or another for the next seven years, at the end of which the state, the nation and society had changed completely.³

¹ Pádraig Yeates, *A city in wartime: Dublin 1914-18* (Dublin, 2011), p.26.

² *Government of Ireland Act 1914* (4 & 5 Geo. 5 c. 90), *Suspensory Act 1914* (4 & 5 Geo. 5 c. 88).

³ For comprehensive accounts of Ireland's experience of the Great War, see J. Horne (ed.), *Our war: Ireland and the Great War* (Dublin, 2008) & Keith Jeffery, *Ireland and the Great War* (Cambridge, 2000).

This chapter will examine the impact of the period of the Great War on political life in Fingal and particularly on those individuals who held positions of influence in local bodies called upon to support the war effort. The four-and-a-half-year conflict presented difficulties and opportunities for the political elite in Fingal. The war suspended local elections and would leave the councillors elected in 1914 in place for the equivalent of two triennial terms, until 1920. The Easter Rising and its aftermath changed both the nature and the substance of those challenges and opportunities. The business of local government carried on but unfolding events, and the returning rebels and rise of Sinn Féin threatened the authority of the existing political establishment.

Taking sides, recruiting and the war effort

At Westminster, directly after the declaration of war, John Redmond pledged his and nationalist Ireland's support for the war effort and offered the services of the Irish Volunteers for the joint defence of Ireland: 'armed nationalist Catholics in the South will be only too glad to join arms with the armed Protestant Ulstermen in the North'.⁴ His offer was widely supported by and in the press.⁵ The nationalist political establishment viewed this as a masterstroke by Redmond, seen to outmanoeuvre both Unionists and separatists at the same time.⁶ He expanded upon his offer in a speech at Woodenbridge, Co. Wicklow on 20 September 1914, urging the Irish Volunteers to serve 'not only in Ireland itself, but wherever the firing line extends'. Eoin McNeill and members of the original committee repudiated Redmond's call, and the leadership and the organisation split. Out of roughly 180,000 Volunteers, 11,000 remained loyal to the original leadership under MacNeill.⁷ O'Luing concluded with hindsight that the Redmondite majority 'lacked cohesion and earnestness' whilst the smaller Irish Volunteers group were led by men with 'a clear objective' and the

⁴ *Hansard*, H.C. Deb, 3 Aug. 1914, vol. 65, cc1828-9.

⁵ *Irish Times*, 4-7 Aug. 1914. There were letters of support to the editor from the aristocracy including Lords Dunraven, Langford and Fingall, the latter of whom had land in north Dublin.

⁶ Pádraig Yeates, *A city in wartime: Dublin 1914-18* (Dublin, 2011), p. 26.

⁷ F.S.L. Lyons, 'The revolution in train, 1914-16', in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland vi: Ireland under the union 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996), pp 190-1. Lyons refers to differing figures on the split in Volunteer numbers, but this aggregate of at least 15:1 indicates the nature of the division.

determination to achieve it.⁸ The majority formed the Irish National Volunteers and followed Redmond.

In Dublin a higher proportion, 1,900 of 6,750, twenty-eight per cent, remained with the original volunteers.⁹ While Redmond's Woodenbridge speech is widely considered the occasion of the Volunteer split, there were already divided companies in Fingal before this. Underlying personal animosities and the increasing cleavage between advanced and constitutional nationalists had created tensions. Police reports in the summer of 1914 noted the militancy of the Swords volunteers whose membership was 'mostly farmers' sons, labourers and shop assistants' with 'nobody of influence' involved. The company split in August, with the majority Redmondite, but significantly, 'the officers being Sinn Féin', a term loosely used by police to describe militant nationalists. The police reports recorded a split between the Sinn Féin and Redmondite factions over attempts by the latter to take control of the company. Michael McAllister of Swords company recalled that the divisions 'had been brewing for quite a while'.¹⁰ Lusk had formed two separate companies from the beginning because of rivalry between the Rooney and the Taylor and Murtagh families over who should be in command. The Rooney faction, drawn from the local G.A.A. club and the Black Raven pipe band, remained with the Irish Volunteers.¹¹ Police intelligence estimated that there were only about 260 members of the Irish Volunteers in the whole of County Dublin by the end of the year, with only 78 rifles between them.¹² The authorities did not regard them as a threat despite the involvement of the fifth battalion Fingal volunteers in a large-scale training manoeuvre near Swords in November 1914 known locally as the 'battle of Broadmeadows'. This episode was significant as the Fingal force under Thomas Ashe used guerrilla tactics to defeat a larger combined city contingent, commanded by Edward Daly.¹³ The Fingal battalion would use such tactics again in 1916.

⁸ Seán Ó Luing, Sean, *I die in a good cause: a study of Thomas Ashe: idealist and revolutionary* (Tralee, 1970), p. 71.

⁹ Richard S. Grayson, *Dublin's great wars: The First World War, the Easter Rising and the Irish revolution*, (Cambridge, 2018) p. 26.

¹⁰ R.I.C. Inspector General and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports, Aug. & Sept. 1914, (N.A.I., The British in Ireland, CO 904/94, POS 8537); Michael McAllister statement, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 1494).

¹¹ Thomas Peppard statement, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 1399).

¹² Brendan Mac Giolla Choille, *Intelligence notes 1913-1916*, (Dublin, 1966), p. 112.

¹³ Seán Ó Luing, *I die in a good cause: a study of Thomas Ashe, idealist and revolutionary* (Tralee, 1970), p. 71.

Politicians in Fingal took opposing positions on the unfolding international events. Michael Dunne, Balrothery R.D.C. chairman, at a review of St. Margaret's Irish National Volunteers with Laurence Kettle, pledged their support to defend Home Rule and place themselves at Redmond's command. Richard J. Rooney publicly recorded his allegiance and wrote to the newspapers in support of Redmond. However, there was not universal support among constitutional nationalists for Redmond's commitment on their behalf, as J.P. Cuffe insisted that 'England confine her recruiting activities to the favoured North-East corner'.¹⁴

The establishment in Fingal soon had calls made on their resources to aid the war effort. In October, Chief Secretary Birrell and Sir Henry Robinson, vice president of the Local Government Board, visited Balrothery workhouse to assess it for the reception of Belgian war refugees with the fever and convalescent hospital buildings given over to accommodate fifty-six adults.¹⁵ At the request of the L.G.B., local war relief committees were formed to administer the National Relief Fund to deal with cases of distress because of the outbreak of the war.¹⁶ These committees had a very broad membership including the Unionist John Jameson of Malahide, Cumann na mBan member and Balrothery guardian Mary Adrien, and clergymen of all faiths. Dublin County Council organised Red Cross committees to fundraise for and support wounded servicemen.¹⁷ P.J. O'Neill was chairman of the County Dublin War Pensions Committee, set up in October 1916, alongside Joseph O'Neill and Michael Dunne, Fr Byrne of Rush and Fr Ryan of Finglas, Mrs William Comiskey, Balbriggan, and Mrs Nicholas Long, Swords. The broad-based committee of twenty-two also included Hon Sybil Hamilton, daughter of the late Lord Holmpatrick, who represented the Soldiers & Sailors Families Association and representatives from the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Irish National Foresters.¹⁸ The war had brought or pushed together all those who had a stake in the welfare of its victims.

¹⁴ *Freemans Journal*, 9 Jul. & *Irish Independent*, 29 July 1914.

¹⁵ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 21 Oct. 1914, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/046: BG40/A136); Virginia Crossman, 'Robinson, Sir Henry Augustus', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

¹⁶ Balrothery R.D.C. minute books, 16 Sept. 1914 (N.A.I., BG40/RA17).

¹⁷ Dublin County Council minute books, 30 Jul. & 27 Aug. 1914, 16 Dec. 1915, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/14-5. John Jameson's residence given as Malahide or Portmarnock, depending on the source although it is the same residence location. In each case, the residence in the original source is used.

¹⁸ Dublin County Council minute books, 19 Oct. 1916, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/16).

The *Drogheda Advertiser* showed its support for the war effort by highlighting local involvement, including the enlistment of Balbriggan R.I.C. District Inspector Dowling's two sons, lieutenants in the Medical and Service Corps respectively.¹⁹ From the start of 1915, newspapers began publishing the names, regiments and home places of men who had volunteered for service with the British army, a very public statement and record of their commitment. Publication of the names of the fallen continued on a weekly basis until the end of 1916.²⁰ Balrothery R.D.C. expressed its support for the war especially local connections, in rather exuberant language, when they passed a motion expressing 'their pride of the bravery and patriotism' shown by Captain Edwin Lundy, R.N. of Skerries, in the capture of 'the prize vessel *Henrietta Woerman* from the piratical hun', off the African coast. Only the Sinn Féin councillor Frank Lawless voted against it.²¹

James McConnel found that the majority of Home Rule M.P.s did not share Redmond's commitment to recruiting.²² Charles Townshend described a 'mental neutrality' that characterized public opinion in much of nationalist Ireland during the early part of the war. Despite some initial early recruitment, there was neither the rush of patriotism nor anti-German sentiment experienced in England.²³ Generally, outside of Ulster, recruitment was strongest in urban areas, as it had always been. Fingal did not have any regimental depots, so had no tradition of men joining the colours. The Royal Dublin Fusiliers was the closest local regiment, serving the city through its depot in Naas, Co. Kildare with Fingal recruits usually directed to the city recruitment offices or through police barracks or post offices. There was active support for recruitment from committed Redmondites like Michael Dunne and P.J. Kettle and among the Unionist community. Support for the war effort placed the National Volunteers and their local leadership in an unanticipated public coalition with local Unionists and supporters of the British government. In January 1915, Balrothery R.D.C. welcomed W. G. Maddock of the Central Recruiting Committee and agreed to form themselves into a recruiting committee for the district. Michael

¹⁹ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 7 Nov. 1914.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 30 Jan. & 16 June 1915, 6 Jan. 1917.

²¹ Balrothery R.D.C. minute books, 24 Feb. 1915, (N.A.I., BG40/RA18).

²² James McConnel, 'Recruiting sergeants for John Bull? Irish nationalist M.P.s and enlistment during the early months of the Great War', in *War in History*, 14, 4 (2007), pp. 408-428; Also see David Fitzpatrick, 'Ireland and the Great War', in Thomas Bartlett (ed.), *The Cambridge history of Ireland vol. iv: 1880 to the present* (Cambridge, 2018) pp 223-57.

²³ Charles Townshend, *Easter 1916: The Irish Rebellion* (London, 2005), p. 60.

Dunne declared the council 'to be in entire sympathy with the British government'. Maddock appealed to Dunne's ego commenting that an endorsement from him would have an 'immense moral effect' on the young people of the district. P. J. Kettle undertook to set up a recruitment committee for Swords, with Thomas L. Plunkett, Elias Corbally and Thomas Aungier.²⁴ Local Unionist and nationalist politicians shared platforms at recruitment meetings exhorting men to join the colours. Often a regimental band attended, with endorsements from the relatives of husbands or sons were already at the front. At one such meeting at Balbriggan, in June 1915, 182 men joined. Colonel R.T. Woods and James Cumisky shared the platform²⁵ Plunkett was prominent at these meetings, usually berating farmers and their sons for not fighting and 'letting others do it'.²⁶ As news of rising casualties on the Western Front and especially in Gallipoli and Suvla slowed recruitment, paid advertising and editorial exhortations to enlist increased, with the *Drogheda Advertiser* carrying a call for 50,000 Irish soldiers in a full front-page appeal on 3 November 1915. A week earlier the lord lieutenant hosted a recruitment conference for newspaper owners and editors at the vice regal lodge, to encourage them to promote enlistment.²⁷ Recruitment to the British Army across all services had fallen from 358,000 and 369,000 respectively in the first two quarters of 1915 to 263,000 men in the third quarter. The number of casualties in all theatres of war in the twelve months ended 30 September 1915 was 75,000 dead and 225,000 wounded.²⁸ Closer to home 1,509 men from Dublin were killed in action at the front in 1915, 476 of these from the Royal Dublin Fusiliers battalions at Gallipoli and Suvla, extensively reported in the local newspapers.²⁹

Recruitment meetings declined after the rebellion in 1916 and more so with the conscription crisis. Red Cross fundraising events continued, patronised by Unionist landowning families such as Hely-Hutchinson, Talbot and Corbally of Swords and

²⁴ *Drogheda Independent*, 15 Jan. & 11 Mar. 1916; Bernard Howard, "The British army and Fingal during the Great War", in Joseph Byrne (ed.), *Fingal studies: Fingal at war* (vol. i, 2010), p. 21.

²⁵ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 9 June 1915, at Balbriggan, where 182 men joined. Colonel Woods and James Cumisky shared the platform.

²⁶ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 1 & 29 Sept. 1915. Meetings at Skerries and Rush respectively.

²⁷ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 3 Nov. 1915.

²⁸ *General annual reports on the British army (including the territorial force from the date of embodiment) for the period from 1 October, 1913, to 30 September, 1919, prepared by command of the Army Council*, [Cmd.1193] H.C., 1921, xx, 469, pp 60-63.

²⁹ Richard S. Grayson, *Dublin's great wars: The First World War, the Easter Rising and the Irish revolution*, (Cambridge, 2018) p. 373.

by the ladies of prominent nationalist families such as the Kettles and McAllisters.³⁰ While no breakdown for Fingal was available, British Red Cross records identified almost four thousand Red Cross volunteers with Dublin city and county addresses during the war: 3,979 of whom 3,459 were women.³¹ Following the sinking of the R.M.S. Leinster in October 1918, a recruitment meeting arranged in Balbriggan by Col Woods met with equal bouts of cheering and booing.³² It is difficult to ascertain the precise level of recruitment from the Fingal area as many would have enlisted in the city rather than locally, and addresses given merely as Dublin. The national roll of honour of those who died in service in the Great War contains some 173 persons from Fingal, including nine officers, thirty-nine naval personnel and one woman, ship's stewardess Sarah Arnott, originally from Malahide, who died when the *S.S. Hare* was sunk on 14 December 1917, seven miles from Dublin port. Almost half of this number were from the Balbriggan and Swords areas, and most of those from Skerries were naval casualties.³³ Using the factor that about one in eight men died in action in the First World War, an estimate of about 1,200 from Fingal is realistic.³⁴ Using data extracted from recruitment offices, Richard Grayson estimates that 561 men enlisted from Skerries, Howth, Swords and Blanchardstown, with an additional 836 at Glasnevin and Clontarf, giving a comparable north county figure. In all 18,080 enlisted in the city and county area. Together with the regular army cohort at the start of the war, over 25,000 Dublin men were involved in the conflict.³⁵ The Fingal elite lost family members among the fallen officer corps. Lieutenant Tom Kettle, son of Andrew Kettle, died at Ginchy on 9 September 1916, at the Battle of the Somme. Lieutenant Ernest Ellis, son of David Ellis, manager of Smyth's hosiery

³⁰ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 28 Sept. 1918. Sale of work at Swords Borough School.

³¹ Richard S. Grayson, *Dublin's great wars: The First World War, the Easter Rising and the Irish revolution*, (Cambridge, 2018) p. 370.

³² *Drogheda Advertiser*, 26 Oct. 1918.

³³ Bernard Howard, "The British army and Fingal during the Great War", in Joseph Byrne (ed.), *Fingal studies: Fingal at war* (vol. 1, 2010), pp 1-33 at pp 30-33. *S.S. Hare* was the vessel that brought food supplies from England for striking Dublin workers during the 1913 lockout; *Ireland's Memorial Records, 1914-1918: being the names of Irishmen who fell in the Great European War, 1914-1918*, online at <https://search.findmypast.com/search-world-Records/irelands-memorial-record-world-war-1-1914-1918> ; Patrick Harte, *Dublin city and county book of honour: the Great war, 1914-18* (Donegal, 2003).

³⁴ David Fitzpatrick, 'Militarism in Ireland' in Thomas Bartlett and David Jeffery (eds.), *A military history of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1996) p. 392.

³⁵ Richard S. Grayson, *Dublin's great wars: the First World War, the Easter rising and the Irish revolution*, (Cambridge, 2018) p. 368.

factory in Balbriggan, died in France a couple of months before the war ended.³⁶ Captain Louis Corbally, a Boer war veteran, son of Matthew Corbally of Rathbeale Hall, Swords, died in 1915. Captain William Prosper Liston was son of Dr Prosper Liston, former medical officer of Balrothery workhouse.³⁷ The Anglican vicar of Skerries lost his son, Captain Richard Shegog, R.A.M.C.

Farmers and food, land and jobs: wartime on the home front

Farmers in Fingal guarded their interests and extended their influence in this period of agricultural prosperity. There were numerous issues pressing the farming community in early 1915. When the County Dublin Farmers Association held their A.G.M. in February 1915, Fingal men dominated the committee, which included Michael Dunne, cousins Charles and P.J. Kettle, and Edward McMahon, with another of their number, Richard Butler of Skerries elected as president of the new Irish Farmers Union.³⁸ They complained of the suspension of Board of Works' loans during wartime, and of increased costs and coal prices, while they themselves were benefitting from increases in demand and better prices for farm produce for the same reasons.³⁹ Foot and mouth disease caused the cancellation of the Royal Dublin Society spring show, amid concern of further disease spreading from Britain.⁴⁰ The estates commissioners were sufficiently concerned about arrears and defaults in land annuity payments that they wrote to Dublin County Council who were liable for shortfalls under the terms of the Wyndham Act.⁴¹ There were calls for compulsory tillage schemes and price fixing to help alleviate diminishing food supplies.⁴² By February of 1917, the war effort demand for food production saw a request from the L.G.B. to Dublin County Council to release road labourers for essential work in agriculture. With the North Dublin U.I.L., the farmers group set up a joint County Dublin Food Production Advisory Committee, with P.J. O'Neill and Michael Dunne

³⁶ *Irish Times*, 24 Sept. 1924; N.A.I., Census of Ireland, 1901, online at http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Dublin/Balbriggan_Urban/Railway_Street/1263898/ accessed 30 Oct. 2019.

³⁷ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 10 Jan. 1900, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/041: BG40/A107); Census of Ireland, 1901, online at http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Dublin/Balbriggan_Urban/Hampton_Street/1263799/ accessed 30 Oct. 2019.

³⁸ *Drogheda Argus*, 6 Feb. & 24 Apr. 1915.

³⁹ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 3 Mar. 1915.

⁴⁰ *Freeman's Journal*, 12 Mar. 1915.

⁴¹ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 20 Mar. 1915.

⁴² Balrothery R.D.C. minute books, 13 Dec. 1916, (N.A.I., BG40/RA20).

involved.⁴³ Balrothery R.D.C. called for the same status for agricultural labourers as for munitions workers in the war effort.⁴⁴ The food shortages begot further local tensions. Lord Holmpatrick declined a request for additional land at Skerries to be made available for tillage allotments, as ‘it would interfere with his lordship’s own farming business.’ It drew a letter of dissatisfaction from J.J. Clancy M.P. He subsequently raised the matter with the chief secretary. Malahide golf club agreed to let some plots of arable land for tillage.⁴⁵ The difficulties for some were opportunities for others, and all faced a combination of both. Prices and demand from Britain benefitted some farmers and demand for labour benefitted agricultural workers and wages. Grazier and sales master J. P. Cuffe had a regular market report column in the *Drogheda Advertiser*. In February 1918, he could report on ‘the good prices for cattle and sheep, the increase in buyers from the north of Ireland, and the good number of cross channel customers’ at recent sales at the Dublin cattle market.⁴⁶ Shortages and rising prices at home presented challenges for everyone.

Wartime conditions were difficult in the town of Skerries. The landlord for most of the town was Lieutenant Hans Wellesley Hamilton, 2nd Baron Holmpatrick. He was a career soldier who embarked for France with his regiment, the 16th (Queen’s) Lancers, when war started. Wounded after his promotion to captain, he received the military cross in 1915.⁴⁷ While in France, he continued to resist demands from Skerries town tenants’ league to sell houses in the town.⁴⁸ Tenant agitation increased with damage caused to the tennis club on land owned by Holmpatrick, and to the Hamilton monument (honouring his grandfather) in the town. The number of evictions increased, and a bitter correspondence followed in the press between the tenants’ league and his land agent, George Fowler.⁴⁹

By early 1915, Skerries was suffering from significant unemployment, due to the loss of outsourced home-based monogram embroidery work from Smyth’s hosiery factory in Balbriggan, as it transferred its production to the war effort, producing uniforms and tents for the British army. There were calls for investment in new

⁴³ Dublin County Council minute books, 8 Feb. 1917, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/16).

⁴⁴ Balrothery R.D.C. minute books, 10 Jan. 1917, (N.A.I., BG40/RA20).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 28 Feb., 26 Mar. & 11 Apr. 1917, (N.A.I., BG40/RA20).

⁴⁶ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 16 Feb. 1918.

⁴⁷ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 3 Nov. 1915, *London Gazette*, 23 Jun. 1915.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 20 Jan. 1915.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 24 Feb., 17 Mar., 5 May & 16 June 1915.

industries, even enquiries made about doing embroidery work for Belfast firms.⁵⁰ In January 1916, a labour union formed in Skerries, largely from the committee who had served on the town tenants' league, with district councillor and trade unionist Patrick Mathews the driving force. This prompted a broadening of agitation in the town to include social issues beyond housing such as rising prices and unemployment.⁵¹

The developing labour movement in North Fingal, which grew out of the Skerries town tenants' agitation, still led by Patrick Mathews and William Ganly, began to call for both land redistribution and housing for workers, and verbally attacked Dublin County Council for its inactivity. The *Drogheda Advertiser* reported on an I.T.G.W.U. meeting at Lusk in February 1918, where Countess Markievicz and independent nationalist M.P. and Sinn Féin supporter, Laurence Ginnell, both spoke. Ginnell was the leading agrarian radical in the anti-grazier ranch wars from 1906.⁵² Mathews criticised the county solicitor's advice on the legal impediments to more widespread land redistribution. He pointed out how easy compulsory tillage orders were implemented under wartime D.O.R.A. legislation, converting grazing lands to tillage for wartime food production.⁵³ Ginnell added how readily land use was adapted for the war effort but not redistributed for the benefit of the people of Ireland. The meeting ended with a resolution that confirmed that the unresolved land question in relation to agricultural labourers had not gone away, with a threat of further agitation:

That we, the workers and landless people of Fingal, having called on the district council to acquire and distribute the grass ranches among us, and having being caused upon by the government to produce food, demand the land forthwith, and if not given to us, will take it to produce food.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 27 Jan. & 6 Feb. 1915. Smyth's had long outsourced fine embroidery monogramming work from women in Skerries who worked from home.

⁵¹ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 22 Jan. 1915.

⁵² Pauric J. Dempsey & Shaun Boylan, 'Ginnell, Laurence', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁵³ *Local Government (Allotments and Land Cultivation) (Ireland) Act 1917*, (7 & 8 Geo. 5, c.30).

⁵⁴ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 16 Feb. 1918.

R.I.C. intelligence reported evidence of the I.T.G.W.U. and Sinn Féin ‘working together to foster discontent’.⁵⁵ The police concluded the same to be the case in Fingal in June in their reports of anti-grazier agitation and a boycott at the Crowley farm at Westphalstown.⁵⁶ The call on the district council to address land redistribution showed the changing perception that local government now had the power to effect such change. This was as much a challenge to the local political structures in Fingal as to the government authorities. The union was targeting local politicians rather than landowners to effect change. The role of the local councils in the war effort and the implementation of tillage orders now appeared to put them on the side of the government, if not the landowners.

As the war dragged on, working conditions for many in Ireland became more difficult. In October 1916, Balrothery R.D.C. reverted to contracts instead of direct labour for road works, as costs of supervision and materials escalated. The council went as far as paying war bonuses to some of its staff to mitigate purported hardship among its own. By February 1918, German naval blockades had exacerbated supply shortages with estimates of only about three weeks’ food supply in the country. Balbriggan town council agreed to meet a Sinn Féin deputation who indicated they would contribute £400 to a fund for food shortages and other forms of relief, if the council sanctioned a public collection target of £1000. Despite derisory comments from some of the councillors, the Sinn Féin men, Patrick Connolly, James Derham and Patrick Domigan stood firm on their offer.⁵⁷

The benefits and deprivations of wartime Ireland were very different for those who had and those who had not. Throughout 1918, the I.T.G.W.U. pressed for improved pay and conditions for roads workmen in the local councils, initially looking for 10 shillings a week increase, weekly payments and the provision of oil clothes and boots.⁵⁸ New trade union branches formed and old ones restarted, more militant, more organised and more demanding than before. By February 1919, over 700 workers at both the Smyths and Deedes and Templar hosiery factories at Balbriggan

⁵⁵ R.I.C. Inspector General and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports, Mar. 1918, (N.A.I., The British in Ireland, CO 904, POS 8545).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Jun. 1918, (N.A.I., The British in Ireland, CO 904, POS 8546).

⁵⁷ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 9 Feb. 1918.

⁵⁸ Dublin County Council minute books, 10 Jan. 1918, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/17).

were on strike, with Patrick Mathews prosecuted a month later for using intimidating language in a speech to strikers.⁵⁹

Through 1918, the preoccupations of the County Dublin Farmers Association provided a commentary on the hardship and problems of the country. Whatever affected the farmers of Fingal more pointedly affected the working classes. At the time of the conscription crisis in spring, farmers were concerned with food prices and impending strike action over agricultural labourers' wages. A delegation that included P.J. O'Neill, P.J. Kettle, Michael Dunne and new president James Ennis, from Naul, met with the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction to try to broker a deal with the I.T.G.W.U.⁶⁰ Only five years earlier they refused to recognise the same union. During the summer securing adequate coal supplies for harvest threshing saw further lobbying, and anger that there were no farmers' representatives on the government committee for food control but places for the mayors of both Belfast and Londonderry.⁶¹ In the spring of 1919 7,000 farm labourers in County Dublin, members of the I.T.G.W.U. went on strike again over pay and conditions, suspending action in April to discuss a C.D.F.A. offer.⁶²

Those who represented the interests of the farmers and labourers in Fingal during wartime reflected the different challenges they experienced. There was a growing confidence and determination discernible in the trade union movement and later Sinn Féin to challenge the local political and economic establishment along decidedly class lines. The wartime economy in Fingal produced winners and losers. The farmers, who were usually the winners, always had the County Dublin Farmers Association to represent their interests. Now the agricultural labourers had the growing influence of the trade unions and the promise of Sinn Féin to represent them.

The Easter Rising in Fingal and its aftermath

In November 1915, a new Irish Volunteer company formed in Balbriggan to replace the inactive Redmondite National Volunteers. The O'Rahilly, who was director of

⁵⁹ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 8 Feb. & 8 Mar. 1919.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 11 May 1918.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 6 July 1918.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 4 Apr. 1919.

arms with the Irish Volunteers, and Lt William T. Cosgrave of the fourth Dublin Battalion, addressed the gathering with Dr Richard Hayes of Lusk company, under the watchful eye of the R.I.C. The following week Frank Lawless started training twenty-five new recruits at the local school.⁶³ Lawless had long been prominent in I.R.B. circles in Dublin and represented the County Dublin volunteers on the general council. When a troop or ‘sluagh’ of Fianna Éireann boy scouts formed at Swords in 1911, the Lawless farm, just outside the town at Saucerstown, hosted the boys’ annual camps.⁶⁴ Ó Snodaigh noted him as one of the more important I.R.B. members at the second annual Volunteer convention in October 1915, and as one of fourteen members of the central executive. Five Fingal companies from Lusk, Skerries, St. Margarets, Swords and Donabate sent delegates.⁶⁵

Frank Lawless used whatever opportunities presented to him to engage in public and overtly political displays of civil disobedience against the authorities. In April 1915, he was prosecuted at Swords before Joseph Christie and Thomas Aungier for failing to vaccinate two of his children, who he claimed were beyond the age of effectiveness for the medication. He cited in his defence the conscience clause for non-vaccination then operative in English law, and asked why the law treated cases in Ireland differently, if supposedly under the same government. Admonished by the court for not setting a better example as a public representative and poor law guardian, the court found him guilty and fined £1 and £1 costs. He refused to pay and served seven days in prison instead. Some of his fellow councillors supported him, criticising the costs incurred in bringing such a case. On his release from jail, there were ‘violent scenes’ in Swords as his Sinn Féin supporters clashed with some drunken hecklers.⁶⁶

When Eoin MacNeill countermanded the orders for the Easter Rising on Easter Saturday they failed to reach many of the Irish Volunteers in the Fingal area. About 120 men of the Fingal battalion from the companies in Swords, Skerries, Lusk and St. Margaret’s mustered on Easter Sunday at Rathbeale near Swords, to take part in

⁶³ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 3 Nov. 1915.

⁶⁴ Joseph V. Lawless, pp 1-11; Valentine Jackson; Frank Gaskin & Sean Kennedy witness statements (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 1043, 409, 386 & 842); F. X. Martin, *The Irish volunteers 1913-15: recollections and documents* (Dublin, 1963), p. 211.

⁶⁵ Pádraig Ó Snodaigh, *Comhghuaillithe na réabhlóide, 1913-1916* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1966) p. 124; *The Irish Volunteer*, 6 Nov. 1915.

⁶⁶ *Drogheda Argus*, 1 May & 12 June 1915.

the Easter Rising, but due to the confusion surrounding the countermanding order, were sent home. The next day around sixty met and were joined by a small group led by Richard Mulcahy, who had been unable to return to the city following a successful raid cutting telephone and telegraph lines near Howth. Camping at various locations in Swords, Finglas and Blanchardstown, the rebels engaged in guerrilla tactics, seizing arms at a number of R.I.C. barracks and attempting to blow up railway lines. Cumann na mBan messenger Molly Adrien kept up constant communications with headquarters at the G.P.O., and at their request a small detachment went into the city. The remaining rebels engaged a force of over fifty police reinforcements on Friday 28 April in what became known as the Battle of Ashbourne, killing seven and wounding fifteen, and taking the rest prisoner. Two Volunteers were killed. R.I.C. County Inspector, Alexander ‘Baby’ Gray died from his wounds a month later. On Pearse’s orders, the Fingal volunteers surrendered at Newbarn, Kilsallaghan on Sunday.⁶⁷ There were 114 men from north County Dublin arrested after the Rising, including some with city battalions but living outside the city. Not all had fought but the arrests included any suspects, deported with the rebels who had surrendered.⁶⁸

The nominal roll of the Irish Volunteer officers from Fingal who fought included political actors, individuals active within the cultural movement and the sons of active U.I.L. councillors.⁶⁹ Commandant Thomas Ashe, a schoolteacher, was in command, with Dr Richard Hayes, then Balrothery Union medical officer as his adjutant and intelligence officer. Capt Edward Rooney of Lusk was prominent in the G.A.A. and Gaelic League, son of a former Dublin county councillor, whose brother John was a district councillor, and had attended Blackrock College.⁷⁰ Capt Richard Coleman of Swords, came from a family active in the Gaelic League, was son of the

⁶⁷ Joseph V. Lawless witness statement, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 1043). For further on the Easter Rising in Fingal, see Paul O’Brien, *Field of fire: the battle of Ashbourne, 1916* (Dublin, 2012); Paul Maguire, ‘The Fingal battalion: a blueprint for the future?’ in *The Irish Sword: Journal of the military history society of Ireland*, xxviii, 112 (2011), pp. 208-28; P.F. Whearity, *The Easter Rising of 1916 in north County Dublin: a Skerries perspective* (Dublin, 2013), & Bairbre Curtis, ‘Fingal and the Easter Rising’, in *Fingal Studies i* (Dublin, 2010).

⁶⁸ P. F. Whearity, *The Easter Rising of 1916 in north county Dublin: a Skerries perspective* (Dublin, 2013), pp 58-9.

⁶⁹ Nominal Roll of 5th (Fingal) battalion, Dublin Brigade, Easter Week 1916, (Military Archives, Military Service Pensions Collection, MA/MSPC/RO/16).

⁷⁰ Census of Ireland, 1901, online at http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Dublin/Blackrock/Castledawson_Avenue/1313353, accessed 26 July 2021.

local schoolmaster, Irish National Teachers Organization representative, and sacristan at St Colmcille's Church. He led the group of twenty men into Dublin when James Connolly requested reinforcements, most of whom fought at the Mendicity Institution under Seán Heuston. He had been joint commanding officer of Swords company with his cousin, William Coleman, who enlisted with the Royal Irish Regiment after the split and was killed in France in 1917.⁷¹ Frank Lawless was battalion quartermaster, the senior political voice in the group. His son Lt Joseph fought along with his brothers Edward and James, a captain in the St. Margaret's company and assistant secretary of Dublin County Council. Their sister Mary and Frank's daughters, Kathleen and Evelyn, took part as members of Cumann na mBan. His fourteen-year-old son Colm was sent home because of his age. He later enrolled as a student at Pearse's school at St. Enda's College, Rathfarnham.⁷² The Crennigan brothers, and James Marks, employees of Frank Lawless, and a couple of ex-pupils of Thomas Ashe, the Kelly brothers were among the seventy combatants. Lt Charles Weston of Turvey, Donabate was the remaining local officer, a member of the Black Raven pipe band, started in Lusk in 1910 by Ashe and John Rooney.⁷³ Bernard McAllister, Turvey, was son of district councillor and Redmondite volunteer, Christopher McAllister, and he married Kathleen Lawless in 1929. On hearing of the split in the Swords volunteers in 1914, the younger McAllister rushed to his father's house and removed the guns stored there, lest they be used by the 'other side'.⁷⁴ Forty-two of the men were members of local G.A.A. clubs including five members of the Lusk team that won the Dublin junior hurling championship in 1915.⁷⁵ Joseph Lawless related in his Bureau of Military History witness statement that his uncle, Edward Lawless, had travelled to South Africa in 1902 to fight with the Boers but arrived in the Transvaal as hostilities ceased, and of his father's I.R.B. activities,

⁷¹ The Committee of the Irish National War Memorial, *Ireland's Memorial Records 1914-1918*, 8 volumes, (Dublin, 1923), online at <http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=try&db=IrelandMemorial&h=5387>, accessed 26 July 2021.

⁷² Letter from Siobhán Fitzpatrick to Frederick James Allan, I.N.A.A.V.D., regarding a complaint from Mrs. Frank Lawless relating to a payment of her children's school fees, 12 Feb 1917, (N.L.I., Irish National Aid and Volunteer Dependents' Fund Papers, MS 24,384/16/4); Christopher Moran witness statement (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S.1438); *Irish Independent*, 26 Aug. 2005.

⁷³ Ó Luing, Sean, *I die in a good cause: A study of Thomas Ashe: idealist and revolutionary* (Tralee, 1970), p. 27; History of the Black Raven pipe band online at <http://www.blackravenpipeband.com/history/>, accessed 26 Jul. 2021.

⁷⁴ [Bernard McAllister witness statement, \(Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 147\); Marriage of Bernard McAllister & Kathleen Lawless, \(G.R.O, 1929, Balrothery, Q1/2/183\).](#)

⁷⁵ Nolan, (ed.), *The G.A.A. in Dublin*, p. 136, pp 153-60;

especially in the infiltration of other organisations. Of the 926 men from Dublin city and county interned at Frongoch camp in north Wales, seventy-one were from north County Dublin. Among them was the veteran nationalist from Skerries, William Ganly, who was elected first president of the general council of prisoners at the camp on 11 June 1916, assigned to looking after the welfare matters of the men.⁷⁶ When a military council formed a few weeks later, Ganly stood aside.

On 4 May, the first meeting of Dublin County Council after the 1916 rising was a brief one. At that stage, seven rebel leaders had already been executed.⁷⁷ P.J. O'Neill chaired the meeting, which only approved payments pending and then adjourned, with no reference to the rebellion in the minute book. It must be remembered that Dublin County Council's offices were at Rutland Square, only a few minutes' walk from Sackville Street and the G.P.O. where some of the heaviest fighting occurred. The area was still under military cordon. On 9 May they met again, at a special meeting requested by the L.G.B. to set up local relief committees for those affected by 'the recent disturbances' and sought approval from the L.G.B. to extend relief measures. However, they cancelled the salary cheque of the assistant secretary, James Lawless, due to his involvement in the rebellion, disallowing any payment beyond Easter Monday, following confirmation of his conviction by the General Prisons Board. The county solicitor, William Shannon, declared that his position as assistant secretary had legally become vacant on his conviction.⁷⁸

Balrothery guardians and R.D.C. were more forthright in their responses, and unanimously passed a joint motion from Dunne and Kettle condemning the rebellion:

We deplore the calamity that has befallen our beloved country by the very unwise Rising of the dupes of German agents. In deference to the policy and past services of the Irish Parliamentary Party, in whom we place implicit confidence in this sad hour of our nation's struggle for her bartered rights, we desire to send a copy of this resolution to Mr Redmond.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Sean O'Mahony, *Frongoch: university of revolution* (Dublin, 1987) pp 174-97 & p.47.

⁷⁷ Patrick Pearse, Thomas Clarke and Thomas McDonagh were executed at Kilmainham Gaol on Wednesday 3 May, and Joseph Plunkett, Michael O'Hanrahan, Edward Daly and Willie Pearse, the following morning.

⁷⁸ Dublin County Council minute books, 4, 9 & 18 May 1916, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/16).

⁷⁹ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 10 May 1916, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/047: BG40/A139).

The motion was consistent with previous personalised animosity to Sinn Féin and a desire to be in close step with the leaders of the Home Rule movement. More than one of their number was involved, as Frank Lawless fought at Ashbourne, and Molly Adrien was active during the week. Cllr John Rooney was arrested with his brothers Edward and James although he did not take part. The L.G.B. requested that they dismiss Dr Hayes from his medical post, following his court martial and further called for the immediate removal of all his possessions from his union residence at the workhouse in Lusk. His brother, Fr Michael Hayes, a Limerick priest, interceded and sought all outstanding monies for registrations and vaccinations, and even holiday entitlements, due to his brother.⁸⁰ Fr Hayes himself had been condemned as a ‘dangerous menace’ by General Maxwell for publicly supporting the Easter Rising, but the bishop of Limerick, Dr Edward O’Dwyer resisted demands to remove him from his parish.⁸¹ Joseph Kelly, ward master at the workhouse at Lusk, was in Knutsford prison. Molly Adrien avoided arrest and was the only guardian who turned up for the meeting on 17 May 1916.⁸² At a meeting of Balrothery councillors on 8 November 1916, the continued absence of Lawless and Rooney for over six months and beyond the period of automatic disqualification was merely ‘noted’ in the minutes.⁸³ By this stage, a more sympathetic view pertained in relation to those still in prison in England.

Balrothery guardians continued to pass motions of support for John Redmond. In direct response to a motion from Cork guardians protesting against partition and the continuation of martial law, Dunne and vice-chairman Hartford proposed a counter resolution supporting Redmond’s agreement to the temporary exclusion of the six counties in Ulster from the Home Rule Act, as a means of furthering self-government for Ireland.⁸⁴ Dunne was a member of the National Directory of the U.I.L. and supported Lloyd George’s settlement conference proposals at that forum in July, along with Tom Kettle, just before the latter departed for France.⁸⁵ It was October

⁸⁰ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 12 & 26 July, 13 Sept. 1916, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/047: BG40/ A139).

⁸¹ Brian Ó Conchubhair (ed.), *Limerick’s fighting story 1916-21: told by the men who made it* (2nd ed., Cork, 2008), pp 307-8.

⁸² Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 17 & 24 May 1916, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/047: BG40/A139).

⁸³ Balrothery R.D.C. minute books, 8 Nov. 1916, (N.A.I., BG40/RA19).

⁸⁴ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 28 Jun. 1916, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/047: BG40/A139); Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: war, peace and beyond* (2nd ed. Chichester, 2010), p. 165.

⁸⁵ *Drogheda Argus*, 8 Jul. 1916.

1916 before the guardians were prepared to support a motion from Dublin Corporation calling for the release of internees in Britain.⁸⁶ When released on Christmas Eve, 1916, the guardians reinstated Joseph Kelly as ward master, using a legal loophole that the L.G.B. did not officially ratify his original suspension.⁸⁷

James O'Mahony, the nationalist councillor for Pembroke township was elected as vice-chairman of Dublin County Council in June 1916, with O'Neill continuing as chairman. In addition to motions of support for Redmond, the I.P.P. and the immediate implementation of Home Rule, the council protested against the continuation of martial law and called for 'the early trial of all Irishmen now detained in England'. The call for the 'early trial' rather than release of detainees underlined the abiding divisions in nationalism between Home Rulers and republicans.⁸⁸ They were prompter and more forthright in offering condolences to Mrs Mary Kettle on the death of her husband Tom in France and that of his father Andrew at home in St Margaret's a couple of weeks later. Both were close to many of the councillors, especially those from the Fingal area, and P.J. O'Neill in particular.⁸⁹ Thomas Kettle had only been in France a couple of months when he was killed. He had been disturbed by the executions of the leaders of the Easter rising, and the murder of his close friend and brother in law, Frank Sheehy Skeffington.⁹⁰ He viewed the rising as a betrayal but he acknowledged a changing political landscape when he confided in friends that the rebels would 'go down in history as heroes and martyrs', while he would go down, if at all, as 'a bloody British officer'.⁹¹ When the war broke out in 1914, Tom Kettle was in Belgium securing arms for the volunteers, which highlights not only the contradictions and ironies in his life, but in nationalist Ireland. Fingal had numerous families who had men fighting for the British army at the front and others against British rule in Ireland.⁹²

⁸⁶ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 31 Oct. 1916, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/047: BG40/A140).

⁸⁷ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 10 Jan. 1917, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/047: BG40/A140).

⁸⁸ Dublin County Council minute books, 29 June 1916, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/16).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 21 Sept. & 5 Oct. 1916, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/16).

⁹⁰ Patrick Maume, 'Skeffington, Francis Sheehy', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁹¹ J. B. Lyons, *The enigma of Tom Kettle: Irish patriot, essayist, poet, British soldier* (Dublin, 1983), p. 293.

⁹² Bernard Howard, "The British army and Fingal during the Great War", in Joseph Byrne (ed.), *Fingal studies: Fingal at war* (vol. 1, 2010), pp 25-6. James Marks from Swords, Jack 'Rover' McCann from Lusk and John 'Terry' Sherlock from Skerries all fought in the 1916 rising, while their brothers fought in Salonika and the Western front.

Political life in Fingal during the war

Throughout 1915, there were a succession of joint National Volunteers and U.I.L. meetings as both organisations, with overlapping local leadership, reorganised themselves. Meetings at Balbriggan and Rush called for organisation to avoid apathy and support for Redmond.⁹³ In October, P.J. Kettle chaired a largely self-congratulatory convention of the County Dublin U.I.L. at the Mansion House, where with Redmond, Joseph Devlin and the Dublin M.P.s they lauded their own contribution to the war effort. This type of publicity for local politicians at such gatherings reinforced their sense of position and destiny.⁹⁴ When Dr May, dispensary medical officer for Swords district requested three months leave of absence, on full pay, to volunteer to serve with the French Red Cross at the front, it divided the guardians, some of whom objected to paying if he were not explicitly in the service of Irish soldiers. A motion in the names of Kettle and Dunne approving the payment passed by a single vote. In the event, Dr May postponed this leave until 1916 due to delays in expediting his appointment.⁹⁵ Support for the war effort continued to be contentious on Balrothery R.D.C. as Frank Lawless consistently refused to support motions of congratulations to local men serving, despite requests from chairman Dunne for unanimity.⁹⁶

By late 1915, the diversion of central funding from local schemes to the war effort dominated council meetings. Insufficient finance and late reimbursement of national insurance payments curtailed treatment of tuberculosis patients at the county T.B. hospital at Peamount. Agricultural and public health issues such as bovine tuberculosis outbreaks and the implementation of sheep dipping orders, were regularly on the agenda.⁹⁷ Despite some motions condemning the detention of Irish Volunteers under the Defence of the Realm Act (D.O.R.A.), and calling for immediate prisoner releases, farmers' interests rather than nationalist political issues took priority on Dublin County Council. There were calls for fairer treatment by the military in the purchase of hay, and for the exemption of agricultural workers in any

⁹³ *Drogheda Argus*, 19 June 1915; *Drogheda Advertiser*, 28 Jul. 1915.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 23 Oct. 1915.

⁹⁵ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 28 July & 22 Sept. 1915, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/046: BG40/A137).

⁹⁶ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 3 Mar. 1915.

⁹⁷ Dublin County Council minute books, 15 July, 26 Aug., 7 & 21 Oct. 1915, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/15).

national service schemes, under the guise of resisting any introduction of conscription.⁹⁸ Despite wartime cutbacks, by the end of 1915 Balrothery R.D.C. succeeded in increasing the number of labourers' cottages that it rented to over 500, and sought new loans of £39,780 to build even more.⁹⁹

The war presented opportunities for further political advancement for P.J. O'Neill. Appointed Director of National Service in Ireland in March 1917, he assumed responsibility for coordinating agricultural productivity and resources related to food production. The objective was to maximise food exports for the British war effort rather than address food shortages in Ireland. Whilst he remained as chairman of Dublin County Council, his attendances declined over the next two years to only thirteen meetings in 1917 and he was present at only ten the following year. This reduced the direct influence that O'Neill had enjoyed since first elected chairman in 1899. James O'Mahony took over in his absence.¹⁰⁰

The other commitment that took O'Neill away from council work was his attendance at the Irish Convention, the assembly initiated by Lloyd George and John Redmond to bring together nationalist and Unionist political interests to break the deadlock over Home Rule and partition in Ireland.¹⁰¹ Political and Church leaders were joined by the chairmen of public bodies and sat between July 1917 and April 1918. Sinn Féin declined to attend. O'Neill served as one of two representatives of Dublin County Council on the Irish Convention with colleague Charles P. O'Neill, nationalist chairman of Pembroke district council. P.J. O'Neill also represented the General Council of County Councils, of which he was chairman. He had one of the highest attendance levels, at all fifty-one sessions that he was entitled to attend.¹⁰² His initial public standing can be gauged by his appointment to the preliminary committee, headed by Redmond, formed on 25 July to consider the appointment of a chairman, and he was a member of the first grand committee formed in August. However, he was replaced on this group in late September as it was reinforced with senior politicians such as Redmond, J.J. Clancy, Lord Londonderry and the Bishop

⁹⁸ Dublin County Council minute books, 26 Aug., 4 & 15 Nov. 1915, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/15).

⁹⁹ Balrothery R.D.C. minute books, 26 Jan. & 9 Feb. 1916, (N.A.I., BG40/RA19).

¹⁰⁰ *Drogheda Argus*, 27 Jan. & 14 Apr. 1917.

¹⁰¹ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: war, peace and beyond* (2nd ed. Chichester, 2010), p. 207.

¹⁰² *Report of the proceedings of the Irish convention*, H.C. 1918, Cd.9019. The convention formed sub-committees to discuss different aspects of their deliberations.

of Raphoe, Dr O'Donnell, who was honorary treasurer of the I.P.P. He continued to serve on the subcommittee to consider franchise and electoral matters. O'Neill was now in the exalted company of the leaders of Irish politic life, Church and business in Ireland. The Dublin delegates included the government appointees Sir William Goulding and Sir Horace Plunkett, who was elected chairman, Andrew Jameson of the southern Unionist group, the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Laurence O'Neill, Dublin north county M.P. Clancy, the writer and activist George Russell, business magnate William Martin Murphy, and Edward H. Andrews, president of Dublin chamber of commerce. When the convention reported, P.J. O'Neill aligned himself with the minority nationalist group, who supported a dominion Home Rule scheme, headed by Bishops Harty, O'Donnell and McRory, along with Murphy, Laurence O'Neill and Joseph Devlin, president of the A.O.H. Charles O'Neill voted with Clancy on the majority nationalist group.¹⁰³ Sir Horace Plunkett did not hold O'Neill in particularly high regard; he recorded in his diary on 30 November 1917:

Saw P.J. O'Neill and had long talk with him about the Convention situation. He has no brains but an awful string of sentences that are applicable to all subjects, only mean absolutely nothing. However, as he is chairman of the Association of County Councils one has to cultivate him.¹⁰⁴

The convention was the latest attempt by Lloyd George to seek an improvised settlement to the Irish question as the I.P.P. lost further ground to Sinn Féin. The convention had too many delegates at 101 members, a weak chairman in Sir Horace Plunkett, the non-attendance of Sinn Féin and the demands of Ulster Unionists that the province be excluded from any Home Rule arrangement.¹⁰⁵ Its proceedings were thus rendered irrelevant, but it did identify and establish some common ground between some nationalists and Southern Unionists. For P.J. O'Neill, his Director of National Service role was perhaps a career high point, as he would have felt he had arrived on the national stage in the company of national politicians and churchmen.

¹⁰³ *Report of the proceedings of the Irish convention*, H.C. 1918, Cd.9019; *Drogheda Advertiser*, 28 July 1917 & 20 Apr. 1918.

¹⁰⁴ *Diary for 1917*, 30 Nov. 1917, (N.L.I., Sir Horace Plunkett papers, MS42227/37).

¹⁰⁵ Joseph E.A. Connell Jr, 'One hundred years ago: the Irish Convention in Trinity College', in *History Ireland*, xxv, 6 (2017).

The rise of Sinn Féin 1917: the prisoners return

By September 1916, police intelligence reported matters as ‘peaceable but that hostility to the authorities had not abated, with much sympathy for Sinn Féin’. They also noted evidence of sporadic attempts to reorganise U.I.L. branches towards the year-end.¹⁰⁶ Sinn Féin heralded as a victory the release of the remaining untried political detainees from Frongoch and Reading at Christmas 1916, although their leaders and the convicted insurgents remained in prison. Sinn Féin vainly tried to establish itself locally by forming branches with those returnees, and to exploit the national profile given by four by-election victories in February in North Roscommon (Count Plunkett), in May in South Longford (Joe McGuinness), in July in East Clare (Eamon de Valera), and in August in Kilkenny city (William T. Cosgrave).

Balrothery declined to send any delegates to a convention called by Count Plunkett at the Mansion House in April 1917.¹⁰⁷ The convention planned to bring the Sinn Féin groupings closer together and formulate a national policy. Laffan states that Plunkett’s personality and more pointedly his manifesto, which was described as ‘Messianic in tone’, had ‘antagonised’ some in republican circles, alienated those invited from local government bodies and ultimately received limited support.¹⁰⁸ The release of the remaining prisoners in June 1917 allowed a more thorough reorganisation of the republican movement in Fingal. Police reports noted that the U.I.L. was in decline, with an increasing number of younger converts to Sinn Féin, ‘although not all republicans’. By October 1917, the R.I.C. recorded that there were nine active Sinn Féin clubs in County Dublin with 279 members.¹⁰⁹ These were only the clubs that were known to the R.I.C.

Balrothery councillors congratulated Frank Lawless on his release in June 1917, and re-nominated him to the R.D.C.¹¹⁰ Chairman Thomas L. Smyth welcomed Lawless to

¹⁰⁶ R.I.C. Inspector General and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports, Oct.-Dec. 1916, (N.A.I., The British in Ireland, CO 904, POS 8542).

¹⁰⁷ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 26 Mar. 1917, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/047: BG40/A140).

¹⁰⁸ Michael Laffan, ‘The Unification of Sinn Féin in 1917’, in *Irish Historical Studies*, xvi, 67 (1971), pp. 353-379, at p. 364-5. Only 68 of 227 local bodies invited sent delegates.

¹⁰⁹ R.I.C. Inspector General and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports, July-Oct. 1917, (N.A.I., The British in Ireland, CO 904, POS 8544).

¹¹⁰ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 25 June & 9 July 1917, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/047: BG40/A141); Balrothery R.D.C. minute books, 25 June 1917, (N.A.I., BG40/RA20). Technically they co-opted him back to the seat from which he was recently disqualified for non-attendance.

the meeting and added that while he did not agree with his politics he was ‘a good man to have on the council’.¹¹¹ They were, one can note, men of the same class, ‘men of property’. By September Balrothery district council were prepared to support the reinstatement of Dr Richard Hayes, although not unanimously.¹¹² It was academic, however, and purely symbolic, as the L.G.B. refused to sanction the appointment and Hayes resigned almost immediately after taking up his old post. A couple of months later, he was elected to the executive committee of Sinn Féin at the same convention that elected Eamon de Valera as president.¹¹³ This executive set up a series of departmental responsibilities, which effectively resembled the government formed after the 1918 election, when Dáil Éireann sat for the first time. Frank Lawless took responsibility for agriculture, but his own business and farming interests, other Sinn Féin duties, and intermittent incarcerations meant he was unable to attend fully to this task.¹¹⁴ It nevertheless shows the standing that Lawless held at that time, as he reprised the portfolio he held for the organisation in 1912.

Dublin County Council rejected James Lawless’ request for reinstatement as assistant secretary following his release from prison in June 1917. Despite representations from North Dublin and Balrothery district councils, they upheld the solicitor’s earlier determination and responded with a terse ‘cannot comply’.¹¹⁵ P.J. O’Neill had exercised his casting vote on Lawless’ initial appointment and must have felt let down when Lawless took part in the 1916 rebellion. When councillors proposed creating a new post of assistant secretary to which Lawless should be appointed, it passed by a single vote, 5-4, against legal advice and the threat of a surcharge. Michael Dunne and James O’Mahony voted against, P.J. O’Neill was absent and Joseph O’Neill abstained. James Lawless’ reappointment marked the beginning of a distinct division on the county council among nationalists where previously there had been unanimity. There were signs of a slow shift in support for the separatist position, or at least an abandoning of support for the Home Rule position. There had always been Unionist dissonance on votes of a political hue, but

¹¹¹ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 30 June 1917.

¹¹² Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 10 Sept. 1917, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/047: BG40/A141).

¹¹³ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 3 Nov. 1917.

¹¹⁴ Darrell Figgis, *Recollections of the Irish war* (New York, 1925), p.176.

¹¹⁵ Dublin County Council minute books, 28 June, 26 July & 9 Aug. 1917, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/17).

this was a different emphasis and among nationalists. It led to taking expenditure votes in multiple motions where previously a single composite vote had sufficed.¹¹⁶ There had not been a local election since 1914, but a number of deaths and disqualifications for non-attendance had seen the demise of all but a couple of moderate Unionists. By this stage fourteen of the councillors were magistrates, almost all of them Catholic and nationalist, as much a part of the establishment as the landed class had been a generation earlier.¹¹⁷ Just before Christmas 1917, the L.G.B. confirmed the postponement of any elections due to the war for another year, and it would be 1920 before the elections took place.

All three levels of local government in Fingal were beginning to divide. Those of the old Home Rule cohort regularly took exception to comments from Sinn Féin and Labour members, forcing on them votes of censure and sanction, and there were obstructionist tactics on most issues. For example, a long debate took place at Balrothery R.D.C. on 29 September 1917 over the level of pay and conditions of reinstatement for union nurses who volunteered for military hospital service at the front.¹¹⁸ This obstinacy from the old political elite and their resistance to challenges to their long-standing authority was reported regularly and extensively in the newspapers. This played a part in garnering public support for change. Sinn Féin, although outnumbered on the district council was maximising the potential of the press, initiating rows and challenges that portrayed them as the agents of change and the men of future. The rise of Sinn Féin accelerated in September with the death on hunger strike of Thomas Ashe, after forced feeding at Mountjoy jail. He was by now president of the supreme council of the I.R.B.¹¹⁹ His funeral to Glasnevin drew an estimated 30,000 mourners on to the streets of Dublin in a show of sympathy and support, generating further momentum for Sinn Féin.¹²⁰ Michael Collins declined to make a long speech at Ashe's graveside, uttering only a few words after shots were fired by uniformed volunteers: 'Nothing remains to be said, for the volley which had been fired was the only speech which it was proper to make above the grave of a

¹¹⁶ Dublin County Council minute books, 29 Nov. & 13 Dec. 1917, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/17).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21 Feb. 1918, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/17).

¹¹⁸ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 29 Sept. 1917.

¹¹⁹ C. J. Woods, William Murphy, 'Ashe, Thomas (Tomás Aghas)', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.)

Dictionary of Irish Biography. (Cambridge, 2009).

¹²⁰ *Drogheda Argus*, 6 Oct. 1917.

dead Fenian'.¹²¹ On Balrothery council, Frank Lawless, with Sinn Féin support now more prominent, but still in a minority, condemned the treatment that caused the death on hunger strike of his former comrade. The council officially rescinded the May 1916 condemnation of the Rising, although only by two votes, seven to five.¹²² Some of the old guard were still present and still resisting the rise of Sinn Féin, Labour and the republican movement. Until the next local elections, still postponed until the end of the war, they could still continue to resist change in the council chamber.

The number of Sinn Féin meetings increased throughout Fingal in late 1917 where prominent speakers attracted large numbers. Eamon de Valera was officially welcomed to Balbriggan by Molly Adrien and the local party president, William Ganly, and went on to speak at Rush later that day.¹²³ Two thousand people at Skerries heard speakers condemn the inactivity of the I.P.P. Ganly referred to a 'gross neglect of duty' in bringing the country to the brink of ruin by placing their trust in Asquith and Birrell. Count Plunkett highlighted the high levels of food exports to England, while Ireland was struggling with high prices and shortages. Frank Lawless emphasised the political importance of the Sinn Féin organisation, which was separate to the Irish Volunteers, and that neither were revolutionary movements. It is difficult to know if he said this to appeal to the audience, as Lawless was still an I.R.B. member and had fought in 1916, or if it was genuinely felt that a political and nonviolent path could be successfully followed at that stage. Frank Lawless' involvement in politics, albeit at the margins at times, would suggest the latter. They were very much different organisations, with some overlapping membership but not entirely trusting of each other. Laffan describes the mutual suspicions that Arthur Griffith's Sinn Féin, the I.R.B. and the Irish Volunteers had of each other in 1917 as they came to unite as a single republican movement.¹²⁴ What is telling is that these speeches reflected a changing mood in the north county, as elsewhere in the country. They were reported in detail by the *Drogheda Advertiser* of

¹²¹ *Irish Times*, 1 Oct. 1917. Ashe had stood aside to allow de Valera contest the East Clare by election.

¹²² Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 1 Oct. 1917, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/048: BG40/A142); Balrothery R.D.C. minute books, 8 Oct. 1917, (N.A.I., BG40/RA21).

¹²³ *Drogheda Independent*, 27 Oct. 1917.

¹²⁴ Michael Laffan, 'The unification of Sinn Féin in 1917', in *Irish Historical Studies*, xvii, 67 (1971), pp. 353-379.

24 November 1917, a newspaper which less than a year earlier was still largely supporting the war effort.¹²⁵

Sinn Féin and Labour councillors continued to challenge the old order. In January 1918, there was still a view among some of the senior Balrothery guardians that political issues were not matters for their consideration. There was a disagreement on support for an inquiry into the summary executions of Francis Sheehy-Skeffington and two journalists, Thomas Dickson and Patrick McIntyre, at Portobello Barracks during Easter week. All three had been shot without trial by the order of Captain John Bowen-Colthurst, who was later court-martialled and found guilty but insane. The widow Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, later a Dublin county councillor, continued to seek justice and truth concerning her husband's murder.¹²⁶ Patrick Mathews forcefully maintained that 'the existence of the nation depended on such matters'.¹²⁷ Mathews continually pursued the issue of land distribution, causing an adjournment on 11 March 1918, when he refused to be silenced by standing orders, the same day that other members were more concerned with the motion of condolence on the death of John Redmond.¹²⁸ Patrick Thunder threatened to resign when Frank Lawless sought to support a condemnatory motion from Tullamore guardians on England's treatment of Ireland. When the chairman Thomas Smyth ruled on keeping religion and politics out of the boardroom discussion, Lawless retorted that it had always been the case to discuss such matters when it suited certain members, and he quoted recent discussions on 'Prussian militarism' and 'other Tommy rot' to illustrate. At the next meeting, the argument continued over the recording of the debate in the minutes, and whether it was a matter for the guardians or the district council. Lawless was particularly annoyed at the incomplete recording of the original motion and the vote, and he complained of the 'endless motions of confidence in the Irish Parliamentary Party in whom nobody now had confidence'. Newspaper reporting of the minutes of these meetings was hugely important as a means of political communication and comment. Sinn Féin, although outnumbered, were taking on their opponents in their own forum, and Peter Murtagh crystallised the changing

¹²⁵ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 24 Nov. 1917.

¹²⁶ Patrick Maume, 'Colthurst, John Colthurst Bowen-', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

¹²⁷ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 4 Feb. 1918, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/048: BG40/A142).

¹²⁸ Balrothery R.D.C. minute books, 11 Mar. 1918 (N.A.I., BG40/RA21).

balance of noise and influence when he opined ‘that whoever it was that Sinn Féin represented it was not the ratepayers’. He had observed and noted the shift in popular representation from the ratepayers to the people.¹²⁹

The Conscription crisis and the German plot; the tide turning

In the House of Commons on 9 April 1918, Lloyd George introduced his Military Service bill to extend conscription to Ireland. It drew protest in Ireland from a wide spectrum that combined in opposition to form an overwhelming coalition of nationalists, republicans, Labour and Catholic Church that succeeded in frustrating the prime minister’s plans. The simultaneous meetings on 18 April 1918 of the politicians at the Mansion House conference in Dublin and the bishops at Maynooth College endorsed a national campaign of resistance. Dublin County Council issued a strong unanimous statement condemning any proposals for conscription in Ireland, and referenced ‘the leadership of our venerated cardinal’ in the resistance campaign, which no doubt helped balance any animosity towards the involvement of Sinn Féin.¹³⁰ Many who had supported recruitment earlier in the war, such as Fr Byrne in Rush and Dr William Fullam in Balbriggan, now shared platforms to condemn conscription with republicans like John Derham, Balbriggan and Sinn Féin’s Patrick Connolly.¹³¹ At Skerries in May 1918 Fr. Keogh shared the platform with trade unionist Patrick Mathews, J.J. Clancy M.P., Sean T. O’Kelly of Sinn Féin, and Alderman Alfie Byrne of Dublin corporation.¹³² A week later at Balrothery R.D.C., Mathews challenged Col Woods about his position on conscription, and refused to stay at the meeting when Woods declined to answer.¹³³ Despite the withdrawal of the conscription legislation, the country ‘remained in a restless and unsatisfactory condition’ as reported in May by the Inspector General of the R.I.C. He further commented that in County Dublin, there was ‘a strong disloyalty prevalent’ and ‘a certain gang, who if the opportunity presents itself are ready to perpetrate outrage’.¹³⁴ When the Sinn Féin leaders of the anti-conscription campaign were arrested in connection with a ‘German plot’ in May 1918, Frank Lawless, Richard Hayes and

¹²⁹ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 19 Jan., 16 & 23 Feb. 1918.

¹³⁰ Dublin County Council minute books, 18 Apr. 1918, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/17).

¹³¹ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 27 Apr. 1918. Meeting at Balbriggan.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 11 May 1918.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 18 May 1918.

¹³⁴ R.I.C. Inspector General and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports, July - Dec. 1918 (N.A.I., The British in Ireland, CO 904, POS 8546-7).

Richard Coleman were among those of that ‘certain gang’ detained and incarcerated in England.¹³⁵ The arrests of Lawless and Coleman were particularly heavy handed, with over thirty police involved.¹³⁶ Raids and arrests continued throughout the summer, including the discovery of ‘seditious’ literature at the home of an old Fenian, Thomas Duff, in Swords, and arms, ammunition and Sinn Féin documents at the home of Patrick Belton at Belfield, Santry, a land commission official, who had avoided arrest after the 1916 rising. Belton was a close associate of Michael Collins in London before 1916 and was secretary of the National Aid Association prisoners’ dependents fund.¹³⁷ After this the R.I.C. noted that ‘Sinn Féin’ were not drilling, parading in uniform or carrying arms in public, but meeting secretly under cover of public events. Public support for the war was less evident, and ‘with the exception of a fanatical sector of Sinn Féin, who are intensely anti-British, the mass of the people appear to regard the war with apathy’.¹³⁸ The conscription crisis had consolidated opposition to the war across all shades of nationalist opinion in Ireland, while the German plot arrests had driven the republican movement underground

The rise of Sinn Féin 1918: the boardroom and the ballot box

While in prison, Frank Lawless remained abreast of matters at home through extensive correspondence with his family on matters relating to his farm, and with James Stack, clerk of Balrothery union on council matters. There were also reports of Sinn Féin meetings from Peter Moran of Cloghran, and what the prison censor referred to as political matters in ‘veiled language’ with his brother James in Dublin.¹³⁹ Although he was in prison, Patrick Mathews and Mary Adrien still proposed Frank Lawless as chairman of Balrothery R.D.C., against the incumbent Michael Dunne who won 10-4. On acceptance Dunne stressed the constitutional way as the only way, adding that there were ‘wiser and surer heads in constitutional

¹³⁵ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 25 May 1918.

¹³⁶ Charles Newton Wheeler, *The Irish republic; an analytical history of Ireland 1914-18, with particular reference to the Easter insurrection (1916) and the German ‘plots’*, (Chicago, 1919), p. 168.

¹³⁷ Pauric J. Dempsey, ‘Belton, Patrick’, in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

¹³⁸ R.I.C. Inspector General and County Inspectors’ monthly confidential reports, Jul. - Dec. 1918 (N.A.I., The British in Ireland, CO 904, POS 8546-7).

¹³⁹ Directorate of Military Intelligence postal censorship report on the Irish internees in British prisons, 8 Oct. 1918, (T.N.A., Home Office records, HO 144/1496/362269).

nationalism'.¹⁴⁰ At their next meeting, P.J. O'Neill, recently disqualified from Balrothery R.D.C. for non-attendance, (but still chairman of Dublin County Council) was reinstated, having cited his national service duties in excuse. Mathews caused a row with the chair when he asked why the 'castle boy' could not attend to answer in person, asking had he now abandoned the long-held policy of Parnell by taking paid work for the government. Some colleagues who defended O'Neill stated he was not a member of the Irish Parliamentary Party to whom the rule applied, and that it was a valuable position of benefit and influence.¹⁴¹ O'Neill's experience and efforts in 1917 and 1918 highlight the difficulty now facing those who had sought to progress self-determination within British structures. Personal insults became more common at meetings reflecting wider tensions in the country, a mixture of war weariness, discontent with rising prices, food and fuel shortages, betrayal over Home Rule, and anger over conscription. Whoever could translate this discontent and anger into action at the ballot box, when the overdue general and local elections eventually took place, would be in a strong position to effect change, or at least influence. Patrick Mathews and William Ganly were thinking this way in February 1918 when they called on the crowd at an I.T.G.W.U. meeting in Balbriggan to remember the men of the councils who did not utilise all their powers on behalf of the workers to address food shortages.¹⁴² The old political class in Fingal were on the retreat and under pressure to move on. Those not already displaced by death or age awaited their fate when the government would decree an election date.

A different war continued with the L.G.B., a sign of things to come when council representation might change. Attempts to move the Balrothery council account from the Unionist run Northern Bank to the Munster and Leinster bank, who were offering better terms, and save the ratepayers some £300 a year, were refused sanction by the L.G.B., and caused deep resentment among the members. There were long-standing suspicions and resentment towards the Northern Bank but now there was also economic justification to move. The L.G.B. showed they could also play politics when it suited. Mathews excelled himself in continued criticism, reported in the

¹⁴⁰ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 29 Jun. 1918. Christopher McAllister and Patrick Domigan also voted for Lawless.

¹⁴¹ Balrothery R.D.C. minute books, 8 July 1918, (N.A.I., BG40/RA21); *Drogheda Advertiser*, 13 July 1918.

¹⁴² *Drogheda Advertiser*, 16 Feb. 1918.

press, of the need 'to resist the tyranny of the L.G.B.', its head Sir Henry Robinson, 'and his gang of Castle merry men, who flouted the authority of the guardians and the advice of their solicitor Mr Early'.¹⁴³ The delegation of senior councillors who met with the L.G.B. on the issue in October did not include Mathews, who objected to J.J. Clancy, M.P. and K.C., being their legal advisor.¹⁴⁴ In August 1918, Dublin County Council passed a motion supporting a L.G.B. suggestion to amalgamate the North and South Dublin unions, with an amendment to merge the rural district councils of South Dublin and Rathdown, and North Dublin and Balrothery, in the interests of cost management and ratepayers' liabilities.¹⁴⁵ Balrothery councillors did not favour such a measure as they had plans themselves to get rid of the workhouse at Lusk, and this would hamper such a move, increasing their workhouse occupancy with city inmates and increasing the ratepayers' burden. The British military were using the N.D.U. workhouse as temporary barracks accommodation at the time, with the inmates transferred to other unions. Some councillors were reluctant to cooperate with the negotiation process at all for this reason, with Mathews proposing the charging of fees for any meeting attended with the military, as it was not normal guardians or council business.¹⁴⁶

When the war ended on 11 November 1918, the long-awaited general election could now take place. The authorities granted permission to candidates in prison to write to their electors. Still in Usk prison, Frank Lawless addressed voters in a letter on 28 November 1918, 'at the eleventh hour, from behind prison walls and through the discriminating sieve of the British censor'.¹⁴⁷ While incarcerated he was surcharged for approving the reinstatement and salary payment to Dr Hayes, and the L.G.B. auditor, E.P. McCarron threatened further legal proceedings for its recovery if not paid by February 1919.¹⁴⁸ Some of the more conservative members of Balrothery R.D.C., who were usually antagonistic to republican issues, actually supported Lawless on this matter, although more as a matter of principle and impugning the

¹⁴³ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 10 Aug. & 14 Sept. 1918.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 19 Oct. 1918.

¹⁴⁵ Dublin County Council minute books, 8 Aug. 1918, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/17).

¹⁴⁶ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 31 Aug. 1918.

¹⁴⁷ Directorate of Military Intelligence postal censorship report on the Irish internees in British prisons, 28 Nov 1918, (T.N.A., Home Office records, HO 144/1496/362269).

¹⁴⁸ The Local Government Board held councillors financially responsible for charges which they did not sanction or approve, and recovered them through personal 'surcharges' on the individuals concerned.

independence and integrity of the council, their council, and thus *their* independence and integrity.¹⁴⁹ On the eve of the election, on 9 December, Richard Coleman died of influenza related pneumonia in Usk prison.¹⁵⁰ The authorities granted Lawless compassionate leave to accompany the remains back to Ireland, and released him on parole for ten days.¹⁵¹ Coleman was a senior member of the team assembled by Michael Collins and headed by Michael Staines to build up financial and intelligence networks in Ireland. They established a benevolent society, which later became the New Ireland Assurance Company. Primarily established to displace English insurance business in Ireland, it was also a crucial cover for fundraising and I.R.A. intelligence and organisation.¹⁵² His remains lay in state for a week in St. Andrew's church Westland Row, with over 100,000 people paying their respects, with a guard of honour provided by his Fingal comrades. Fifteen thousand people attended his funeral in driving rain.¹⁵³ Sinn Féin could not have written a better drama on the eve of an election.

At Finglas in November 1918, local Sinn Féin officers Philip Ryan and Archie Heron spoke in support of candidate Frank Lawless. They ridiculed the I.P.P. claims that they had secured pensions, labourers' cottages and national insurance benefits for the people through their efforts at Westminster. They had not been returned to secure those things but to get Irish independence and had failed, and now asked the electorate to trust in English democracy again. Conscription for Ireland was not defeated in the parliament at Westminster, but by the Irish people at the Mansion House.¹⁵⁴ Fr Toher, at an election meeting at Lusk, described Sinn Féin as 'the new name for the Irish spirit – following in the footsteps of St. Laurence O'Toole, Thomas Ashe, Pearse and Thomas Rafferty [a Fingal battalion member killed in 1916], and marching alongside de Valera and Frank Lawless'. This clerical endorsement facilitated a morally supported shift of support to the new political movement for independence. Supportive speeches from James Connolly's daughter

¹⁴⁹ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 26 Aug. 1918 & 27 Jan. 1919, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/048: BG40/A144); *Drogheda Advertiser*, 1 Feb. 1919.

¹⁵⁰ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 14 Dec. 1918.

¹⁵¹ Dublin Castle file on Sinn Féin activists, Frank Lawless, 7 Jun. 1922, (T.N.A., War Office: Army of Ireland: Administrative and Easter Rising Records, WO35/207/114).

¹⁵² Frank Thornton witness statement, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 510).

¹⁵³ Fr M. J. Curran & Frank Henderson witness statements, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 687 & 821); *Nenagh Guardian*, 21 Dec. 1918.

¹⁵⁴ *Irish Independent*, 29 Nov. 1918.

Nora, and Labour councillor, Patrick Mathews, underlined the extent of Labour support for Lawless.¹⁵⁵ At Finglas, J.J. Clancy affirmed his record of thirty-three years' service to the constituency, and warned of abstentionism giving the initiative to Carson at Westminster, amid heckling and calls 'to stand aside for a younger man'. Ironically, an I.P.P. abstentionist policy in relation to cabinet aided Carson's influence in the war cabinet in 1915. The disillusionment that the Home Rule generation had held power and influence for so long, since the time of Parnell, and failed to deliver, was palpably present in the audience.¹⁵⁶ As McGarry contends: 'John Redmond's currency was devalued by his repeated concessions, particularly on partition and support for Irish enlistment, in return for the same post-dated cheque for Home Rule'.¹⁵⁷ The appeal of Sinn Féin lay in what they were not, and that was the failed party of Home Rule. Their vague message stood for 'self-government, political and social reform, an end to profiteering and corruption, a voice for the youth and women, a hard line against partition, land for the landless, and Gaelicisation', all at the same time.¹⁵⁸

Police reported that younger clergy supported Lawless while the older clergy remained loyal to the nationalist candidate. They particularly welcomed the campaigning which brought many Sinn Féin supporters out into the open, 'who may only have been suspected of being Sinn Féin'.¹⁵⁹ The Irish Volunteers were conspicuous by their presence up to and on polling day, involved 'in a huge amount of personation on behalf of Sinn Féin', while the R.I.C. 'were openly hostile to the Sinn Féin movement and friendly to the Redmondites'.¹⁶⁰

Polling took place on 12 December. In Dublin North County, Lawless defeated Clancy by 9,138 votes to 4,428.¹⁶¹ Sinn Féin won seventy-three seats, displacing the I.P.P., which had failed to deliver Home Rule. A new nationalism was about to take

¹⁵⁵ *Drogheda Independent*, 12 Jun. & 27 Nov. 1920. Mathew's candidature and declarations as a representative of Labour.

¹⁵⁶ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 30 Nov. 1918.

¹⁵⁷ Fergal McGarry, 'Revolution' in Thomas Bartlett (ed.), *The Cambridge history of Ireland, vol. iv: 1880 to the present* (Cambridge, 2018) p. 266.

¹⁵⁸ Peter Hart, *The I.R.A. at war* (Oxford, 2003), p.17.

¹⁵⁹ R.I.C. Inspector General and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports, Jul. – Dec. 1918, (N.A.I., *The British in Ireland* CO 904, POS 8546-7).

¹⁶⁰ John Gaynor & Thomas Peppard witness statements, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 1447 & 1399).

¹⁶¹ Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918-92* (Dublin, 1982), p. 95.

on the baton in the quest for Irish independence. At the A.G.M. of the Irish County Councils General Council, a couple of days before the poll, and somewhat precipitously, Thomas Clarke of Dublin County Council proposed that P.J. O'Neill continue as chairman, stressing the importance of 'having a level-headed man in charge at this time'.¹⁶² The election had delivered a resounding verdict for change, not just new nationalism for old, new ideas for old, but a new generation to replace the old men of the I.P.P.

Conclusion

The four and a half years from the summer of 1914 to December 1918 was a period of difficulties faced and opportunities taken that resulted in a new political landscape that changed Ireland's relationship with Britain, and the relationships, reputations, and positions of many of those involved in Fingal political life. The traditional nationalist rallying cry that 'England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity' is well associated with the Easter Rising and its aftermath. It is just as applicable to the changes that took place in Fingal in the same period. Unwavering support for John Redmond, the delayed and uncertain status of Home Rule and the circumstances of the war left the constitutional nationalists of Fingal in the unexpected position of supporting the war effort and recruitment for the British army. This brought men like P.J. and Joseph O'Neill, Michael Dunne, and P.J. Kettle closer to the establishment than ever before. The Fingal battalion was involved in the only successful engagement of Easter week in 1916, yet its members were severely condemned by local constitutional nationalists in its aftermath. Their reactions to the rebellion in Dublin were a sign of how far they had travelled in support of an Ireland within the empire, and away from those in search of greater independence. Their complacency, if not their arrogance had been visible in the council chambers before the war and proved a central part of their demise.

The war saw winners and losers, economically and politically. There was greater demand for farmers' produce, higher prices and wages with labour in demand, but higher costs, shortages and periods of unemployment. Local government survived with reduced funding and supports. The business of local government carried on but unfolding events, and the returning rebels and rise of Sinn Féin threatened the

¹⁶² *Irish Times*, 10 Dec. 1918.

authority of the existing political establishment. The return of imprisoned rebels and local politicians like Frank Lawless initiated the reorganisation of the volunteers and a rise in Sinn Féin that gave confidence to republicans and threatened apprehension and fear in the local ruling polity. The reorganisation of the volunteers in 1917 prepared the way for the electoral success of Sinn Féin at the general election in 1918. Constitutional nationalism had lost the general election. Its foot soldiers in Fingal waited to see if they could retain their position when the next local government polls took place, at a date not yet confirmed. The political trajectory of Frank and James Lawless was the precise opposite. Their risks, activism and dedication to the separatist cause had brought them to the forefront of the political movement for independence. Taken together the reactions to the rebellion, the rise of Sinn Féin and the 1918 general election brought about changes in the dynamic and alignment of the local polity that removed some political personalities and redefined others. Aside from a brief period of unity during the conscription crisis, public support transferred from Home Rule to SinnFéin at the ballot box in 1918. The routes to further political success and failure were somewhat clearer as the New Year 1919 dawned.

Chapter 6

Politics and local government in Fingal during the War of Independence and Civil War, 1919-23

Following the 1918 General Election, the newly elected Sinn Féin members of parliament refused to take their seats at Westminster and met instead at the Mansion House in Dublin on 21 January 1919, declared Irish independence, and set about forming an alternative government. Frank Lawless was one of thirty-six Teachta Dála (T.D.s) who did not attend the first meeting of the Dáil as he, along with the others, was in prison. On the same day, two R.I.C. constables were killed in an I.R.A. ambush at Soloheadbeg in County Tipperary. The events were unrelated and the attack was not authorised by the Dáil, but it is widely regarded by historians as the first shots in the War of Independence, 1919 to July 1921.

This chapter will consider the experience and transformation of local government in Fingal during the War of Independence and the effect of the military struggle on local political life. Particular attention will focus on the involvement and contribution of Dublin County Council and Balrothery rural council and guardians in legitimising and enabling the revolution and the subsequent transfer of power in 1922. The republican success in the 1920 local elections was followed by the reality that declaring allegiance to Dáil Éireann and the new republic brought these bodies into the front line of the struggle for independence. In this chapter, the subsequent nature of the uneasy relationship between the Dáil Department of Local Government and the local government bodies in north Dublin will be explored. The chapter will also examine the reactions to the treaty and the Civil War in Fingal.

Changes and continuities: new priorities and unresolved questions

The Dáil's first priorities were to publicise their claim to independence on the international stage, challenge the crown legal system, and secure funding for their fledgling parallel administration. As there had not been any local elections since 1914, control of the local bodies remained with the constitutional nationalists who had enjoyed power since 1898. To secure support for the Dáil at the local government level, Sinn Féin needed to organise at constituency level to take over

these bodies at the next local elections.¹ However, planning started immediately for the important role local government would play in the strategy to disable British administration in Ireland. In April, Dáil Éireann appointed William T. Cosgrave as minister for local government, with Kevin O’Higgins as his deputy. These two men had considerable influence over local government in Fingal through the War of Independence and into the early years of the Irish Free State. The Dáil then appointed a ten-man committee to assist Cosgrave and to formulate policy, which included Dr Richard Hayes, T.D. for East Limerick, and Frank Lawless.² Fingal appeared to have a voice and potentially some influence at the top table.

Dáil arbitration courts, also known as Sinn Féin courts, were set up in June to replace those of the British administration and to control increasing land agitation in the West of Ireland, which threatened the authority of the Dáil and its national objective. By the end of the year, the Dáil established the National Land Bank as a friendly society, to provide loans for co-operative land purchase as a measure to prevent land hunger diverting any effort away from or overshadowing the independence struggle.³ There are very few surviving records of courts sitting in north County Dublin as the sittings in the city courts covered this area, but it also suggests that the land question was not a prominent issue in the area.⁴

In the summer of 1919, the Dáil launched an issue of ‘republican bonds’ known as the Dáil loan, to raise finance for the new government departments.⁵ The Dáil loans raised £370,165 in Ireland and almost \$6m in America, at a time when it cost over £10m a year to fund local government.⁶ About eighty per cent of the funding for local government came from locally collected property rates, with the balance from central grants from the British government.⁷ North County Dublin had one of the

¹ John O’Callaghan, ‘Republican administration of local government in Limerick, 1920-21’, in *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 45 (2005) pp 119-137.

² Dáil debates, vol. F, no.4, 2 Apr. 1919.

³ Edward M. Stephens witness statement, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 616). Stephens was the main organiser of the Land Bank; Peggy Quinn, Denis Aylmer, Donal Cantwell & Louis O’Connell, *An Irish banking revolution: the National Land Bank of Ireland, a history* (Dublin, 1995), pp 7-12.

⁴ Department of Home Affairs files, 1920, (N.A.I., Dáil Éireann secretariat files, DE/2/51).

⁵ Pdraig Yeates, *A city in turmoil, 1919-21* (Dublin, 2012), pp 104-5.

⁶ Robin J. C. Adams, ‘Tides of change and changing sides: the collection of rates in the Irish War of Independence, 1919-21’, in D. Kanter & P. Walsh (eds.), *Taxation, politics and protest in Ireland, 1662-2016* (Basingstoke, 2019), pp 253-275 at p. 255.

⁷ Brian Hughes, *Defying the I.R.A? Intimidation, coercion and communities during the Irish revolution* (Liverpool, 2016), p. 55.

lowest amounts collected in the country for the first Dáil loan, as receipts to the end of September 1920 were only £1,370.⁸ This low level of response is most likely due to a strong residual Unionist and Home Rule cohort in Fingal, and a weak I.R.A. presence. Fingal had had similarly low levels of participation in the Land War, and contributions to the Parnell tribute. The strongest contributions in Ireland were in Munster and Connacht where the opposite conditions prevailed. Threats of suppression from the authorities led several Dublin newspapers to decline adverts for the loan, reducing public awareness. The fact that the main organiser and agent for the loans was Frank Lawless T.D. did not help, given his considerable workload and spells in prison.⁹

The authorities declared the Dáil illegal on 12 September 1919, accompanied by a series of raids including one at Sinn Féin headquarters in Harcourt St. in Dublin. Evelyn Lawless, a daughter of Frank, was working there as a secretary for Michael Collins, and helped him evade capture.¹⁰ Within a couple of months the war commenced in earnest in Fingal when the I.R.A. raided Collinstown Aerodrome, then under construction, and a significant British army garrison. Over thirty I.R.A. men got away with almost eighty rifles.¹¹ After the raid, all 800 civilian workers at the site were sacked and replaced by military personnel, augmented by employees of the contractor John Good, a Unionist county councillor in Dublin.¹² This caused local resentment in Fingal where unemployment was high. Before this, the authorities at the site were more concerned with labour and union activities.¹³

In time, the new political situation in Ireland put the institutions of local government in the front line of a propaganda war against the British authorities but throughout 1919, the economic impact of the Great War remained the predominant issue for the district and county councillors. Financial matters dominated Balrothery meetings

⁸ Gary Evans, “*The raising of the first internal Dáil Éireann loan and the British responses to it, 1919–1921*”, (M. Litt. thesis, Maynooth University, 2012) p. 153 citing N.L.I. Pamphlet I.L.B. 300 p2.

⁹ Arthur Mitchell, *Revolutionary government in Ireland, Dáil Éireann 1919-22* (Dublin, 1995), pp 60-64; Col Joseph Lawless witness statement, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 1043 p. 284).

¹⁰ Sr. Eithne/Evelyn Lawless witness statement, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 414). Also called Eibhlin she later became a nun. She hid Collins’ revolver in her clothing while the military searched the building.

¹¹ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 29 Mar. 1919; Frank Henderson witness statement, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 821),

¹² Padraig Yeates, *A city in turmoil, 1919-21* (Dublin, 2012), p.15.

¹³ R.I.C. Inspector General and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports, Jan. – Apr. 1919, (N.A.I., The British in Ireland, CO 904/94, POS 8548).

particularly shortfalls in central funding for housebuilding, and the rising cost of maintaining the workhouse with declining inmate numbers. Some of these issues were a wartime legacy, others post-war challenges. The L.G.B. had already recommended closing the Balrothery workhouse and transferring the inmates to Drogheda, not Dublin, and while the board welcomed this, some were suspicious of the L.G.B.'s motives and timing.¹⁴ The issues with the Northern Bank in Balbriggan, 'Carsons's pet' as Mathews called it, re-emerged when they sought, with L.G.B. support, to charge interest on the council overdraft. The Northern bank was designated the district council's 'treasurer' and approved as such by the L.G.B. Frank Lawless, possibly pre-empting a later policy of the Dáil, suggested seeking alternative sources of funds, and securing independent loans, but Dunne worried about upsetting the L.G.B.

An early opportunity to implement the Dáil policy of ignoring the crown and its agents arose when the still outstanding Balrothery surcharge case against guardians Frank Lawless and Mary Adrien, relating to Dr Hayes' salary, was heard in March. When guardians or councillors undertook unsanctioned expenditure, the Local Government Board had legal recourse to recover the amount by levying a surcharge or liability on those who had authorised it originally. The chairman, Thomas Smyth, was named as a co-defendant, as he had chaired the meeting that sanctioned the payment to Dr Hayes. The guardians defence was that if the appointment was legal then the payment was legal, but the case was lost. Lawless and Adrien did not attend or defend their case.¹⁵ Eventually, the authorities seized goods to the value of the surcharge, totalling £27, from the homes of Lawless and Adrien. Smyth paid his £8 portion and then asked the guardians to reimburse him. The press reported in dramatic detail how combined police and military detachments seized a piano from the Lawless home and a sewing machine, bicycle, and hallstand from Molly Adrien.¹⁶ The L.G.B. later charged the associated legal costs to the guardians, which further infuriated P.J. Kettle's principles, and the issue remained on the agenda at Balrothery meetings for months.¹⁷ For the more pedantic nationalist councillors such

¹⁴ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 30 Aug., 20 Sept. & 18 Oct. 1919.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22 Mar. 1919.

¹⁶ *Drogheda Argus, Drogheda Independent & Irish Independent*, 17 May 1919.

¹⁷ *Irish Independent & Freeman's Journal*, 29 Apr.; *Drogheda Independent*, 3 & 31 May, 14 & 21 June & *Drogheda Advertiser*, 24 May 1919.

as Smyth and P. J. Kettle, the issue was an affront to the integrity of the council and its ratepayers, and they saw defending the payment as a matter of principle. For Lawless and Adrien, it was about making a political statement. Their objective was to expose the petty attitude of the L.G.B. to the public. The episode highlighted the difference between those who now saw their role and political future outside the British system, and those who continued to operate within it.

It is ironic that the surcharge saga played out at the same time as arguments continued over the payment of war bonuses to council officials, explicitly authorised by the L.G.B. It reveals a political approach on their behalf. Dr Hayes was an ex-employee and an insurgent in 1916 while the council officials were regarded as loyal contributors to the war effort. At a stormy meeting in July, Frank Lawless highlighted the inconsistency and bias, while Patrick Mathews and P.J. Kettle clashed over paying it at all, when other workers were on strike and suffering hardship. Kettle vacated the chair when Mathews accused him ‘of doing the dirty work of the Dublin castle curs’, creating an awkward standoff.¹⁸

While still in a numerical majority at meetings, the traditional nationalist and unionist members with their focus on ratepayers’ interests were increasingly under pressure from the growing self-confidence and vocalism of those in the growing independence movement. There was also a marked class divide emerging at the meetings, with the conservative ratepayer interest facing a new popular and working-class coalition of Sinn Féin and Labour. While the overdue local elections could not come soon enough for the Sinn Féin cohort, they would be too soon for the other. Three co-options to Balrothery R.D.C. in July 1919 shifted the balance further from the ratepayer interest when republicans, James Derham, Peter Kelly and John Moran replaced retiring unionists Lewis Whyte and Elias Corbally, and nationalist J.P. Cuffe.¹⁹

Finances also preoccupied Dublin County Council in the early months of 1919. A negotiating team led by P.J. O’Neill, now fully involved again after the end of the war, examined the issue of roadmen’s wages. The newly established Ministry of Transport in London had only allocated £236,000 in funding for roads in Ireland

¹⁸ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 19 July 1919.

¹⁹ Balrothery R.D.C. minute books, 28 July 1919, (N.A.I., BG40/RA22).

compared to £1.75m in Britain. Only £250,000 was allocated for housebuilding, with any shortfalls secured by loans undertaken by the councils themselves.²⁰ William Field pointed out in March that there was central financing available for this purpose in England and Wales, and that the previous chief secretary, Edward Shortt, had also approved £2m for housebuilding in Ireland.²¹ There were concerns about late payment of rates, and threats of legal proceedings from the Land Commission over annuity arrears.²² By April, the rates were over £1,000 in arrears, the worst O'Neill could remember.²³ There were shortfalls in funding for the treatment of tuberculosis patients, growing numbers of venereal disease patients and an ongoing dispute with the L.G.B. over whether the board or the council was responsible paying for the employer portion of national insurance contributions.²⁴ There were still demands from staff for the payment of war bonuses promised under productivity legislation during the war. These unresolved challenges, with the uncertain political backdrop, gave cause for concern that levels of tension and dissent might grow into hostile public unrest.

Eventually in April 1919, the roadmen's disputes, following a year of strikes and negotiations, were resolved with 37 shillings per week pay agreed with improved conditions and bonuses. By October, economic conditions had so deteriorated that the roadmen made a further claim for a rise to 50 shillings per week. Despite these headaches, the council unanimously approved a pension package for the retiring secretary to the council, R.T. Blackburne, of over £944 per annum for his forty-five years' service to the council and the grand jury. The new starting salary for the post was set at £300 per year, with £25 annual increments to a maximum of £500.²⁵ The new county secretary was the incumbent assistant accountant, Herbert Clancy, son of the former Home Rule M.P., J.J. Clancy. The council also appointed a new county accountant while James Lawless added the responsibilities of assistant county

²⁰ Dublin County Council minute books, 23 Jan. 1919, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/18); Ministry of Transport Act, 1919, 9 & 10 Geo. v. cii. c.50 set up a new department that replaced the British Road Board, which made the original allocation.

²¹ Dublin County Council minute books, 6 Mar. 1919, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/18).

²² County councils were liable for the land annuity arrears in their area, deducted from their annual grant in relief of the rates.

²³ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 26 Apr. 1919.

²⁴ Dublin County Council minute books, 29 May & 26 June 1919, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/18).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2 Sept. 1918, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/17).

accountant to his existing role.²⁶ County solicitor William Shannon resigned in December 1919, with Thomas Early elected in his place, defeating Laurence O'Neill, the son of Joseph O'Neill, by a margin of twelve votes to ten.²⁷ This was a complete changing of the guard among the senior officials in Dublin County Council; the election planned for June 1920 presented the prospect of similar shifts among the elected members.²⁸

Three items on the agenda at the meeting of Dublin County Council on 5 February 1920, against the background of the War of Independence, give an insight into the everyday reality and competing priorities of political life. Arrested and detained at Mountjoy prison, James Lawless wrote that he was unable to attend for work as normal and asked that the council forward his salary cheque to him at the prison address. When Lawless later transferred to Wormwood Scrubs in England, he requested the cheque go to his wife. Due to the 1916 precedent, the council sought legal opinion and decided to grant Lawless three months leave on full pay instead. They subsequently extended this leave, although in this case there was no conviction, only detention.²⁹ Michael Dunne raised the issue of agricultural regulations preventing the landing of Irish cattle at British ports on Sundays, as it was prejudiced against the Irish cattle trade. Correspondence from the County Dublin Farmers Association called for the licensing of all bulls in the county, to reduce and prevent servicing by non-licensed beasts.³⁰ The range of issues discussed at this meeting highlights just how different priorities were at the same forum, but they also very much reflected wider society in Fingal in the early months of 1920. Everyday issues that affected people's livelihoods were as important for most as fighting a war for independence was for the likes of James Lawless.

Meanwhile, the female workers at all of the Balbriggan factories went on strike in February 1919 over union recognition, with their trade union representative Patrick Mathews prosecuted for making intimidatory speeches on the picket line.³¹ Post-war

²⁶ Dublin County Council minute books, 18 Sept. & 2 Oct. 1919, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/18).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 11 Dec. 1919, 8 Jan. 1920, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/18).

²⁸ *Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1919*, 9 & 10 Geo. V, c.19; *Drogheda Advertiser*, 19 Apr. 1919.

²⁹ Dublin County Council minute books, 18 Mar. 1920, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/18).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 5 Feb. 1920, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/18).

³¹ *Drogheda Independent*, 8 Feb. & 8 Mar. 1919. Balbriggan Mills (Gallen), Smyth's and Deedes & Templar were all on strike.

labour unrest was growing and in an agricultural society like Fingal was linked to the land question. Farm labourers had become increasingly unionised towards the end of the war, driven by price and wage pressures, and encouraged by the involvement of organised labour in the conscription crisis. The promise of improved prospects at the war's end raised expectations as much among the landless who clamoured for land and the workers for higher wages as among the farmers for increased profits. Labourers, small farmers, and the younger sons of established farmers all wanted either more land or access to their own holdings. The state interventions on compulsory tillage, agricultural wages and price controls during wartime helped alleviate some hardship for labourers, but were of less benefit to farmers than a free market. They were always blunt instruments designed primarily to supply the British war effort. They left an imperfect and uneven imprint on Irish agriculture as they imposed additional costs, restricted prices and dictated land use. The disorganised and violent society developing in Ireland was ripe for ad hoc agitation and localised disputes.³² Trade unionist James Woods was scathing and personalised his anger at a Balrothery R.D.C. meeting, highlighting the underlying antagonism of the class and social divide: Who is Lord Holmpatrick? Are not all the farmers of north County Dublin Lord Holmpatrick's? They are vindictive and ignorant and mean to wipe us out. What about the 'great nationalists', posing as Irishmen but employing nobody on farms of two to three thousand acres? ³³

In March 1920, farm labourers in Fingal went on strike again. Farmers who did not come to terms were boycotted locally. Within a fortnight, a settlement was reached and half of the strikers had returned to work.³⁴ As the labourers became better organised so did the farmers. Richard Butler was re-elected president of the Irish Farmers Union, which grew under his leadership, overcoming the 'traditional divisions of sectional and economic diversity' that previously hampered its development. The constant threat of government intrusion, unionised labour and the common expectation of further land disposal rejuvenated their common purpose.³⁵ Everyone was fighting their own corner: landlords, graziers, larger farmers,

³² Terence Dooley, *The land for the people: the land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), pp 30-33.

³³ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 17 July 1920.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 13 & 27 Mar. 1920.

³⁵ Raymond Ryan, 'Farmers, agriculture and politics in the Irish Free State', (Ph.D. thesis, U.C.C., 2005), p. 46.

smallholders and labourers, all prepared to take advantage of the other or the political and economic circumstances that presented.

Frank Lawless defended the efforts of the Dáil on land reform, and proposed the formation of co-operative models. Through the National Land Bank, he secured the purchase of a 140-acre farm at Roscall near Ballyboghall, for £13,000, on behalf of Roscall Agricultural Co-operative Society for the benefit of local landless men. Lawless' imprisonment delayed the purchase, but the local priest and John Rooney continued negotiations.³⁶ Similar attempts to purchase a farm for a co-operative of landless men at Swords in early 1918 were unsuccessful when the bids of the co-operative failed to reach the reserve price.³⁷

The agrarian question in Fingal was never far away even during the independence struggle but it was primarily focused on the demands of agricultural labourers as, indeed, it had in 1913. These included not just better wages but inclusion in the division of untenanted lands. Maura Cronin summed up the class dimension of the land question concluding that 'in rural Ireland, land was the ultimate determinant of social status...and separated farmers from labourers'.³⁸ For the landless, the quest for any land was their personal struggle for independence, and the only one that mattered. The rural council discussed support for landless families in the area by redistributing untenanted lands or pasture that had been under compulsory tillage orders during the war, but had no powers of compulsory purchase. The easier access to land for compulsory tillage during the war had exacerbated feelings. After 1914, government loans for land purchase under the land acts stalled, while the amount of visible untenanted land remained sufficiently high to contribute to the discontent. Sinn Féin's electoral position in 1918 did little to allay such expectations and took advantage of them, taking on the cause of compulsory acquisition and redistribution.³⁹ The issues of agricultural labourers in Fingal remained unresolved, always below the surface and with the potential to escalate.

³⁶ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 26 June & 18 Sept. 1920.

³⁷ *Drogheda Argus*, 2 Mar. 1918. The seller was the painter Nathaniel Hone.

³⁸ Maura Cronin, 'Class and status in twentieth century Ireland: the evidence of oral history', in *Saothar* vol. xxxii (2007) pp 33-43.

³⁹ Terence Dooley, 'Irish land questions, 1879-1923', in Thomas Bartlett (ed.) *The Cambridge history of Ireland Vol. 4, 1880 to the present* (Cambridge, 2018), pp 141-2.

Through 1919 and the early months of 1920 Dublin County Council and Balrothery R.D.C. struggled to deal with the implications of reduced funding during the war. The Dáil counter state had not yet fully materialised at local government level in Fingal Local politics were often reduced to the trading of personal insults and technicalities between the remnants of the Home Rule ratepayers group and an increasingly assured coalition of republican and Labour councillors. The changes in priorities for national politics in Ireland were countered by the continuities of the challenges of local government.

1920 local elections: new councils, new allegiances and new responsibilities

Under the new system of proportional representation, enacted primarily to safeguard minority political representation, the borough and urban district elections in January 1920 saw Sinn Féin, with Labour support, gain control of 172 out of 206 municipal councils, the exceptions being in Ulster.⁴⁰ J.V. Lawless, now living at Botanic Avenue, Drumcondra, was elected to Dublin Corporation for Sinn Féin where the party secured a small majority, winning forty-two of the eighty seats.⁴¹ He remained employed as assistant secretary and accountant of Dublin County Council.⁴² James Lawless was nominated to sit on the cleansing and housing committees of the corporation, but attended very few meetings due to his work commitments on the county council, service with the national movement or imprisonment. His military service pension record claims that he was involved in intelligence work (apart from his spells in prison when he led a number of hunger strikes), reporting directly to Michael Collins, providing information extracted from sources such as motor taxation files in Dublin County Council and from roadworks plans relating to the laying of telegraph and telephone cables. He recalled county councillors P.J. Curran and James Derham, as ‘helpful’ accomplices in surveillance work in the Balbriggan area. Piaras Béaslaí, who was part of Collins intelligence network and Tom Markham who was a spy for Collins in Dublin Castle both confirmed Lawless’ role in supplying information from the council records. However, Gearóid O’Sullivan, a

⁴⁰ F. S. L. Lyons, ‘The war of independence, 1919–21’, in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland vi: Ireland under the union 1801-1921*, p. 397. Proportional representation first used in the municipal elections in Sligo in Jan. 1919.

⁴¹ *Freeman’s Journal*, 19 Jan. 1920.

⁴² Reports & printed documents of Dublin corporation, (Dublin City Archives, 1920 vol. 1, p. 67; 1921 vol. 1, p. 47; 1922 vol. 1, p. 61; 1923 vol. 1 p. 99, & 1924 p. 29).

close confidant and cousin of Collins, in correspondence to the military pensions' board in 1938, maintained that Lawless 'was in no way an intelligence officer attached to Collins'.⁴³ The contradictions here reveal how divided comrades had later become. O'Sullivan had made many enemies in his position as Lieutenant General of the National Army and on the supreme council of the I.R.B. The clandestine nature of Michael Collins' intelligence networks during the War of Independence make it entirely possible that Lawless reported independently to him. Lawless was present at the city hall council meeting on 6 December 1920 when crown forces raided the chamber and he was arrested along with Michael Staines and four other councillors. He was also a member of the Commission on Local Government, which formulated the strategy for the local councils' accession from British rule, which reported in August 1920, where his hands-on professional experience was valuable. Chaired by Kevin O'Higgins, it included Rory O'Connor, Richard Hayes, Eamonn Duggan, James McNeill and Terence McSwiney.⁴⁴ However, despite these attributes and experience, James Lawless was always on the periphery of power, involved in the independence movement from its earliest days, and moving within the circles of influence but never seeming to come to ascendancy within the new political elite.

The first local election in Fingal in January 1920 saw control of Balbriggan town council transferred to an alliance of Sinn Féin and Labour councillors. Father and son John and M.J. (James) Derham were elected for Sinn Féin. The younger Derham was elected chairman but disqualified a month later by the L.G.B. because he signed his declaration in Irish.⁴⁵ Balbriggan town council had always been dominated by local businessmen particularly from its hosiery industry. Long-serving outgoing nationalist chairman Archdale Graham and Unionist Richard Gorman topped the poll. The manager of Smyth's hosiery factory, David Ellis, who had previously described himself as a Labour Unionist, and who was auditor for Balrothery workhouse, lost

⁴³ Dublin corporation minute book, 1920, (Dublin City Archives); James V. Lawless & Thomas Markham pension records, (Military Archives, Military Service Pensions Collection, MSP34/REF818 & 24SP10942); Patrick Long, 'O'Sullivan, Gearóid' & Patrick Maume, 'Béaslaí, Piaras' in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁴⁴ Dáil Éireann department of local government reports, Aug. 1920, (N.A.I., Dáil Éireann secretariat files DE/2/243).

⁴⁵ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 14 Feb. 1920.

his seat.⁴⁶ Now three Sinn Féin and two Labour councillors controlled the nine-seat Balbriggan town council.

The rural and county council elections in June 1920 brought significant impetus to the political struggle as Sinn Féin gained control of twenty-nine of thirty-three county councils and 172 of 206 rural councils.⁴⁷ A declaration of allegiance was now possible, with the potential to escalate the war against the British government on a new front. Balrothery R.D.C. returned ten Sinn Féin and seven Labour members with Michael Dunne the sole surviving nationalist from the previous council. They elected Peter Kelly, a 1916 veteran, and active in the I.R.A. in Swords, as chairman and its representative on Dublin County Council and declared its unanimous allegiance to Dáil Éireann.⁴⁸ When the clerk presented the council with a number of malicious injury claims against it, Kelly, in one of his first actions in the chair, directed him to put them in the wastebasket.⁴⁹ This was not the first time the clerk at Balrothery took such a directive. In April 1914, the nationalist chairman John Hartford had similarly instructed the clerk to throw a Sinn Féin resolution opposing partition in the event of Home Rule into the fire.⁵⁰

Balrothery board of guardians unanimously elected Mary (Molly) Adrien as its chairperson, the first lady to hold the position, and elected a second woman, Ms Lily Fogarty, a schoolteacher from Malahide and Gaelic League activist, as deputy vice chairperson. Daniel Brophy, a Sinn Féin 1916 veteran, and active I.R.A. officer, was elected vice-chairman.⁵¹ At the first full meeting she chaired, Adrien commenced the meeting by asking for God's blessing and reciting the Hail Mary, adding that religion was no longer taboo in the boardroom, as the members now had no religious or political differences.⁵² Such a statement was unheard of under the L.G.B., if not also

⁴⁶ Balbriggan Town Council minute books, 4 Feb. 1920, (Fingal County Archives, online at https://btc.informa.ie/Browse_Minute_Books_list.asp accessed 23 Feb. 2022; *Anglo Celt*, 24 Jan. 1920. Michael James Derham also went by the names James and Jimmy Derham. The name used in the original source is the name used in the text. Graham was a seed merchant and Gorman was a senior hosiery factory clerk.

⁴⁷ Pádraig Yeates, *A city in turmoil, 1919-21* (Dublin, 2012) p. 146.

⁴⁸ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 26 June 1920; Balrothery R.D.C. minute books, 17 June 1920, (BG40/RA22); Fingal Brigade Battalion Membership reports, (Military Archives, MA/MSPC/RO/519). Michael Dunne, the sole nationalist elected, was absent.

⁴⁹ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 3 July 1920.

⁵⁰ *Drogheda Independent*, 18 Apr. 1914.

⁵¹ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 17 June 1920, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/048: BG40/A147); Thomas Peppard witness statement, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 1399).

⁵² *Drogheda Advertiser*, 26 Jun. 1920.

unacceptable to the majority of the former guardians. Molly now began to sign off the minutes in Irish, as Máire Ní Dreáin, an assertion of the changing Ireland the new council aspired to.⁵³ Only a dozen meetings took place before the military occupied the workhouse as garrison accommodation in September 1920, and the majority of the inmates were transferred to Drogheda workhouse. A small number of infirm and old patients remained at the hospital. Few full meetings took place over the next year with those that did poorly attended. Some members declined to attend for fear of raids by the military while others were themselves on the run. The workhouse had windows smashed, furniture broken, and the minute books removed by crown forces.⁵⁴ The official minute books recorded little during this period, other than routine details, as the workhouse had no inmates. Rough minute books from 1921, however, give some details of increasing correspondence with Dáil Éireann, including warnings to Balrothery about breaching the Belfast Boycott through the appointment of a medical analyst from Belfast, and continuing to deal with the Northern Bank in Balbriggan, as previously instructed by the LG.B. Partly prompted by attacks on Catholics in Belfast in August 1920, the boycott gave the Dáil the opportunity to impose sanctions on Belfast-based banks and insurance companies. It later expanded to exclude Northern Irish goods and services. The guardians also recorded a loan of bedding materials to the local eighth (Fingal) Brigade.⁵⁵ On 12 December 1921, the board recommended closing the workhouse hospital and transferring patients to the amalgamated Dublin Union, and discussed the sale and disposal of its assets, in line with the Dáil policy to dismantle and reform the poor law system in Ireland.⁵⁶ Despite the occupation, when a group of Black and Tans was ambushed at nearby Ballough, Dr Kieran at the workhouse hospital treated the injured. Ms. Adrien praised the humanity of the hospital staff for treating the enemy and then sent the bill to the military.⁵⁷ This was a period of continued disruption for Balrothery R.D.C. and its attempts to carry on normal business.

⁵³ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians minute books, 5 July 1920, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/048: BG40/A147),

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 27 Sept. 1920, 23 May 1921, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/048: BG40/A147 & BG40/AA149); *Drogheda Advertiser*, 20 Oct. 1920.

⁵⁵ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians rough minute books, 25 July & 28 Nov. 1921, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/048: BG40/AA149-50); Balrothery Poor Law Union minutes notation, 19 May & letter to guardians, 27 May 1921, (N.A.I., Dáil Éireann Department of Local Government files, DELG 9/1).

⁵⁶ Balrothery Poor Law Guardians rough minute books, 12 Dec. 1921, (N.A.I., MFGS 49/048: BG40/AA150).

⁵⁷ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 30 Oct. 1920.

Nevertheless, the council also took the opportunity to confirm its allegiance to the Dáil and cooperate with the D.E.L.G. Balrothery council began to refer disputes to the republican courts and regularly sought advice and direction from Dáil Éireann Department of Local Government.⁵⁸ When the L.G.B. auditor, E.P. McCarron asked to attend one of their meetings in August, they refused him and restated their republican allegiance. William Ganly added that if the government could refuse entry to Archbishop Mannix to visit Ireland, his home, they could refuse the auditor. McCarron promptly wrote reminding them of their legal obligations to the ratepayers.⁵⁹ References to the archbishop's exclusion and standing up to McCarron were opportunities to publicise the council's republican position in the newspapers and confirm individual commitment to the cause of independence.

In Dublin County Council elections in June 1920, Frank Lawless comfortably topped the poll for the four-seat Swords constituency, with over forty per cent of the vote, elected alongside party colleague Henry Friel from Howth, and two Labour councillors, Patrick J. Curran and John Wilson. There was a turnout of just over fifty-four per cent. The outgoing chairman, P. J. O'Neill lost his seat, as did other prominent councillors Richard Butler, Archdale Graham and Michael Dunne. Other high-profile casualties were former M.P., William Field, in Kingstown, and J.J. Lawlor, chairman of South Dublin R.D.C. All were members of the old guard, prominent I.P.P. supporters and with varying degrees of association with the war effort. Sinn Féin took control of the county council with twelve of the nineteen elected councillors. There were also three Unionists, two nationalists and two Labour. The five ex-officio appointees of the rural district councils, which included Peter Kelly (Balrothery) and Patrick Connolly (North Dublin), and two additional co-opted members were all from Sinn Féin, ensuring its dominance. At the first meeting of the new council, with twenty-three members in attendance, Henry O'Friel was unanimously elected to the chair, with James McNeill, brother of Eoin McNeill, as vice-chairman, both proposed by Frank Lawless. Independent Unionist Lady Margaret Dockrell seconded McNeill's nomination. O'Friel was a former civil servant from Donegal, dismissed in 1918 for refusing to take an oath to the crown

⁵⁸ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 31 July & 18 Sept. 1920.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 14 & 28 Aug. 1920. The British government had the outspoken Archbishop Mannix arrested at sea to prevent his landing at Cork in 1920; John Molony, 'Mannix, Daniel', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

under D.O.R.A. legislation. Now working as a tax consultant, he was a member of Howth urban council.⁶⁰ The new council immediately declared its allegiance to Dáil Éireann, with the five Unionist and nationalist councillors dissenting. They also passed a motion to signify this transfer of allegiance by flying the tricolour flag of the Irish Republic on the council buildings.⁶¹ Sinn Féin representatives at all levels quickly assumed places on committees and representative positions from county agricultural boards down to school attendance committees allowing them to take control at every level of local administration.

Declaring allegiance to the Dáil meant submitting to the authority of the new Department of Local Government and ceasing all cooperation and reporting to the L.G.B. This had consequences for the local democratic autonomy of the councils. This included quite a wide spectrum of councillors: the more independently minded Sinn Féin or trade union councillors, especially those with prior council experience, Unionists, old nationalists and those whose allegiance was to the ratepayers or their local electorate first and the republic second. The transfer of allegiance meant supplying the minutes and documentation of all meetings for approval and sanction, as had always been the case with the Local Government Board. If there was any misapprehension that the new supervisors would be less rigorous, it was quickly dispelled.

The submission of minutes to the Dáil Department of Local Government from November 1920 sheds light on the attitude of Cosgrave, and in particular O'Higgins, to the local authority bodies, and how they saw their subservient role in the new apparatus of government.⁶² Comparing the correspondence and notations in departmental files with local records reveals the developing frustration on both sides

⁶⁰ Gerry McElroy, 'O'Friel, Henry', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2009). He changed his name to from Friel to O'Friel on election but some records still used the original spelling.

⁶¹ Dublin County Council minute books, 24 June 1920, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/19); *Drogheda Independent*, 12 Jun.; *Evening Herald*, 16 & 17 June; *Leinster Leader*, 26 Jun. & *Weekly Irish Times*, 3 July 1920. Eoin McNeill was also elected to Dublin County Council, but not present at the first meeting and later resigned his seat.

⁶² Balrothery Poor Law Union, letter from J. Stack accompanying first minutes, 19 Nov. 1920, (N.A.I., Dáil Éireann Department of Local Government files, DELG 9/1). The burning of the Customs House by the I.R.A. in May 1921 brought about the destruction of the centralised records of both the Poor Law Commissioners and the Local Government Board, depriving historians of original archives to examine the detail of their modus operandi and approach to local authorities., hence the importance of notated records within the D.E.L.G.

as they both sought ascendancy, centre against periphery. The records reveal a highly attentive examination by O'Higgins, in particular, of the minutes and decisions made by the councils. Any deviation from the authority of the Dáil or the department brought rebuke. There was routine questioning, orders for reconsideration or outright rejection in relation to staff appointments, remuneration, pension awards, holidays and relief expenditure.⁶³ Balrothery R.D.C. were regularly advised to claim malicious injury damages from the British government for military damage, with further direction on withholding of taxation and annuity receipts.⁶⁴ Requests were made to approach local businesses who had contracted during the Great War to re-establish their operations to help alleviate winter unemployment, including the brickworks businesses of W&T Cumiskey in Balbriggan and Thomas Plunkett in Portmarnock. Plunkett replied that it was not possible, but he would sell the council twenty-six acres of land ideal for harvesting of clay for brickmaking. Dublin County Council received regular reminders to make malicious injury claims against the military and to avail of the republican courts.⁶⁵ Correspondence shows that the council could also rely on the support of the department as O'Higgins warned under-secretary Cope in a strongly worded letter that the presentation of a decree for malicious damages for £62,000 by Deedes Templar for the factory destroyed in the 'sack of Balbriggan', was in contravention of the terms of the truce. This followed a request by James McNeill to him to act on the matter on 3 October 1921.⁶⁶

The declarations of allegiance to the institutions of Dáil Éireann coincided with the escalation of violent activity. In July 1920, the Auxiliary Division of the R.I.C. was formed to supplement the Black and Tans and military, at a time when the regular constabulary was depleting in numbers due to resignations. Concerns about this escalation in violence and the increase in military forces led Dublin Chamber of Commerce to call for immediate self-government for Ireland, without any coercion of Ulster. With such a motion endorsed by prominent Unionists such as Andrew Jameson, Sir William Goulding, E.H. Andrews and John Good, it indicated a

⁶³ Balrothery Poor Law Union minutes notation, 29 Sept. 1920 to 14 Nov. 1921. (N.A.I., Dáil Éireann Department of Local Government files, DELG 9/1).

⁶⁴ Balrothery R.D.C. minutes notation, 29 Dec. 1920, 25 Nov. 1920 & 19 Jan. 1921. (N.A.I., Dáil Éireann Department of Local Government files, DELG 9/2, 1712/20, 1718/20 & 842/21).

⁶⁵ Dublin County Council minutes notation & correspondence, 21 Feb. to 9 Dec. 1921, (N.A.I., Dáil Éireann Department of Local Government files, DELG 9/18).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 9 Dec. 1921, (N.A.I., Dáil Éireann Department of Local Government files, DELG 9/18, 18523/21).

growing acceptance that Ireland needed more than Home Rule.⁶⁷ Goulding, Andrews and Jameson had been moving in such a direction since displaced from the General Council of the Irish Unionist Alliance under its new constitution the previous year.⁶⁸

The results of the local government elections transformed the political balance in Fingal, and the new Sinn Féin-controlled councils were able to play their role in the development of the counter state and the War of Independence. Apart from the publicity of declared allegiance to the Dáil and the republic, the resolve and mechanism were now in place to usurp the apparatus of British administration in Ireland, simply by turning that apparatus itself on its masters.

The question of the rates

To demonstrate its new authority, Dublin County Council introduced official letterheads in Irish, discontinued advertising with the *Irish Times*, withdrew business from banks and public bodies where a political test was a condition of employment, and stipulated that all future council purchases should be of Irish manufacture and from companies who recognised trade unions. It asked its subsidiary rural councils to adopt the same policy.⁶⁹ More importantly, Dublin County Council quickly endorsed and enacted the Dáil policy of refusing any examination of their books or audits by ‘any agents of the British government or inland revenue’.⁷⁰ The British government moved to deal with the increasingly subversive local bodies through financial and legal methods. They withdrew all grants from councils that refused to submit their books for audit and declared that all future claims for any malicious injury, perpetrated by either side, be charged against the rates.⁷¹ On 24 August, Dublin County Council took the crucial steps, as directed by the Dáil, to break financially from the Local Government Board by refusing to lodge the rates to the approved treasurer bank, which was now the Munster and Leinster bank. They replaced it with

⁶⁷ *Irish Times*, 30 July 1920.

⁶⁸ Irish Unionist Alliance general meeting, 24 Jan. 1919, (N.L.I., MS 49708/6). The new leadership included Sir George Brooke and Major E. C. Hamilton, who had been active with the Irish Landowners Association thirty years earlier.

⁶⁹ Dublin County Council minute books, 7 Aug. & 4 Sept. 1920 (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/DCC/1/19).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 8 & 24 July 1920, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/19); T.J. McArdle witness statement, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 501). McArdle, secretary of the Department of Local Government, gives an extensive account of the work of the department.

⁷¹ Brian Hughes, *Defying the I.R.A? Intimidation, coercion and communities during the Irish revolution* (Liverpool, 2016), p. 55.

a committee comprising the chairman and vice-chairman, and two other councillors. This committee appointed a paymaster to manage council funding, to whom the rate collectors would now lodge their receipts, effectively withholding them from British scrutiny.⁷² Tom McArdle, secretary of the Department of Local Government, gives a detailed account in his Bureau of Military History statement of how the scheme of rate diversion operated.⁷³

On the evening of 22 November 1920, at the council offices at Parnell Square, the I.R.A., described in the council minutes as ‘persons unknown’, broke the locks to the storage presses in the accountant’s office, and removed the minute books and financial ledgers to keep them from the L.G.B. The next morning the military carried out a raid, looking for the same documents. When they could not be located, they undertook a search of the building and removed any remaining books, mostly staff lists and wage ledgers.⁷⁴ In the next few months, for security and safety reasons, meetings were short, financial matters not discussed, often only a large payment to the paymaster noted, and then adjourned. Dublin County Council had effectively gone underground, and the lack of minutes reflects this. Balrothery R.D.C., under instruction from James Lawless in the county council, did likewise, appointing Peter Kelly as paymaster and William Ganly, James Derham and Matthias Derham as trustees.⁷⁵ Balrothery meetings were even less regular, as Kelly was an active I.R.A. and Derham was under constant police surveillance.

Withholding the rates placed the rate collectors in an unenviable position legally bound by their contracts with the L.G.B. and the personal sureties they had lodged against their collections. Caught between two masters, a standoff was inevitable. O’Higgins sought the resignation of any collector who failed to lodge the monies in the national interest. As he saw it, non-compliance ‘was tantamount to treason’.⁷⁶ Following communication from the L.G.B. on the obligations stipulated in their contracts, all ten Dublin County Council rate collectors wrote to resign their

⁷² Dublin County Council minute books, 24 Aug. 1920 (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/DCC/1/19); Instruction from cabinet to DELG outlining procedures to safeguard council funds, 10 Aug. 1920, (N.A.I., Dáil Éireann Secretariat, DE/2/62).

⁷³ T.J. McArdle witness statement, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 501).

⁷⁴ Dublin County Council minute books, 4 Dec. 1920, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/DCC/1/20); John Shouldice witness statement, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 679).

⁷⁵ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 13 Nov. 1920.

⁷⁶ Brian Hughes, *Defying the I.R.A? Intimidation, coercion and communities during the Irish revolution* (Liverpool, 2016), p. 62.

positions in January 1921. Eight of them reported raids on their homes or businesses where all the books, warrants and cheques relating to their collections were seized. About £11,000 in collections were cashed on newly written cheques, while the collectors were held under guard until the bank had honoured them. There was now the threat of physical danger to add to the fear of losing both sureties and pension entitlements.⁷⁷ Kevin O’Higgins confirmed who was responsible when he wrote to Dublin County Council that ‘the rates held illegally by your rate collectors have been obtained and will be paid to the credit of your council in due course’.⁷⁸ R.J. Rooney, one of the Balrothery rate collectors, did not resign, but complained bitterly to the council at his loss of earnings.⁷⁹

The county council acted promptly acknowledging that the rate collectors were employees and not ‘republican representatives’, and should not be asked to undertake the same risks. Charting a course between the competing authorities of the L.G.B. and D.E.L.G., they resolved to reinstate the Munster and Leinster bank as treasurer, and defer the rate collectors’ resignations until 31 March 1921, the end of their collection period. This also had the benefit for the council of collection by those who knew what they were doing. They immediately recruited additional collectors to replace them.⁸⁰ Given assurances on fees, bonuses and pensions, the collectors returned to duty, and there were no shortage of applicants for the probationary collectors’ positions, including from I.R.A. men such as Jack Shouldice and Michael Rock. Shouldice contrasted the success of their methods of persuasion to those of the older incumbents, in a difficult period when would be defaulters sought to take advantage of the ‘war situation’.⁸¹

With a loss in grants amounting to a revenue shortfall of about twenty per cent, the councils initially tried to cut back on expenditure rather than increase rates, as

⁷⁷ Dublin County Council minute books, 20 Jan 1921, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/18); Drogheda Argus, 8 Jan. 1921.

⁷⁸ Letter from Kevin O’Higgins to Dublin County Council, 6 Jan. 1921, (N.A.I., Dáil Éireann Department of Local Government files, DELG 9/18).

⁷⁹ Letter from secretary, Dublin County Council to minister, 3 Dec. 1921, (N.A.I., Dáil Éireann Department of Local Government files, DELG 9/18, Dublin County Council, 18815).

⁸⁰ Dublin County Council minute books, 27 Jan. 1921, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/20).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 14 Feb. 1921, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/20); John Shouldice witness statement, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 679).

instructed by the department, but this was only feasible for a limited period.⁸² When the rate was struck at the end of February 1921, Dublin County Council made a public appeal for payments, and criticised the Local Government Board for withholding grants and then plundering rates levied for specific local services to pay for exorbitant criminal damages claims, inflicting ‘the meanest and most callous form of warfare on the Irish people’.⁸³ A departmental circular from the D.E.L.G. issued on 13 December 1920 advised, for propaganda purposes, that the loss of grants ‘brought the war into the hospitals and [poor law] unions, to the aged poor and destitute orphans’.⁸⁴ The statements issued by the Dublin councils were repeated elsewhere in the country, and as we have previously encountered, the same messages reported and reinforced in the press. The County Dublin rate was almost twice the previous year and immediately drew the opposition of larger ratepayers, who formed the County Dublin Ratepayers Association at the Gresham Hotel in May 1921.⁸⁵ They sought departmental investigations into the setting of rates, although now from the D.E.L.G. rather than the L.G.B. The council eventually met with a delegation, which included their chairman Patrick Belton and farmers’ representative P.J. Kettle, who, in addition to a detailed questioning of the rate, took the opportunity to raise issues on the condition of roads in the county. It was an agenda identical to that of the County Dublin Farmers Association, where Belton and Kettle were prominent, and almost a certainty that some would take advantage of the opportunity to resist paying the rates in the circumstances.⁸⁶ They followed up the meeting with a highly critical letter to the council, questioning their financial competence and cost management, and repudiating any insinuation from the council that they were self-serving, out of step with the national struggle or ignorant of the poorer classes in society.⁸⁷ Yet again, the farmers of Fingal showed they were ready to defend their interest whenever any issue or campaign impinged on their financial wellbeing. The

⁸² Mary Daly, *The buffer state: the history of the Department of the Environment* (Dublin, 1997), p. 73.

⁸³ Dublin County Council minute books, 28 Feb. 1921, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/20).

⁸⁴ Circular no.24, Dáil Éireann Department of Local Government, 13 Dec. 1920, (Waterford City & County Archives, IE/WCA/WCC/GNA/88), in Department of Planning, Housing and Local Government, *Democracy and change: the 1920 local elections in Ireland*, (Dublin, 2020) pp 52-3.

⁸⁵ *Irish Times*, 15 Sept. 1921.

⁸⁶ Dublin County Council minute books, 2 Jul. 1921, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/20).

⁸⁷ Copy of letter from County Dublin Ratepayers Association passed on to minister from Dublin County Council, 28 Aug. 1921, (N.A.I., Dáil Éireann Department of Local Government files, DELG 9/18, 12645/21).

War of Independence was hitting their pockets and they would resist. Dublin County Council were equally resolute in carrying out what they needed to do to ensure payment compliance. In February 1922, Dublin County Council was awarded a judgement against Patrick Belton for £63 14s. in respect of the arrears of rates that he objected to paying.⁸⁸

Collections were often hampered by a simple inability to pay due to a weakened economy, or a principled reluctance on the part of loyalist ratepayers to fund an illegal obtrude such as Dáil Éireann.⁸⁹ Included among the loyalist ratepayers were those who lived in the ‘hostile’ Unionist townships in Dublin.⁹⁰ In addition to bringing pressure to bear on recalcitrant ratepayers, Dublin County Council also sought extended credit from their treasurer bank, and additional loans to make up the shortfall. There was potential credit and loans from unexpected sources. Andrew Jameson, as Governor of the Bank of Ireland extended credit to Dublin Corporation when they were in difficult circumstances after the severing of government loans, encouraging other banks to do likewise. He also played an important role in facilitating the setting up of the National Land Bank, which may have been as much a financial investment as a signal of support for the borrowers.⁹¹ In December 1920, the Dáil approved loans to councils through the D.E.L.G. and the National Land Bank was later used to facilitate loans to local councils.⁹²

Criminal injury claims, now levied on local authorities by the government, increased dramatically as the levels of violence escalated.⁹³ Dublin County Council received seventeen claims in January, twenty-seven in March and forty-four in April 1920. The attorney general for Ireland confirmed that Irish local authorities and ratepayers were responsible for funding such compensation claims.⁹⁴ Ironically, one of these, sent to Dublin County Council but later withdrawn, was from Sinn Féin for damage caused in a military raid on the Sinn Féin bank in Harcourt Street the previous

⁸⁸ Dublin County Council minute books, 4 Feb 1922, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/DCC/1/20).

⁸⁹ Brian Hughes, *Defying the I.R.A? Intimidation, coercion and communities during the Irish revolution* (Liverpool, 2016), pp 57-8 & 66

⁹⁰ Letter from Kevin O’Higgins to Dublin County Council, 14 Feb. 1921, (N.A.I., Dáil Éireann Department of Local Government files, DELG 9/18).

⁹¹ Padraig Yeates, *A city in civil war, 1921-24* (Dublin, 2015) p. 206.

⁹² Patrick O’Sullivan Greene, *Crowdfunding the revolution: the first Dáil loan and the battle for Irish independence* (Dublin, 2020), pp 180-1.

⁹³ Criminal Injuries (Ireland) Act 1919, (9 & 10 Geo. 5) c. 14.

⁹⁴ *Hansard*, H.C. Deb, 10 Jun. 1920, vol. 130, cc575-6 & 5 Nov. 1920, vol. 134, cc737-83.

September.⁹⁵ The Balrothery district council had to cancel contracts for the repair of roads and labourers' cottages due to funding shortfalls, while a series of malicious injury claims totalling £5,600 were lodged from the Inspector General of the R.I.C., Viscount Gormanstown and Talbot de Malahide, for I.R.A. damage to barracks leased from the latter.⁹⁶

The departmental circular of 13 December 1920 also congratulated local councils for taking control of the 'internal administration' of the country 'to enable Dáil Éireann to become the DE FACTO as well as the DE JURE government of Ireland', with the capitalisation emphasised in the original document.⁹⁷ Central to this was the diversion of the rates and key to the crucial role that local government played in the war of independence, at considerable risk and sacrifice to both employees and councillors.

The War of Independence in Fingal: military and political

There were over 700 British soldiers garrisoned in the Fingal area during the War of Independence, and a similar amount at the North Dublin Union complex, indicative of the high level of militarisation imposed on the local community. The South Wales Borderers had 230 men at Swords, Gormanstown and Skerries with 481 men of the East Surrey regiment and later the Duke of Wellingtons' Own at Collinstown and thirty at the Remount depot at Lusk.⁹⁸ There were no Auxiliary companies based in Fingal but there was a significant presence of Black and Tans at Gormanstown. To unemployment, shortages and price inflation was added the further dislocation caused by martial law, with its attendant raids, roadblocks, cordons, curfews and

⁹⁵ Dublin County Council minute books, 22 Jan., 18 Mar. & 29 Apr. 1920, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/18-9). Sinn Féin headquarters, secretariat and bank were in the same building and this is the same raid referred to previously.

⁹⁶ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 14 & 28 Aug. 1920.

⁹⁷ Circular no.24, Dáil Éireann Department of Local Government, 13 Dec. 1920, (Waterford City & County Archives, IE/WCA/WCC/GNA/88), in Department of Planning, Housing and Local Government, *Democracy and change: the 1920 local elections in Ireland*, (Dublin, 2020) pp 52-3.

⁹⁸ Charles Townshend, *The British campaign in Ireland, 1919-1921: the development of political and military policies* (Oxford, 1975) p. 216. Based on figures extracted by Townshend from Dublin District operational strength returns for July 1920, T.N.A. W.O. 35 179/1.

searches.⁹⁹ This contributed to making attendance at council meetings more difficult and dangerous, if not impossible.

Michael Lynch commanded the Irish Volunteers in the Fingal area in late 1918 but was transferred as vice-commandant of the Dublin Brigade in the city under Dick McKee, when Daniel Brophy temporarily took over. Brophy was heavily involved in campaigning for Frank Lawless but the area fell into inactivity after the elections. By 1920, Lynch set up a bomb-making factory with Archie Heron and Joseph Lawless in Parnell St. under the cover of a bicycle repair business. When the brigade areas were reorganised later that year, the Fingal Brigade reformed as four battalions, with parts of County Meath forming part of the first Eastern Division under the command of Sean Boylan. Lynch returned as Fingal O/C with Michael Rock as vice commandant.¹⁰⁰ At the time of the truce on 11 July 1921, the brigade numbered 614 men, but reduced to less than a quarter of this a year later.¹⁰¹ Some of the officers were 1916 veterans, such as intelligence officer Thomas Peppard. Others like Frank Lawless and Eamonn Rooney had too high a political profile for involvement in operational military roles. Besides, during the period of the War of Independence, Frank Lawless, like his brother James, spent as much time in prison as on the outside.¹⁰² Peter Kelly, chairman of Balrothery R.D.C. and a member of Dublin County Council, and Daniel Brophy, vice-chairman of Balrothery guardians were active I.R.A. officers in Fingal. One of the few surviving I.R.A. intelligence reports from Fingal recorded troop movements and garrison numbers, uncooperative post offices, railway station masters, magistrates' activities, government officials and any potential 'enemy agents'. Thomas Peppard's report of October 1921 gives an insight into the I.R.A. perception of who were 'enemy agents' including those with a political profile perceived as unsympathetic to the independence movement. It was remarkably similar to the rudimentary Dublin Castle intelligence of a few years

⁹⁹ Aubane Historical Society, *Irish bulletin*, vol. 1, 12 Jul. 1919 to 1 May 1920 (Millstreet, 2012). A reprint of the original bulletins, it details in chronological order the invasive nature of the occupation at this time.

¹⁰⁰ Dominic Price, *We bled together: Michael Collins, the squad and the Dublin brigade* (Cork, 2017), pp 38-41 gives a good description of battalion areas.

¹⁰¹ Fingal Brigade Battalion Membership reports, (Military Archives, MA/MSPC/RO/519).

¹⁰² See James Dorney, *Interned: the Curragh internment camps in the War of Independence* (Cork, 2019); Will Murphy, *Political imprisonment and the Irish, 1912-21* (Oxford, 2014) & Liam Ó Duibhir, *Prisoners of war: Ballykinlar internment camp, 1920-21* (Cork, 2013), for lists of Fingal internees and references to the Lawless family and their spells in prison, including hunger strikes.

earlier that noted as ‘disloyal’ all shades of nationalist political and cultural organisations. Peppard’s list included farmers’ representatives James Dickie of Swords, Richard Butler and James Ennis. Lord Holmpatrick’s land agent George Fowler, Smyth’s hosiery factory manager Lewis Whyte and all the local magistrates were named as ‘enemy officials’. Malahide Golf club was identified as an ‘enemy social institution’ as it was used by British officers.¹⁰³ Colonel Richard Woods, a former poor law guardian, of Whitestown House, Balbriggan was warned to desist from entertaining British officers at parties and tennis matches by Michael Lynch, O/C of the Fingal I.R.A.¹⁰⁴ Local political differences were drawn more sharply into the military domain as a result of this identification of local individuals. Here, as elsewhere, old animosities and differences of religion, class or politics continued to be the basis of local suspicion with the potential for old scores to be settled.

The brigade activity reports for the Fingal area record sixteen operations carried out between 1 April 1920 and 11 July 1921, on average about one a month. Apart from the Collinstown raid, in which some members including Joseph Lawless took part as drivers and lookouts, these were mostly sporadic and isolated attacks on enemy barracks and convoys. Just before the truce, on 18 June 1921, Fingal I.R.A. undertook its most successful operation when it destroyed six coastguard stations and the Remount Depot at Lusk, which prompted a combined malicious injury claim of over £64,000.¹⁰⁵ This was the precursor to a landing of arms planned by Michael Collins to take place at Loughshinny near Skerries. The delivery never took place as U.S. police at Hoboken, New Jersey seized the consignment of 600 Thompson machine guns as it was being loaded for Ireland.¹⁰⁶

Geographically Balbriggan was at centre of the War of Independence in Fingal. After the release of some republican prisoners in April 1920, an R.I.C. sergeant was shot

¹⁰³ Eastern Division intelligence reports & Fingal intelligence reports, (Military Archives, Michael Collins papers, IE/MA/CP/05/02/29/XL).

¹⁰⁴ Michael Lynch witness statement, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 511). Woods stopped the parties and Lynch later admitted their intention was to burn the house if he did not.

¹⁰⁵ Fingal Brigade, First Eastern Division, I.R.A., (Military Archives, Brigade activity reports, MA/MSPC/A/64); *Drogheda Advertiser*, 1 Oct. 1921.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Lynch witness statement, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 511); Fingal Libraries, *The burning of Fingal coast guard stations*, 18 June 1921, (Fingal, 2021), online at <https://www.fingal.ie/sites/default/files/2021-06/burning-of-coast-guard-stations.pdf> accessed 20 Feb. 2022.

and killed during the celebrations at Clonard St, Balbriggan, in confusion over an attempt to stop a procession.¹⁰⁷ In July, district councillor and chairman of Balbriggan town council, James Derham was jailed for three months when he refused to give sureties to be of good behaviour when found in possession of firearms.¹⁰⁸ When the Royal Irish Constabulary began to enrol recruits to the Black and Tans, they located their training and despatch centre at the converted Royal Flying Corps airfield at nearby Gormanstown, which opened in August 1920. Balbriggan was in the front line of the war zone and this heavy presence had violent and tragic consequences both for the town and for the local I.R.A. in the War of Independence. On 20 September 1920, following an incident with some drunken Auxiliaries in Smyth's pub in the town, the proprietor called for the assistance of the local I.R.A. In the gun battle that followed head constable Peter Burke and his brother, Michael, a sergeant, who were returning from Dublin, were shot dead. I.R.A. men Michael Rock and William Corcoran were involved and escaped. Later that night Auxiliaries and Black and Tans from Gormanstown returned to burn and loot the town in retaliation, in what became known as the 'Sack of Balbriggan'. Black and Tans took two known local volunteers, Sean Gibbons and Seamus Lawless from their homes and beat them to death that night.¹⁰⁹ There was £200,000 worth of damage caused, thirty houses in Clonard St burned and four public houses, including that owned by John Derham as well as the English owned hosiery factory, Deedes and Templar. Fifty families were left homeless. The national and international newspapers carried the night's events in graphic detail, accompanied by photographs of the refugees now forced to leave their homes, in scenes resembling the devastation wreaked on Belgian towns by the German army in 1914. Widespread condemnation followed with relief funds set up in Balbriggan and Drogheda. The Irish White Cross looked to divert some of its American sourced funds to Balbriggan, and it became the focus of an inquiry by a group of American politicians.¹¹⁰ The following month the I.R.A abducted and killed an ex-Royal Navy sailor known locally as Jack Straw, a suspected informer on the

¹⁰⁷ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 17 Apr. 1920; John Gaynor witness statement, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 1447). Sgt. Finnerty attempted to confiscate a tricolour. I.R.A. captain, Gaynor was arrested but later released.

¹⁰⁸ Statement by Sir Hamar Greenwood, Chief Secretary for Ireland, 26 Jul. 1920 (H.C. Parliamentary papers, Hansard: Fifth Series, vol. cxxxii, pp 983-1022, Geo V). ,

¹⁰⁹ *Irish Times & Irish Independent*, 22 Sept. 1920. See Ross O'Mahony, 'The Sack of Balbriggan, Tit-for-Tat Terror' in David Fitzpatrick (ed.) *Terror in Ireland 1916-1923* (Dublin, 2012) for a full account of the events and their aftermath.

¹¹⁰ *Report of American committee for relief in Ireland* (New York, 1922).

night.¹¹¹ Michael Rock admitted that the events in Balbriggan made some locals reluctant to continue to offer support, and partly prompted the attempted formation of an I.R.A. flying column near Oldtown, further west from the town.¹¹²

The next meetings of Dublin County Council on 2 October and that of Balbriggan Town Council on 5 October made no official reference in the minutes to the events in Balbriggan. Balrothery workhouse was under military occupation at the time and the R.D.C. held no meetings in October 1920.¹¹³ At a later meeting of the county council, Lady Dockrell objected to the use of the term ‘Black and Tan’ to describe the crown forces, and questioned the sequence of events that led to the burnings in Balbriggan, precipitating a row with the chair and Frank Lawless.¹¹⁴ The initial understated response of the councils is perhaps not as surprising as it might seem. At the time the diversion of rates had brought increased military attention on the public bodies, some councillors were in hiding, while others were anxious to avoid attracting any further attention. The motions passed were dependent on who attended.

As the war in Fingal escalated, their fears were well founded. The number of arrests in the area increased as the military responded in force to activities in the greater Dublin area, mostly following searches and for possession of arms or seditious material, which continued into 1921.¹¹⁵ When the I.R.A., under Collins’ orders, assassinated fourteen British secret service agents on the morning of Sunday 21 November 1920, the Black and Tans retaliated by killing or fatally wounding fourteen people, and injuring at least sixty others, attending a G.A.A. football match at Croke Park that afternoon. Dick McKee, from Finglas, vice-commandant of the Dublin Brigade, who was involved in planning the operation, was arrested the night before. He was murdered by Auxiliaries in Dublin Castle, along with Peadar Clancy

¹¹¹ Joseph Lawless, John Gaynor & Michael Rock witness statements, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 1043, 1447, & 1398). According to these witness statements, Daniel Brophy was involved in the court-martial and execution.

¹¹² Michael Rock witness statement, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 1398).

¹¹³ Dublin County Council minute books, 2 Oct. 1920, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/19-20); Balbriggan Town Council minute books, 5 Oct. 1920, (Fingal County Archives, online at https://btc.informa.ie/Browse_Minute_Books_list.asp accessed 23 Feb. 2022; Balrothery R.D.C. minute books, Oct. 1920, (N.A.I., BG40/A147-8).

¹¹⁴ Dublin County Council minute books, 28 Oct., 6 & 13 Nov. 1920, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/19-20); *Irish Independent*, 10 & 22 Sept. & 8 Nov. 1920.

¹¹⁵ *Drogheda Argus*, 4 & 18 Sept., 9 & 30 Oct. 1920 & 3 Feb. 1921; Files relating to peace/truce negotiations, Mar. -May 1921, (N.A.I., Dáil Éireann secretariat files DE/2/132).

and Conor Clune on the night of 21 November. There were several raids in Fingal that night as well as Auxiliaries and Black and Tans took revenge. British forces burned the Star Tavern in Main St., Swords, owned by Mark Taylor, and the house of Thomas Duff, both known republicans. They looted Taylor's drapery shop and destroyed his delivery vehicles. At the time, his three sons were in jail in Mountjoy, Belfast, and Kilkenny. Barns and outhouses at Sinn Féin district councillor William Ganly's farm at Skerries were burned. In the early hours of Monday morning, 22 November, district councillor Patrick Mathews, the outspoken trade unionist, was shot five times in front of his wife at his home in Skerries. He pleaded with his would-be-killers that he was a Labour man. Mathews survived and gave a detailed account of his ordeal to the *Drogheda Independent* a few days later.¹¹⁶ At 2.30 a.m. that morning, Jack 'Rover' McCann was taken from his mother in law's house at Rush by Black and Tans and killed in a nearby field. McCann fought at Ashbourne in 1916 and was on the run. He had only returned to Rush as his wife was heavily pregnant, and his son was born a fortnight later. The official inquiry reported the death due to 'shock and haemorrhage due to gunshot wounds inflicted by a person or persons unknown, with intent to murder'.¹¹⁷ Thomas Hand, a quarry labourer, I.T.G.W.U. official and I.R.A. member on the run, who had a public profile as an arbitration judge in the Sinn Féin court in Skerries, was shot dead by Black and Tans at his mother's home in December.¹¹⁸

All were well-known republican targets or perceived as such by the military authorities and perpetrators. Some like Ganly were known Sinn Féin members from before the War of Independence; others like Mathews had a prominent political profile as a trade unionist. In Fingal, Labour support for Sinn Féin marked him out as a target. 'Bloody Sunday' sparked international outrage and condemnation, harnessed support for the I.R.A., and temporarily curtailed British intelligence operations in Ireland. However, in Fingal, the aftermath of the Bloody Sunday killings led to immediate reprisals, continued military raids and wholesale arrests and a cycle of retaliatory violence as the year ended. This depleted the I.R.A. capacity to

¹¹⁶ *Drogheda Advertiser & Drogheda Independent*, 27 Nov. 1920.

¹¹⁷ *Freemans Journal*, 23 Nov. 1920, *Drogheda Advertiser & Drogheda Independent*, 27 Nov. 1920; Peter Francis Whearity, 'John Jack "Rover" McCann (1886-1920), Irish Volunteer', in *Fingal studies: local history journal of Fingal County Library* (Fingal, 2010), pp. 50-70.

¹¹⁸ *Drogheda Argus*, 11 Dec. 1920.

engage as men were killed, arrested or went on the run. The crown forces targeted individuals with any connection to the independence movement and this removed the local Sinn Féin representatives from council attendance, as they were arrested or absent for their own safety. For example, in December 1920, chairman Mary Adrien, clerk James Stack and two newspaper reporters were preparing for a guardians' meeting scheduled for later that day when armed military, 'wearing trench helmets', raided the Balrothery workhouse boardroom and subjected the group to interrogation and searches at gunpoint. They were looking for councillors and I.R.A. members Peter Kelly, James Woods and Daniel Brophy. They were all arrested later that day.¹¹⁹

The Fingal brigade was heavily criticised by General Richard Mulcahy for a lack of activity during the War of Independence. The proximity to Gormanstown as well as to the capital and the increased military activity after September 1920 played a part, but so too did the topography with little mountain or hill cover to support flying columns. Intelligence returns for the area include unsatisfactory reports on the organisation in Fingal and dissension and rivalry among the officers.¹²⁰ Daniel Brophy disagreed with Lynch over the conduct of the war and pushed for a more aggressive level of activity.¹²¹ However, he confided in Joe Lawless that Collins had asked for no provocation to the British in the area to avoid any potential declaration as a military zone, as it was important as a rest area for city units and for access and escape north from the city.¹²² Attention was on the city activity and as a rural command Fingal was transferred to the Eastern Division, where there was some resentment and rivalry with the Meath and Louth I.R.A. units.¹²³ The more active I.R.A. members gravitated to the city battalions, as Daniel Brophy did on his release in December 1921 when he joined the Dublin Brigade active service unit.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 18 Dec. 1920.

¹²⁰ Eastern Division intelligence reports & Fingal intelligence reports, (Military Archives, Michael Collins papers, IE/MA/CP/05/02/29/XL).

¹²¹ Joseph Lawless, John Gaynor & Michael Rock witness statements, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 1043, 1447, & 1398).

¹²² Joseph Lawless witness statement, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 1043).

¹²³ Eastern Division intelligence reports & Fingal intelligence reports, (Military Archives, Michael Collins papers, IE/MA/CP/05/02/29/XL).

¹²⁴ Michael Hopkinson, *The Irish war of independence* (Dublin, 2002 p. 146; Thomas Peppard & Joseph Lawless witness statements (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 1399 & 1043).

The main significance of the military campaign in Fingal was the effect it had on the administration of local government and normal political discourse. The overlapping of political and military roles for the likes of Frank Lawless, M.J. Derham, Peter Kelly and Daniel Brophy meant it was inevitable they would be absent for considerable periods. The numbers of British troops, Auxiliaries and Black and Tans stationed in or near Fingal, and the events of late 1920 made operations difficult for the I.R.A. and public appearances often impossible for local Sinn Féin representatives. Meetings were by necessity infrequent. Nevertheless late 1920 came to resemble the period of the Great War in the council chambers with motions of condemnation and memorials for fallen comrades, but for a different conflict. Dublin County Council voted to send representatives to the funeral of Terence McSwiney in Cork, but when a vote of condolence arose on the execution of Kevin Barry, there was Unionist dissension. McSwiney died after a highly publicised hunger strike that lasted for seventy-four days. Barry was hanged for the capital offence of killing three soldiers. At Balrothery R.D.C., P.J. Kettle, no friend of Sinn Féin, resigned his Swords magistracy in protest at the manner of McSwiney's death.¹²⁵ There was a distinction for some as to who were martyrs or murderers.

Despite the disruptions and impediments faced by the councils, the business of local government still had to be carried on. The combined Balrothery rural council and guardians that met in January 1921 to discuss a rate for the year to March 1922 faced a multitude of difficulties. Many of their members were in prison or internment camps, the account books were confiscated, the workhouse vandalised by the military, and the transfer of inmates to Drogheda had yielded little savings. The district's roads were in poor condition due to overuse by British military vehicles and the I.R.A. blowing them up to hamper the military. The contractor in charge of repairing the workhouse was himself in jail, and there were widespread arrears in both rates and rents, in addition to the lack of grants from central government. Subventions from Dublin County Council were delayed due to an impasse over the legal and practical status of the treasurer and incarcerated paymaster, and there was a serious concern that wages might not be paid. The D.E.L.G. was seeking cutbacks in expenditure for the coming year in order to remain financially solvent. Michael

¹²⁵ Dublin County Council minute books, 28 Oct., 6 & 13 Nov. 1920, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/19-20); *Irish Independent*, 10 & 22 Sept. & 8 Nov. 1920.

Dunne criticised the board and called for a restoration of cooperation with the L.G.B. to draw down central funding for roadbuilding, in order to avoid laying off council workmen. Defaulting council tenants had their weekly rents increased by the amount of any rates arrears.¹²⁶ The problem of rent and rates arrears was not helped by the fact that some of the rent collectors were also the relieving officers, responsible for the authorisation relief payments, in the same districts. After the truce, the Dáil utilised the full powers of the republican courts to enforce arrears payments.¹²⁷ In March 1921, the L.G.B. indicated that it would authorise temporary loans on restoration of normal financial procedures, but warned against levying any flat rate on agricultural land to replace the agricultural grant, for fear of legal challenges by ratepayers.¹²⁸ Balrothery guardians received a rebuke from the D.E.L.G. over communicating with the L.G.B. in relation to making a return regarding dispensary expenses, for which Mary Adrien as chairperson took full responsibility, as it was a way of returning money to those in most need, the poor of the union. The *Drogheda Argus* described it as a ‘rap on the knuckles’ for the council.¹²⁹ The D.E.L.G. was proving to be as strict an overseer as the L.G.B.

The general election in May 1921 under the terms of the Government of Ireland Act was uncontested in southern Ireland with all but four of the 128 seats won by Sinn Féin, who used the election as the contest for the second Dáil. In the new six-seat Dublin County constituency, the Fingal area returned sitting T.D. Frank Lawless and James Derham, both for Sinn Féin.¹³⁰ Fingal had two capable local representatives, I.R.A veterans and experienced local politicians, strong voices for Fingal.

The Dublin I.R.A. sustained heavy losses in casualties and men arrested during an attack on the Custom House on 25 May 1921, the centre of British local administration in Ireland, as it housed the records of the L.G.B. and Custom and Excise. The burning of the building saw the loss of over four hundred years of local government archives. One can only imagine the insights for this study that might have been found in supplementary correspondence in the records of the Local

¹²⁶ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 15 & 29 Jan., 19 Feb. & 23 Apr. 1921

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 27 July 1921.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 19 Mar. 1921.

¹²⁹ *Drogheda Argus*, 30 Apr. 1921.

¹³⁰ Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918-92* (Dublin, 1982), p. 101. The University of Dublin returned four independent Unionists.

Government Board, with whom the local bodies in Fingal and Dublin had engaged.¹³¹

The military aspect of the War of Independence in Fingal was at its most active in the latter part of 1920, due to the activities of the British military in the incidents outlined at Balbriggan, Swords and Skerries, but the presence of large garrisons, internal I.R.A. divisions and the topography mitigated against extensive republican military activity in return. These factors also limited the progress of any political activity other than the national struggle, with the maintenance of local government administration carried on by a few councillors like Molly Adrien and officials like James Stack at Balrothery. The overlap of I.R.A. and political roles meant that key personalities such as Frank Lawless, M.J. Derham or Peter Kelly were pulled between both. Beyond the everyday financial issues, Balrothery and Dublin County Council politics reflected what was happening on the military front, and sometimes, as in the cases of Molly Adrien, William Ganly and Patrick Mathews the councillors found themselves directly in the firing line.

Truce, treaty and Civil War

While the Anglo-Irish truce of 11 July 1921 saw hostilities cease, the funding problems facing the councils remained, in particular the claims for malicious injuries, for which the law held public bodies and ratepayers liable. In October, the Minister for Local Government wrote to local bodies emphasising the importance of resisting these claims, and the devastating effect they had to date on the provision of services. He was particularly scathing of those in the legal profession who might seek to benefit from pursuing such cases in the courts and through garnishee orders. Dublin County Council authorised their solicitor, a couple of weeks later, to initiate proceedings against rate defaulters. More cutbacks to services and salary adjustments followed before the year's end.¹³²

After initial contacts, the negotiations in London between Irish and British representatives started in earnest in October, and culminated in the Anglo-Irish

¹³¹ *Drogheda Argus*, 28 May 1921. One of those killed in the attack was a nephew of Frank Lawless, Mahon J. Lawless, who was a clerk working with the L.G.B.

¹³² Dublin County Council minute books, 1 & 13 Oct., 12 Nov. 1921, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/20); Garnishee judgements allow debts to be legally collected from a third party with whom one has credit.

Treaty signed on 6 December 1921, which then needed ratification by the Dáil to come into effect. Just before Christmas, the prisoners from Ballykinlar, including Frank Lawless, returned home.¹³³ Only eight out of the eighteen councillors attended a special meeting of Balrothery R.D.C. on 2 January 1922 to discuss the treaty. They passed a motion in support of the treaty and recommended that the members of the Dáil endorse it. Those in favour like Patrick Mathews, William Ganly and Mary Adrien said that there was overwhelming support for acceptance in their local areas. Ganly urged acceptance as it meant ‘self-government and a republic in all but name’.¹³⁴ The debate was heated at times as Daniel Brophy insisted it was not the job of the council to tell the Dáil its business. He added that neither did the treaty deliver the full independence for which he had fought. Ganly remarked that he was fighting for Ireland’s cause before Brophy was born, unaware or perhaps envious of the younger man’s seniority in the Fingal I.R.A. Brophy voted against but the motion was carried by seven votes to one. Brophy subsequently joined the National Army and fought in support of the treaty. Michael Dunne was unable to attend as he was already committed to a farmers’ meeting but wrote to say he was in favour of the treaty. The meeting that Dunne was attending was at the County Dublin Farmers Association, chaired by Patrick Belton, called to voice their support for the treaty.¹³⁵ A special meeting of Dublin County Council on 2 January 1922 called to discuss the treaty did not even debate the matter. An initial motion not to discuss was defeated 9-8 with two abstentions. The chairman H.J. Friel said that no useful purpose could be served by prolonging the meeting after such a division and terminated the meeting forthwith.¹³⁶ The treaty was passed in the Dáil on 7 January 1922 on a vote of 64 to 57. Those who opposed ratification, led by de Valera, walked out of the chamber, setting in motion a series of events that ultimately led to the civil war. Frank Lawless and James Derham voted for the treaty and undoubtedly influenced many of their followers. There is surprisingly little in the minutes of the district and county council meetings relating to discussion of the treaty, other than those initial meetings and little local newspaper coverage. It is possible that the pace of events mitigated against meetings over the Christmas and New Year period, and that there was

¹³³ *Drogheda Argus*, 17 Dec. 1921.

¹³⁴ *Drogheda Independent*, 7 Jan. 1922.

¹³⁵ *Drogheda Argus*, 2 Jan. & *Drogheda Independent*, 7 Jan. 1922.

¹³⁶ *Irish Times*, 9 Jan. 1922.

comprehensive national coverage of the Dáil debates, but more likely that the fatigue of over five years of struggle and privation had taken its toll, and the majority wanted peace and a return to some degree of normality.

The early part of 1922 continued as had the previous couple of years of the struggle, but without the military campaign. Another farm labourers strike in Fingal in the spring of 1922 did little to alleviate the unemployment problem or local frustrations. The same arguments continued among councillors in Balrothery as meetings became little more than personalised debates among declining attendances. For example, a row broke out when Balrothery guardians refused Mrs Rooney of Lusk the use of the workhouse for a fundraising dance, as she had labourers on strike. Ganly and Curran argued for weeks about the cause of labour and who represented the workers.¹³⁷

Balrothery meetings descended into endless arguments of principle over the allocation of labourers' cottages to the costs of relief and the ratepayers' burden amid a minor exodus of councillors. Chairman Peter Kelly never returned after his release from internment, Lily Fogarty resigned, and Daniel Brophy just stopped attending.¹³⁸ All three were elected in the surge of support for Sinn Féin in 1920 but had declined to remain now that the conflict had ceased. None gave the impression of being comfortable with the nature of local politics in Fingal and other than Brophy, made few contributions to debates. With the treaty accepted, and the impending departure of not just the British military but British judiciary, there were increased reports of Sinn Féin parish courts sitting across the towns of the north county replacing usual petty sessions work.¹³⁹ In April 1922, Michael Rock, who had been officer commanding the Fingal Brigade in the War of Independence was appointed one of six new rate collectors for County Dublin, responsible for an area in south part of Fingal. I.R.A men had proven to be 'persuasive' rate collectors during the War of Independence and now the council was in a position to reward some of them with jobs after the conflict. A month later the council complained that delays in sanctioning the appointments was causing problems with rate collections.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ *Drogheda Independent*, 18 & 25 Mar. & 15 Apr. 1922.

¹³⁸ *Drogheda Argus*, 11 Mar., 17 & 24 June 1922.

¹³⁹ *Drogheda Independent*, 18 & 25 Feb. & 4 Mar. 1922.

¹⁴⁰ Dublin County Council minute books, 21 Apr. & 19 May 1922, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/20).

W. T. Cosgrave had now secured loyalty and confidence in his policy on local government but was forced to defend his appointment of E.P. McCarron of the L.G.B. as his private secretary and liaison officer between the Department of Local Government and the Local Government Board. In a Dáil debate in March 1922, specific reference was made to McCarron's activities in 1916 on behalf of the British and his subsequent treatment of Dr Hayes at Balrothery.¹⁴¹ Cosgrave defended McCarron's experience and the organisational qualities he would bring to the department, even if he was still on the payroll of the L.G.B. Cosgrave wanted the most experienced and capable administrators in the department if he was to overhaul the legacy of the poor law system of dependency and degradation now inherited from the British.

In April, Frank Lawless died following an accident in Swords. The esteem in which he was held was measured by the huge attendance at his funeral at the Pro-Cathedral in Dublin. Despite their ongoing differences Griffith, Collins, Mulcahy and Cosgrave stood with de Valera, Brugha and Harry Boland to pay their respects.¹⁴² His public record was well known but the files kept on him at Dublin Castle confirm his proximity to the key events of the revolutionary period, his spells in prison and deprivations and his closeness to Griffith, Clarke, MacDiarmada, Pearse, Ashe, and then Collins in turn.¹⁴³ Frank Lawless was the most influential and prominent political leader of the republican and revolutionary movement in Fingal. His involvement in the formative years of a range of political and cultural organisations, and his constant dedication to the pursuit of his political objectives saw him and his family take up arms and suffer incarceration and intimidation, at considerable cost to his family life, business and farm. Son of a poor law guardian and comfortable farmer, he was co-opted to Balrothery guardians in his early thirties and experienced first-hand the closed farming elite circle that dominated Fingal politics. His journey from Parnellism through Griffith's early Sinn Féin movement to advanced nationalist

¹⁴¹ *Drogheda Argus*, 4 Mar. 1922; Dáil debates, vol. S2, no.2, 1 Mar. 1922. McCarron offered his services to the military in Drogheda during Easter week.

¹⁴² *Drogheda Independent*, 22 Apr. 1922.

¹⁴³ Dublin Castle file on Sinn Féin activists, Frank Lawless, (T.N.A., War Office, Army of Ireland: Administrative and Easter Rising Records, WO35/207/114); Civilians convicted by field general court martial; List of Irish prisoners in England; Treatment in English prisons, (T.N.A., Home Office, HO144/1453); Ernie O'Malley, *On another man's wound* (Third ed., Dublin, 1990), p. 234. O'Malley observed him taking a beating from an auxiliary in Dublin Castle for refusing to answer questions, Dec. 1920.

revolutionary mirrors that of the evolution of the separatist and independence movement itself. He utilised the vehicles of cultural nationalism to spread the message of republicanism and recruit others to the cause. His loss to Fingal politics was significant, his contacts, reputation and experience not easily replaced.

The general election in June 1922 was called the ‘pact election’ as Collins and de Valera agreed not to contest seats with a sitting member of Sinn Féin to avoid exacerbating tensions over the treaty split any further, but also to minimise losses against other parties. However, the pact did not apply to other parties or independents and the arrangement broke down in several constituencies for fear of further seat losses. This was the first election in the independent Irish Free State, held under proportional representation. The result was academic as the anti-treatyites refused to take their seats or recognise the Dáil so the pro-treaty part of Sinn Féin took power. Six-seat Dublin County was one of the contested constituencies and returned M.J. Derham as one of three pro-treaty candidates, John Rooney of Lusk for the Farmers party, Thomas Johnson, leader of the Labour party, and the independent poll topper Darrell Figgis, who ran on a pro-treaty platform. Margaret Pearse, mother of Padraig Pearse was defeated for anti-treaty Sinn Féin, despite polling in fourth place on the first count. Over ninety per cent of the votes were for parties who supported the treaty, with two of those based in Fingal, underlining the pro-treaty support in the area.¹⁴⁴

The looming civil war became a reality on 28 June 1922, when the National Army, with eighteen pounder guns supplied by the British army, shelled the anti-treaty garrison that had occupied the Four Courts in Dublin. The anti-treaty forces were hampered by a lack of cooperation between the occupiers under Rory O’Connor and the Dublin Brigade under Oscar Traynor, who had no wish to re-enact the defensive military spectacle of the 1916 rising. After the destruction of the Four Courts and half of O’Connell Street following a week of street fighting, the republican forces escaped south slowly retreating back towards their Munster support base.¹⁴⁵ The conflict continued, amid atrocities, reprisals and executions for another ten months.

¹⁴⁴ Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918-92* (Dublin, 1982), p. 105.

¹⁴⁵ Michael Hopkinson, ‘Civil war and aftermath, 1921-24’, in J. R. Hill (ed.) *A new history of Ireland vii, 1921-84* (Oxford, 2010), pp 32-36.

There was some brief activity in Fingal in early August when attempts to mine the railway bridges at Malahide and Portmarnock and cut off the city were unsuccessful. Only one bridge, at Baldoyle, suffered damage. On the night of 5 August, Free State troops captured 104 republican fighters in the act of attempting the blow up the bridges over the Royal canal and the Belfast railway line. This crippled the remnants of the anti-treaty I.R.A. in Dublin, and effectively ended the civil war in the area.¹⁴⁶ The local newspaper coverage in north Dublin thereafter resembled that of a distant conflict, just as they had reported the colonial wars of the nineteenth century or the Great War. Only occasionally did the war make contact with everyday life in Fingal, when a local personality was involved or an event captured the public imagination. For instance, Harry Boland was killed in Skerries resisting arrest in August 1922.¹⁴⁷ Unionist John Bagwell, general manager of the Great Northern Railway, was kidnapped near his home in Howth in February 1923, a few weeks after his ancestral home, Marlfield, was burned in Co. Tipperary. The government threatened reprisals if not released, but he escaped unharmed after a couple of days and served as a senator under both Cosgrave and de Valera administrations.¹⁴⁸ Liam Lynch, military commander of the anti-treaty forces, was on the run and in hiding in Ballymun at the same time as the kidnapping took place.¹⁴⁹ Explosions destroyed Balbriggan coastguard station and Skerries police barracks in February 1923, but with no loss of life.¹⁵⁰ This was the extent of the civil war in Fingal. The immediate movement south by anti-treaty forces dictated the conduct of the war, and apart from the initial activity in early August, the conflict completely bypassed Fingal. The local political leadership supported the treaty and a war weary public who yearned to return to some normality after eight years of wartime restrictions and deprivations, were content to do likewise.

While Fingal itself saw little of the civil war, there were men from the Fingal area who played key roles on the Free State side in the civil war. Disillusioned with

¹⁴⁶ John Dorney, *The civil war in Dublin: The fight for the Irish capital, 1922-24* (Newbridge, 2017), pp 116-9.

¹⁴⁷ *Drogheda Independent*, 5 Aug. 1922.

¹⁴⁸ Pauric J. Dempsey, 'Bagwell, John Philip (Jack)', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2009); Anthony White, *Irish parliamentarians: deputies and senators, 1918-2018* (Dublin, 2018), p.12.

¹⁴⁹ Michael Hopkinson, 'Civil war and aftermath, 1921-24', in J. R. Hill (ed.) *A new history of Ireland vii, 1921-84* (Oxford, 2010) p.51.

¹⁵⁰ *Drogheda Argus*, 3 Feb. & *Drogheda Advertiser*, 17 Feb. 1923.

politics, Daniel Brophy joined the National Army as a private with the Dublin Guards, eventually promoted to colonel with the Kerry command, and involved in some of the intense fighting there.¹⁵¹ Joseph Lawless attained the rank of colonel in the transport section and became a career soldier. Captains Thomas Peppard and Bernard McAllister were returned with the fifth Battalion, Eastern Division in the National Army census on 12 Nov 1922. Joseph Kelly, the union ward master at Balrothery absented himself from his post yet again, having fought in 1916 and in the War of Independence, and joined the Dublin Guards.¹⁵² Mathias Derham and John Gaynor supported the anti-treaty side.¹⁵³ The death of Liam Lynch from gunshot wounds near Clonmel in April 1923 effectively spelt the end of the civil war, as within a month, a ceasefire brokered with de Valera by Andrew Jameson and James Douglas led to a cessation of hostilities.

With a war to finance, the government was uncompromising in its financial dealings with Balrothery council. Miss Adrien was critical of the civil servants who did little but ‘sling printer’s ink’, with no understanding of the poverty on the ground.¹⁵⁴ William Ganly saw the distribution of local resources as their only remaining function. A regular response from the department was to send out an inspector to examine the situation, who inevitably reported that it was not as bad as to warrant any intervention from them.¹⁵⁵ This was a reality of the implementation of the policy envisioned by Cosgrave and O’Higgins to eliminate the culture of dependency created by the poor laws. As the war continued, councillors resented the diversion of funds from unemployed and distressed families in their area to spending ‘on bullets and mines’, as Mary Adrien put it.¹⁵⁶ The divide between the department and Balrothery R.D.C., festering for some time, came to a head in May 1923, when its financial affairs were subject to a sworn inquiry by a local government inspector. The ratepayers and the farmers had legal representation and proceeded to scrutinise details of expenditure decisions, almost line by line. Mathews defended the council, ‘a Labour board, who had been indicted as fools and amadáns’ but who would vindicate themselves. What they spent was to alleviate distress and poverty, as

¹⁵¹ *An t-Oglach*, 7 Apr. 1923.

¹⁵² *Drogheda Argus*, 2 Sept. 1922.

¹⁵³ *Drogheda Independent*, 4 Feb. 1922.

¹⁵⁴ *Drogheda Argus*, 17 Feb. & 24 Mar. 1923.

¹⁵⁵ *Drogheda Independent*, 1 July 1922.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 18 Nov. 1922.

promised by Sinn Féin and Labour when they took over from the old L.G.B. The inspector adjourned any decision pending a full audit. When reconvened, Christopher Browne lamented that they had ‘fought for three years for our freedom and had fought for nothing’, as nothing had changed. James Woods had to admit that even as a guardian he had to apply for relief for his destitute family, while his health was broken after his long internment at Ballykinlar.¹⁵⁷

For some, there was only one solution to addressing such rural poverty, the redistribution of land. In early 1923, in anticipation of the promised Land Act (1923), ‘back to the land’ meetings began to take place, supported by the I.T.G.W.U.¹⁵⁸ In Fingal this was predominantly in the northwest corner of the county, in the grazing heartlands of Naul and Garristown, and appears to be an extension of the more active land agitation movement in County Meath. The act was passed in August. It effectively abolished any remaining dual ownership and gave wide powers for the compulsory acquisition of untenanted land anywhere in the state deemed necessary for relief of congestion. Land was vested in the Land Commission and then in the applicants who became tenants of the Land Commission until their annuity was paid. There was a long queue of claimants, a ‘hierarchy of allottees’. This included smallholders in congested districts, migrants willing to move from congested areas, ex-employees of the estates to be divided, evicted tenants, and the landless.¹⁵⁹ With never enough land to satisfy everyone these groups were inevitably pitted against each other. Designed to complete land purchase and relieve congestion, the timing of the act also weakened anti-treaty I.R.A. induced agrarian agitation and land grabbing. Hogan and Kevin O’Higgins, the architects of the act, saw a future Irish economy dependent on cattle exports to Britain and saw to it that land remained in the class that would deliver this, by selective redistribution. They were the graziers and large farmers that were the previous winners in the Land War, the supporters of Parnell and now the constituency for the party of government and stability, Cumann na nGaedheal. Secret negotiations with the British government secured loan funding for the enterprise, but as Dooley points out the process of redistribution of estates was

¹⁵⁷ *Drogheda Independent*, 5 May & 23 June 1923; *Irish Times*, 2 May 1923. Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 20 Jan. 1923

¹⁵⁹ Terence Dooley, *The land for the people: the land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), pp 57-98 comprehensively covers the land act and its claimants.

slow due to a lack of qualified personnel and funding impediments.¹⁶⁰ In Fingal, the issue was one of labourers' wages in the tillage focussed south and east while graziers would defend their position in the north and west of the county. There was to be no widespread social change, little or no land for the landless and as little as possible for republicans. In the next chapters, we will examine how this played out in the later 1920s and 1930s.

Dublin County Council passed a series of respectful motions of condolence with regularity over the summer of 1922 on the deaths of Cathal Brugha, Harry Boland, Griffith and Collins. Business proceedings carried on, even though the political world about them was in a state of turmoil and the city a battlefield.¹⁶¹ At the end of September Henry O'Friel tendered his resignation on his appointment as secretary to the now Minister for Home Affairs, Kevin O'Higgins. William Ganly's attempt at co-option to the vacant seat failed. James McNeill presided at meetings thereafter, and was elected chairman in November, but resigned in January 1923.¹⁶² McNeill had spent twenty-five years in the Indian civil service, rising to the position of commissioner of the Bombay presidency. Part of the team that drafted the Free State constitution in 1922, he was leaving Dublin to take up a position as the first high commissioner of the Irish Free State in London, and became governor general in 1928.¹⁶³ The departure of two senior, highly capable and successful officials and administrators was a loss to local government and an asset to the central power. It indicates perhaps that the local government elections were merely a means to an end for the leaders of the Irish revolution. Since 1898, local government was a tangible manifestation of local democracy and an important vehicle for the exercise of local political power. Local representatives had put themselves forward to represent local interests and issues and provide local solutions and remedies. Now local councillors had been elected on a party political platform, on national issues. It exposed an attitude to local government and its importance in the apparatus of government that might undermine the gains and consolidation of the previous quarter century. The

¹⁶⁰ Terence Dooley & Tony McCarthy, 'The 1923 land act: some new perspectives', in Mel Farrell, Jason Knirck & Ciara Meehan (eds.), *A formative decade: Ireland in the 1920s* (Sallins, 2015) pp133-156.

¹⁶¹ Dublin County Council minute books, 31 Aug. 1922, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/20).

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 28 Sept, 26 Oct & 30 Nov 1922, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/1/20-1).

¹⁶³ Michael Kennedy, 'McNeill, James', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

Free State government evolved through the Civil War from the top down and the core group of politicians and civil servants that worked closely together, under considerable pressure and personal risk from within Leinster House and its environs. They were Ireland's new elite. Those on the outside, for the moment had to wait where they were, almost reminiscent of de Valera's alleged quote in December 1917 that 'Labour must wait'.¹⁶⁴

In the 1923 general election in August, the still abstentionist residual Sinn Féin party under de Valera won forty-four seats to the sixty-three for the government party Cumann na nGaedheal under William T. Cosgrave. Many of the republican candidates were still interned after the war and unable to canvass. James Derham held his seat and was the only successful Fingal candidate in the now eight-seat County Dublin constituency, as Rooney lost his seat. Only one republican candidate Dr Kathleen Lynn, was elected, again reflecting the overwhelming support for the treaty in the county.¹⁶⁵ The hunger strike engaged in by republican prisoners in October and November collapsed and weakened the movement so that by Christmas any semblance of resistance had dissipated. The *Drogheda Independent* reported the end of the hunger strikes on the same day as James Derham's funeral in Balbriggan. He had died in an accident at home when he fell down the stairs.¹⁶⁶ Fingal had now lost its two T.D.s in the space of eighteen months, two men central to the two phases of the struggle for independence, leaders with the connections to both the military and political networks and support that Fingal would come to miss.

Conclusion

Local politics in Fingal during the period of the War of Independence was characterised primarily by the crucial role played by local bodies in the usurpation of the British administrative structures of local government. Up to the local elections in 1920, the remnants of old and new nationalism in Fingal engaged in a tired verbal sparring match in the council chamber, replaced by the new Sinn Féin controlled councils with single-minded members who declared allegiance to Dáil Éireann and its military and political strategy to achieve independence. In breaking with the

¹⁶⁴ D.R. O'Connor Lysaght, ' "Labour must wait": the making of a myth', in *Saothar*, vol. 26 (2001), pp 61-65.

¹⁶⁵ Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918-92* (Dublin, 1982), p. 111.

¹⁶⁶ *Drogheda Independent*, 24 Nov. 1923.

L.G.B., the local authorities lost grant funding, risked litigation over the diversion of rates, and put themselves in danger of arrest or injury by withholding documents and records from the Crown forces during raids and searches. Both councillors and employees played their part in this front line of the struggle.

Sinn Féin exploited the 1920 local elections for national political objectives, by introducing candidates of national reputation or with distinct or specialised ability, but usually little previous experience of local politics, who occasionally moved on to positions in the national government. Henry O’Friel and James McNeill’s brief tenures as officers in Dublin County Council are two examples. The members of Dublin County Council and Balrothery and North Dublin R.D.C.s took on considerable personal risk in declaring allegiance to the Dáil, and played a crucial role in legitimising the claims for independence, usurping the authority of the L.G.B., diverting the rates and subjecting themselves to military harassment. These sacrifices were all the more commendable, when viewed against the disdainful attitude of Cosgrave and O’Higgins towards local politicians and local government. Fingal lost greatly in this this scenario. Those who held influence under the previous regime, the O’Neills, Kettles and Dunnes were departed, soon followed by those who replaced them, Frank Lawless and James Derham.

Militarily the War of Independence in Fingal was less intensive than in other parts of the country due to geographic and strategic considerations, a strong British military garrison, and the harassment and imprisonment of local republican leaders. The Civil War effectively bypassed Fingal as the conflict moved quickly south from the capital. Local government however was an important battlefield in Fingal and County Dublin. Over the five years of conflict, everyday conditions deteriorated for the population at large and became more difficult for the councils. It left a challenging economic and social legacy for the new independent state.

David Fitzpatrick described the transformation of local government in the entire revolutionary period as changing allegiance within the existing structures. This, he said, ‘might not bring the revolution so many desired, but merely a change in who was their master, *an existing apparatus needing no dislocation only adaption*’.¹⁶⁷ Yet

¹⁶⁷ David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish life, 1913-21: provincial experience of war and revolution* (Dublin, 1977) p. 154.

it was this existing apparatus, the experience of it, and the competence of its administrators that allowed the successful transition of local government allegiance from the L.G.B. to the Dáil department of local government. In Fingal, the experience and resolve of Frank and James Lawless, Patrick Mathews, James Derham, William Ganly and Mary Adrien were central to this 'adaptation'. The change in who was master had begun in 1920, and would play out over the next thirty years in local government in Fingal.

Chapter 7

Building a Free State: challenges for local government in Fingal, 1924-32

This chapter will examine the evolution of local politics in Fingal through the institutions of local government established under the Cosgrave administration from the end of the civil war to the change of government at the 1932 election. For the Cumann na nGaedheal government, securing and building the new Free State necessitated comprehensive local government structural reforms and greater central governance. There was a widely held perception that political corruption was prevalent at local level.¹ The government saw a system of excessive spending and an unwieldy network of inefficient structures supporting a dependency culture. Cosgrave revealed his personal view of the poor laws in a private letter to Austin Stack in May 1921 when he wrote: ‘as you are aware, people reared in workhouses are no great acquisition to human society. As a rule, their highest aim is to live at the expense of the ratepayers’.² The new political elite were also suspicious of the communitarian ties and vested interests of potentially troublesome adversaries among the councillors on such local bodies. Any major policy of reform would threaten local political power and influence in Fingal and the tensions generated between the government department and these local bodies will be examined. The conduct of council politics reflected the economic and social challenges of the decade and the disappointments that independence did not deliver all that was expected. As Dublin County Council became the main forum for discourse, the influence of the rural district councils receded with the impact of political change and reforms. The lack of locally based Dáil representation became an important dimension of the frustration of Fingal politics, and elevated the importance of the council as a forum. Agrarian unrest re-emerged and unemployment and poverty issues began to dominate both within and outside the local government chambers,

¹ Elaine A. Byrne, *Political corruption in Ireland 1922-2010: a crooked harp?* (Manchester, 2012) pp 21-35. In a chapter entitled ‘Why so little corruption? 1900s–1920s’, Byrne traces this perception to Griffith and Sinn Féin’s sustained depiction from 1906 of a corrupt Irish Party because they accepted Dublin Castle patronage through appointments to the civil service, the magistracy and local government and outlines the infrastructural shortcomings in local government for such perceptions.

² Letter from W.T. Cosgrave to Austin Stack, 3 May 1921, (N.A.I., Dáil Éireann secretariat files DE/2/84).

ultimately providing the alternative electoral platform that saw a change of government. These issues brought assertive political personalities to prominence, who led the various factions in Fingal and on the county council for the next couple of decades.

Centre-periphery tensions: local government on the defensive, 1924

From 1920, when they first declared allegiance to the Dáil, the county and district councils learned that their new masters were just as exacting as their previous ones. That was during a period of war and revolution; the bureaucracy was likely to increase now with no military distractions. The first year after the end of the civil war was characterised by central and local government competing with each other on a number of levels, as the government laid down a clear indicator as to its expectations. Minutes from the Dublin County Council meetings in January 1924 indicate the nature of the changing relationship with central government.³ The council came under immediate pressure from the Ministry of Local Government, whose secretary, Edward P. McCarron, wrote to them in December 1923 calling for swifter collection of the rates, reductions in staff bonuses, a review of superannuation payments and general economies across all council expenditure. One-fifth of the rates for the year 1922-23 was in arrears with £39,486 out of £182,920 still outstanding. Moreover, there were now organised campaigns in Naul and Garristown, on the Meath border, resisting payment in the event of any further increase for the coming year. Long-time agrarian activist Andrew Mooney of Garristown, leader of the Naul Ratepayers Association, had organised a ‘no rate’ campaign in that area against the County Dublin rates. He claimed that they were ‘not opposing the government, had always paid their rents, rates and taxes, but were now unable to pay any more’.⁴ They would not pay more than five shilling in the pound on land or eight shillings in the pound on buildings, the same as the farmers in County Meath were paying.

The minister, Seamus Burke, assured the chairman of Dublin County Council, P.J. Connolly, that they would support prosecutions but there is no evidence that it came

³ Dublin County Council minute books, 10, 17 & 21 Jan. 1924, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/21).

⁴ *Drogheda Independent*, 17 & 24 Nov., 8 & 15 Dec. 1923, 19 & 26 Jan. 1924, *Irish Times* 23 Jan. 1924

to this. In April, Edward McCarron called for immediate implementation of the Local Government (Collection of Rates) Act, 1924, outlining what the council record noted as ‘drastic’ new powers regarding the collections of arrears.⁵

There was further tension when McCarron personally got involved in questioning the appointment of Kevin Lawless, son of the serving secretary James Lawless, as a junior clerk with the council. This appears to have been a continuation of the antagonism to James Lawless since the Easter Rising, as well as asserting central authority regarding recruitment.⁶ McCarron revisited the issue again the following year when the department refused to sanction a salary increase for Kevin Lawless.⁷ That such a minor appointment attracted such attention from the most senior official in the department indicates that McCarron must have developed a deep dislike of James Lawless.

McCarron was no less popular in the Balrothery R.D.C. boardroom, where they had not forgotten his allegiances in 1916 and his pursuit of Frank Lawless for surcharges.⁸ Already unhappy at the dissolution of the Dublin poor law guardians, Labour’s P.J. Curran was more upset at the increased costs to Balrothery since the Dublin Union commissioners had taken over the running of the Richmond asylum.⁹ He described a report from the commissioners as having ‘nothing in it but Séamuses, Seáns and Pádraigs’ and the impression that ‘the minister for local government was E. P. McCarron, the auditor who was kicked out of Balrothery’, claiming the recent appointment of the commissioners by the new minister James Burke (Séamus de Burca), as jobbery and ‘a family affair’. Fellow councillor Adrien was in full agreement.¹⁰ The frustration of councillors at the diminution of their influence grew,

⁵ Dublin County Council minute books, 10 Apr. 1924, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/22).

⁶ Dublin County Council minute books, 31 Jan. 1924, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/21); Census of Ireland, 1911, <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai000009210/>. The government department with responsibility for local government was renamed the Department of Local Government and Public Health under the terms of Ministers and Secretaries Act, 1924. *Tipperary Nationalist*, 6 June 1923. Following the premature death of Herbert Clancy in Apr. 1923, the council unanimously appointed James V. Lawless to the senior position and later in 1924 combined the secretary and accountant’s offices. The council decided not to rescind the appointment of Kevin Lawless having ascertained it followed correct procedure.

⁷ Dublin County Council minute books, 15 Jan. 1925, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/22).

⁸ See chapters 5 & 6 for details of the surcharges relating to Frank Lawless and Dr Hayes’ salary.

⁹ *Irish Times*, 22 Nov. 1923. Following an inquiry, the government suspended the Dublin Union board of guardians and replaced them with three commissioners.

¹⁰ *Drogheda Independent*, 16 Feb. 1924. He was referring to the appointment of Mrs. Power as a union inspector, who he claimed was an aunt of the Minister for Defence, Richard Mulcahy, while the Christian names refer to the commissioners and officials in the department. Pauric J. Dempsey, ‘Burke

matched by a corresponding distrust of civil servants. The Ministry of Finance added further pressure when it requested employment preference in any council vacancies to be given to officers and men from the National Army now being demobilised.¹¹

The political environment in 1924 was not an easy one for local authorities as government patience with underperforming county and district councils ran thin. Local councillors had justification in fearing for their political futures. Several local authorities had been dissolved due to financial difficulties or political problems, and government appointed commissioners or administrators were installed. They included Leitrim and Kerry County Councils in May. Government commissioners took over the running of the Dublin board of guardians in November 1923. Following a controversial inquiry, Dublin Corporation was dissolved in May 1924 under the Local Government (Temporary Provisions) Act, 1924 and three commissioners appointed.¹² By the year-end, seventeen bodies were dissolved including Offaly County Council and Cork Corporation, and the local government bill to abolish all rural councils was passed in the Dáil in November.¹³ Against this backdrop of suspended councils, the government postponed the 1924 local elections for twelve months. In November, Dublin County Council called on the General Council of County Councils to protest the suppression of public bodies and demand that the local elections take place, adding that the only reason for the current state of affairs was the ‘buttressing of one party which has not the confidence nor the support of the people’.¹⁴ Dublin County Council felt that multiple forces were threatening its independence as a local authority. For example, the council objected to the Dublin (Corporation) Electricity Supply Bill, 1924, on grounds that it prejudiced the county area, and objected in principle to electricity and lighting provision by a single central authority.¹⁵

(Bourke), James Aloysius’, in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2009). Burke was appointed in Oct. 1923.

¹¹ Dublin County Council minute books, 31 Mar. 1924, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/21).

¹² See Aodh Quinlivan, *Vindicating Dublin: the story behind the controversial dissolution of the corporation in 1924* (Dublin, 2021) for a full account of the Dublin Corporation dissolution.

¹³ *Irish Times*, 26 & 31 May 1923, 21 May, 10 Sept., 1 & 8 Nov. 1924; Aodh Quinlivan, *Philip Monahan: a man apart – The life and times of Ireland’s first local authority manager* (Dublin, 2006) pp 60-68.

¹⁴ Dublin County Council minute books, 27 Nov. 1924, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/22).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3 July 1924, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/22).

There was not unity on the councils in their resistance to the imminent reform of local government. The ratepayers and business interests, traditionally regarded as Cumann na nGaedheal's support base in local government, attempted to avoid any discussion on government policy, and to confine debate to local council business. They occasionally tried to maintain the practice of no political motions, in the tradition of the old poor law guardians' boardroom, but the councils were fast becoming political fora, if not echo chambers of national politics.¹⁶ The ratepayers group supported the government policy to suspend councils and unions and replace them with directly appointed and accountable commissioners as a more efficient and effective use of resources, even at the cost of their own demise. There was continual lobbying against expenditure programmes, especially those primarily to alleviate unemployment and distress, perceived to have little tangible benefits for the ratepayers. Political dissension and disagreement became commonplace on Dublin County Council with opportunities to defend or attack government policies exploited by the opposing groups.¹⁷

There were other groups willing to challenge the council and its decisions, least of all the farmers of Fingal and their capable leaders. When Balrothery R.D.C. proposed obtaining a loan of £10,000 for road surfacing works in the northern, and more rural parts of the county, the County Dublin Farmers Association objected and appealed directly to Dublin County Council. A delegation led by P.J. Kettle and Edward Rooney met the county council but the meeting degenerated when Rooney 'attacked' Labour councillor P.J. Curran, the original proposer for the Balrothery loan. Following a tied vote requesting the delegation to leave, chairman Patrick Connolly's casting vote allowed them to remain. They were, after all, of a similar political persuasion to himself.¹⁸ The County Dublin Farmers Association, with many serving and former councillors were experienced political operators and had no apprehension of taking on the council representatives. The farmers' organisation was never far from the political arena, either within or on the margins of all the local bodies. As outgoing president at their A.G.M. in February 1925, P.J. Kettle lamented the poor

¹⁶ Dublin County Council minute books, 27 Aug. 1925, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/23); *Irish Times*, 11 July 1925.

¹⁷ Dublin County Council minute books, 14 May 1925, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/22). Hanna Sheehy Skeffington condemned the Treasonable Offences Bill, as 'reactionary and provocative'.

¹⁸ Dublin County Council minute books, 20 Nov. 1924, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/22).

state of agriculture and criticised the rural district councils for increasing the estimates, placing more burden on already hard-pressed farmers, in Balrothery's case to the tune of £4,000. The government was criticised for postponing the local elections, which only contributed to such 'irresponsible estimates'.¹⁹ At Balrothery district council P.J. Curran defended himself and took the *Irish Independent* to task for inaccurate and biased reporting of the extent of the rate increases. William Ganly added that in his fourteen years' experience of both the farmers' and ratepayers' associations they had done little of use for either themselves or the country.²⁰ Patrick Belton captured dramatic headlines when he refused to pay court costs relating to rent arrears to his absentee landlord for his farm at Drumcondra. The sheriff, backed up by civic guards and National Army troops, attempted to seize goods in lieu, causing a standoff with his employees and a potentially violent incident was averted when Belton himself intervened. He defended his position saying he was awaiting the implementation of the 1923 Land Act to address matters.²¹ The land question was re-emerging in Fingal as a rates issue, and thus a direct challenge to the local councils.

Farmers were not the only group with outstanding or pressing issues, even if they were the loudest in the local press. Local tensions remained high in the town of Skerries as negotiations continued with Lord Holmpatrick to secure the sale of houses to urban tenants. He was only prepared to sell at a price which would give him the same yield as his current rental income, plus capital valuation. For William Ganly and Patrick Mathews leading the town tenants' protests, this absorbed much of their daily efforts.²² Despite attempts to attract investment in the local fishing fleet, the town was in decline and an unemployment blackspot. Regular adverts in the local press, offering incentives from the Canadian government to emigrate to 'a land of opportunity for farmers and farm labourers' did little to help confidence in the new state.²³

When the Dáil by-election to replace the deceased M.J. Derham took place in March 1924, Fingal lost its remaining locally based T.D. when Batt O'Connor was returned

¹⁹ *Irish Times*, 6 Feb. 1925.

²⁰ *Drogheda Argus*, 31 May 1924.

²¹ *Irish Independent*, 20 & 21 May 1924.

²² *Drogheda Advertiser*, 31 May 1924.

²³ *Ibid.*, 10 Jan. & 17 Mar. 1925; 12 Jan. 1929.

for Cumann na nGaedheal, defeating the Republican Sean MacEntee by 2,193 votes.²⁴ O'Connor was a 1916 internee and close associate of Michael Collins, a former treasurer of the National Land Bank, and a successful building contractor in Donnybrook, in south Dublin.²⁵ The council chamber was now the only forum for the raising of Fingal local political issues. Furthermore, Dublin County Council and Balrothery R.D.C. found themselves threatened by increased control from central government, by reform legislation and potential dissolution, and by outside pressure groups such as the farmers. There had not been local elections for five years and the approaching poll might offer the opportunity of renewed momentum.

Local elections, 1925

The reform legislation to rationalise the structures of local government was designed to ensure greater focus and accountability, essentially changes to bring about greater continuity, effectiveness and efficiency. The Local Government Act 1925 (No. 5) became law in March 1925. It provided for the reorganisation of county councils, abolished rural district councils as administrative units and replaced boards of guardians with boards of health and assistance. As replacement structures in Dublin were not yet finalised, the county was exempted from the immediate restructuring and the rural councils remained until 1930. However, the gradual process of the effective dissolution of Balrothery R.D.C. continued. With the workhouse closed since its occupation by the British military in 1920, now the hospital closed, and responsibilities for libraries soon came under the management of the county council, despite resolutions of resistance from the R.D.C.²⁶

Farmers dominated the County Dublin Ratepayers Association meeting at the City Arms Hotel in May 1925 to select their candidates for the local elections. Some yearned for a return to the certainty of the past, like J.P. Cuffe who wanted to ask the veteran ex-chairman, P.J. O'Neill, now over seventy years old, to run again for the county council. A delegation went to see him but failed to convince him to come out of retirement. John Rooney and P.J. Kettle complained of the poor state of the register so close to polling day. When the local elections did take place in June,

²⁴ *Drogheda Independent*, 29 Mar. 1924.

²⁵ Marie Coleman, 'O'Connor, Bartholomew', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

²⁶ *Drogheda Independent*, 18 Apr. 1925; Dublin County Council minute books, 26 Nov. 1925, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/23).

County Dublin elected to the same number of bodies as before. Voter apathy and confusion with the multiple ballots was widely reported in the press, with a turnout of around 42% across the county and as few as one in three voters in the North Dublin R.D.C. area. The ratepayers' representatives were returned in a large two to one majority on Dublin County Council, further strengthened by the five ex-officio chairmen of the rural district councils. Mrs Sheehy Skeffington was one of two Sinn Féin candidates elected, with three Labour and one official Farmers representative, Patrick Belton.²⁷ Cumann na nGaedheal did not officially contest local elections. Dublin County Council was undeniably a conservative council dominated by a coalition of the representatives and interests of the large farmers of County Dublin and the businessmen of the south Dublin townships.

Only six of the twenty-three councillors at the first meeting of the new Dublin County Council represented the north county area. A quarter of a century earlier, at the first elections in 1898 a third of the councillors were based in the Fingal area. Population changes reduced the area of representation to four seats. The elected members returned, the Independent Patrick Belton (Artane), Labour's P. J. Curran (Balbriggan), and the two ratepayers' representatives, Col. Coote Robert Hely-Hutchinson (Lissenhall, Swords) and Edward Rooney (Lusk) were joined by ex-officio chairmen Joseph A. O'Neill (North Dublin R.D.C.) and Thomas L. Smyth (Balrothery R.D.C.), both also ratepayers representatives. Only three years after independence, the six representatives for north County Dublin included two 1916 veterans, two former Home Rulers, an ex-Unionist and a Labour party trade unionist. Hely-Hutchinson, Rooney and O'Neill were the latest in their families to serve, as their fathers had been councillors and guardians for decades before independence. Joseph A. O'Neill was the son of Joseph and nephew of P.J. O'Neill who had dominated the county council for its first twenty years. William McCabe, who had held a council seat as a nationalist since 1914, and ran in the 1923 general election for the business interest, was elected chairman, defeating Patrick Belton 17-4 while O'Neill was elected vice-chairman, defeating Hanna Sheehy Skeffington by the same margin. Belton was nominated as one of the representatives to the General Council of County Councils, which would help him develop a national profile. Four of the

²⁷ *Irish Times*, 4 July 1925.

eight members of the county agricultural committee were from north Dublin - O'Neill, Belton, Rooney and Hely-Hutchinson - later joined by five co-opted members of the County Dublin Farmers Association.²⁸ While in a minority on the council, the farmers' interests from north County Dublin had significant representation where it mattered. They elected Belton chairman of the county agricultural committee in August 1925.²⁹ When Dublin County Council chairman William McCabe died over Christmas 1925, Joseph A. O'Neill presided at subsequent meetings until himself formally elected to the chair for 1926, with Mrs Mary Cosgrave, an independent business colleague of McCabe, elected vice-chair.³⁰ The O'Neill dynasty had survived the independence struggle intact, back at the top of Dublin County Council and North Dublin R.D.C., where Joseph A. O'Neill's uncle and father served for twenty years. His brother Laurence was solicitor to the Balrothery council and union. These political family dynasties, Hely-Hutchinson, O'Neill and Rooney, had survived the years of the revolutionary upheaval to return to local representation and influence.

Balrothery R.D.C. returned a council with a similar majority with only two Labour members elected and one independent republican, P. J. Fogarty in Swords. Frank Lawless' son, Colm, sent home from the Fingal brigade in 1916 because he was too young, was elected for the ratepayers.³¹ At the first meetings in Balrothery, Thomas L. Smyth was elected chairman of the R.D.C. and William Ganly for the guardians.³² Ganly thanked the retiring outgoing chairperson Molly Adrien, the first woman elected to Balrothery guardians, for her service, and she recalled the difficult conditions in which they had to operate but pointed out that as chair she inherited a debt in 1920 and left a surplus of £5,754. Some of the same individuals who had been involved for years were still holding local office, albeit diminishing in prestige and influence, as both Dublin County Council and Dáil Éireann became the centres

²⁸ Dublin County Council minute books, 6 & 30 July 1925 (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/23). They were Thomas Duke (St Margaret's), Alfred Grimes (Cloghran), Jerome Hayes (Santry), John Monks (Rush), and Thomas Sweetman (Lusk).

²⁹ *Drogheda Independent*, 15 Aug. 1925.

³⁰ Dublin County Council minute books, 11 Mar. 1926, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/23).

³¹ *Irish Independent*, 26 June 1925.

³² *Drogheda Argus*, 1 Aug. 1925.

of power. Balbriggan Town Commissioners returned eight ratepayers and one Labour candidate, P.J. Curran.³³

The Fingal influence on national farming policies in the Free State senate reduced further when the outgoing Richard A. Butler of the Farmers Party lost his seat in the directly elected 1925 contest. J.P. Cuffe was eliminated on the thirty-fifth count but senator John Counihan, a grazier and livestock exporter from Donabate retained his seat for Cumann na nGaedheal. All three were actively involved in the interconnected network of farming and political networks of the area.³⁴ Butler remained in influential farming circles when later appointed to the Food Prices Tribunal.³⁵ Despite the changes of the revolutionary period, within ten years of the Easter Rising, the continuity of local politics was discernible when the same interests and families retained their presence on Fingal's local government institutions.

Unemployment and poverty: class politics in Fingal, 1925-7

Following the local elections, economic issues preoccupied Fingal politics with farmers' interests set against those of workers. Urban-rural political divisions surfaced at Balrothery R.D.C. after a joint deputation from Balbriggan and Skerries met with the minister and were 'strongly advised' by E.P. McCarron to proceed with a new water scheme for the two towns. The secretary of the department had no reservations in circumventing the priorities of local councillors to implement government policy. Edward Rooney vehemently objected on cost grounds to any scheme that placed an additional levy or rate on the surrounding rural ratepayers for the benefit primarily of the town. He particularly objected to being 'dictated to' by McCarron. He added that both towns were large enough for urban district council status and if they wanted to act so, they should pay for their services like any U.D.C. The schemes failed to secure Balrothery approval by nine votes to seven, but after a series of local protest meetings, the decision was overturned.³⁶ This was reminiscent of Andrew Kettle and the O'Neill cousins' resistance to the Malahide water scheme forty years earlier.

³³ *Drogheda Independent*, 27 June 1925.

³⁴ John Coakley, 'Ireland's unique electoral experiment: The senate election of 1925', in *Irish political studies*, xx (2005), pp 231-69, at p. 248 & 262.

³⁵ *Drogheda Argus*, 20 Feb. 1926.

³⁶ *Drogheda Independent*, 3 & 17 Oct. & 19 Dec. 1925.

Harsh financial realities and the need to curb poverty and unemployment took priority. In January 1926, a committee formed in Balbriggan to seek grants to rebuild the hosiery factory in the town, destroyed by the Black and Tans in 1920. Led by ex-M.P. for North Meath, Patrick White, Balbriggan town clerk, William Bannon, and the manager of the local gas company and town councillor, James Canty, they met with President Cosgrave, and county T.D.s Batt O'Connor and Major Bryan Cooper. Later they advertised for investors claiming that they had government support. Kevin O'Higgins, now Minister for Justice, denied any such government support was given, and dismissed White's claims as 'untruthful'.³⁷ The failure to rebuild the hosiery factory in Balbriggan had festered like an open sore in the town since 1920, brought up at every election as a betrayal of the town.

For example, it was a central issue at the by-election the following month. When independent T.D. Darrell Figgis died in February 1926, William Norton of Labour won the party's first ever seat in a by-election, beating the Cumann na nGaedheal candidate Thomas Healy on the second count aided by significant transfers from Patrick Belton, who ran as an independent. In a low turnout of 33%, less than 4,000 votes separated the three candidates with only 1,000 between poll topper Healy and Norton.³⁸ Belton referred to himself as 'the national candidate' and conducted a vigorous campaign, extensively canvassing the Fingal area as well as heckling the government party meetings with the ridicule that they could 'resettle Mayomen in Meath but couldn't build a factory in Balbriggan'. Healy countered that Belton was not really a farmer, but an extensive market gardener within the city limits.³⁹ Fingal still had no locally based T.D. to represent their interests in the Dáil.

At the start of the year, the Dublin branch of the Irish Farmers Union elected Laurence Roe as its chairman, making its perennial calls for rate abatements, and seeking that council wages be reduced and brought into line with those of agricultural labourers. P.J. Kettle went as far as to say that money spent teaching Irish would be better spent elsewhere, a view endorsed by J. P. Cuffe.⁴⁰ Such

³⁷ *Drogheda Independent*, 2 Jan. 1926; *Drogheda Argus*, 12 June 1926.

³⁸ Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918-92* (Dublin, 1982), p. 117; 33,050 voted.

³⁹ *Drogheda Independent*, 6 & 13 Feb. 1926. The Mayomen reference is to the Rathcarn Gaeltacht in County Meath.

⁴⁰ *Drogheda Independent*, 30 Jan. 1926.

comments from a former Gaelic League activist either underlines the extent of the financial hardship being experienced, or brings into question his initial sincerity in support of the Irish language. Over the winter of 1925-26, agricultural depression and especially reduced produce prices exacerbated the unemployment problem in north County Dublin, with renewed calls for road work schemes to alleviate distress for agricultural labourers. The threat of disruption by unemployed groups seeking a hearing led Dublin County Council to seek police attendance at their meetings in Rutland Square.⁴¹ The C.D.F.A. now gave its support to work schemes, provided roadmen's wages did not exceed those of the agricultural labourers in a particular area.⁴² Balrothery R.D.C., the authority directly responsible for the operation of such schemes faced continuous challenges in not only funding but also ensuring cost-effectiveness and fairness in providing employment on the roads. P.J. Curran and P.J. Fogarty called for loans of £20,000 per year from the department to increase the level of infrastructural works, and to limit employment to one man per family to spread the payments around. Only £4,000 was forthcoming, and then only on condition that the council raise £1,000 themselves as well. The ratepayers' representatives like Henry Dardis of Skerries, Edward Rooney and Thomas Smyth, proposed reducing council expenditure on trunk and main roads, to force the government to foot the bill. Roads investment in Fingal was primarily provided from the local rates.⁴³ Not surprisingly, there were allegations that 'cliques and rings' were operating in the hiring of direct labour, which the county surveyor denied, and of regular men working overtime instead of additional men being taken on.⁴⁴ The ideological divide between the free market policies of central government and the desire of the councils to fund and support employment initiatives was playing out on the roads of Fingal.

Unemployment grew worse. In February 1926, the Balrothery union requested hardship aid for exceptional distress under section 2 of the 1847 Poor Law Act, 10 & 11 Vic. c.31, citing famine era legislation for conditions in an independent Ireland. Dublin County Council supported the claim, later extended it to the whole county and looked to the department for sanction.⁴⁵ Debates on rates arrears, costs, wage

⁴¹ It was renamed Parnell Square by Dublin Corporation in 1933.

⁴² Dublin County Council minute books, 7, 14 & 28 Jan. 1926, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/23).

⁴³ Balrothery Rural District Council Quarterly Minutes, 18 Jan. 1926, (N.A.I., BG40/RAQ4).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 26 July 1926, (N.A.I., BG40/RAQ3).

⁴⁵ Dublin County Council minute books, 25 Feb 1926 (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/23).

reductions and unemployment schemes dominated most of the meetings in the first half of 1926.⁴⁶ When William Norton T.D. raised the issue in the Dáil and called for special relief under section 13 of the 1898 Local Government Act, the minister quoted local government inspectors' reports that the situation in Balrothery did not justify such measures. Labour leader Thomas Johnson replied that 600 people in distress indicated otherwise.⁴⁷ When 200 unemployed married men, mostly from Swords, turned up at a meeting at the workhouse in June some of the guardians felt intimidated. P.J. Fogarty warned of revolution like that in Poland if the 'slowly starving men' did not receive support, prompting William Ganly to drive into Lusk village and telephone the department to relay their plight. The negative reply prompted the usually conservative Thomas Smyth to indignantly decry 'the Mussolini's and Primo de Rivera's of Merrion Street' adding 'that if they did not take this seriously then democracy would go by the board'. The rural councillors defended their relief efforts and blamed legal restrictions from the county council and the department in terms of any additional or special works. A group of single men also appeared looking for work or relief, to be told that the law made no allowance for them, and they were referred to the workhouse in the city. One 1916 veteran said that as younger men they also went there in Easter Week, and this was where it got him.⁴⁸ The helplessness of the councillors at Balrothery, when face to face with those in distress is palpable, in their language and their reactions, and served to further compound their distrust of the government and civil servants.

Even minor attempts by Balrothery R.D.C. to raise funds were subject to considerable departmental scrutiny. When they resolved to sell the contents of the workhouse by auction, and let the adjoining farm, the instructions were to have an official auditor's valuation, and then not to sell any items below that level. Col Hely-Hutchinson doubted that any such values were attainable at auction. The heavy handedness and pettiness extended to a further directive to discontinue the resident caretaker's use of the union furniture, all of which was to be disposed of.⁴⁹ The view in government and among the higher civil service was that local government was

⁴⁶ Dublin County Council minute books, 25 Mar. & 22 Apr. 1926; (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/23); *Drogheda Independent*, 31 July 1926.

⁴⁷ *Drogheda Argus*, 5 June 1926; *Dáil Debates*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1 June 1926.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 19 June 1926.

⁴⁹ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 16 Jan. 1926.

inefficient and profligate, and it was their mission to eliminate every issue of waste. Eight banks refused Balrothery loan requests for housing and water schemes and referred the council back to its own treasurer bank, the National Land Bank. They continued to refuse loans for any works not sanctioned by the department. The exasperation and anger for Fogarty, Hely-Hutchinson and Colm Lawless reached new levels when they discovered that the National Land Bank was charging them interest on their overdraft but not paying interest on council deposits.⁵⁰ Here were a republican, an ex-Unionist and a pro-treaty supporter working together to alleviate local hardship against an ideologically driven central department concerned with costs. When Dublin County Council received their £41,000 allocation from the £2,000,000 national road grant in the summer, there was an additional stipulation to employ ex-National Army soldiers, which outraged Mrs Sheehy Skeffington and Patrick Belton.⁵¹ The relentless list of stipulations to the periphery from the centre continued.

As the winter of 1926-27 approached, the unemployment situation worsened. Dublin County Council allocated £17,150 to road works in the run up to Christmas, including £8,800 across eighteen schemes to employ about 500 men in the Balrothery and North Dublin rural districts for four weeks. The Department of Local Government contributed £10,000 towards this cost out of the Motor Tax Fund, which had long been a contentious matter. The local councils had complained that as modern motor traffic increased since the turn of the century, the maintenance costs of main roads had increased, borne by local rates for users that lived and worked outside of the area.⁵²

The Balrothery R.D.C. meetings in January 1927 to discuss the annual estimates highlight the predicament that the local councillors faced. Edward Rooney pointed out that rates were now double what they were in 1913, but that ‘the decisions at Dublin County Council were taken by people not paying agricultural rates, while the Balrothery representatives on that council were in a minority’. William Ganly contended that ‘the working man was worse off now than in the worst times of

⁵⁰ *Drogheda Independent*, 13 Mar. & 10 Apr. 1926.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 7 Aug. 1926.

⁵² Dublin County Council minute books, 3 Nov. & 7 Dec. 1926. (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/24).

landlordism'. The clerk insisted no further reductions in expenditure were possible, and they could not meet their liabilities. When Ganly yet again called for a postponement of the rates, Curran retorted that it was not just ratepayers but people's welfare that mattered. He added that if Ganly employed men to till his seventy-eight acre farm instead of letting it at conacre, men would have work. The row ended with Ganly calling Curran an 'ex-corner boy and a blackguard' as Curran questioned Ganly's 1916 credentials.⁵³ These were the frustrated voices of a local political establishment, whose power was diminishing. As influence shifted to the county council and further to the Dáil and central government, their influence was less potent if not even relevant and their sense of helplessness palpable. It also indicated the extent of the underlying class tensions, more pronounced, always present, if not always aired. The arguments and rights of the ratepayer compared to those of the working classes had resonance in the arguments of the past, back to the property rights claims of the landlord to those of tenant rights.

With the continuing rates burden the numbers of annuity defaulters also increased. The government insisted, as the British had before them, that the liability for annuities lay with the councils, prompting Patrick Belton and P.J. Curran to call for an investigation of the impact on the ratepayers and taxpayers of County Dublin of the financial settlement in the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Belton would run as a candidate in the general election in 1927, so this was an opportunity for him to build a public profile by championing a popular political cause.⁵⁴

Council relations with the government got worse, as the government introduced further legislation to reduce the powers of local councils in the areas of recruitment and procurement. Having objected to the terms of the Local Authorities (Officers and Employees) Bill, and the Local Authorities (Combined Purchasing) Act, at a meeting in June 1926, Dublin County Council received a letter from the Minister for Justice, Kevin O'Higgins, suggesting that 'nepotism, logrolling [cronyism], and corruption in the matter of public appointments' was the reason for the legislation. The councillors strongly refuted this in relation to Dublin County Council and called for a withdrawal of his comments. They defended the rights and responsibilities of the elected council

⁵³ *Drogheda Independent*, 8 & 15 Jan. 1927.

⁵⁴ Dublin County Council minute books, 30 Dec. 1926 (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/24).

under the 1898 Local Government Act to make local appointments and contract tenders on behalf of the people. They described the pending legislation as ‘a dictatorship of the Ministry of Local Government, whose powers would appear to be superior to those of the courts of justice’.⁵⁵ O’Higgins replied a month later that as he did not direct his comments ‘in particular at Dublin County Council, that he was not disposed to withdraw them’.⁵⁶

Examples of O’Higgins’ suggestions of nepotism and self-serving practices in Dublin County Council were not difficult to find. In May 1927, following a review of remunerations, Dublin County Council capped the county secretary’s annual salary at £1,100 per year, with annual increments of £50 up to £1,300, a considerable sum when the council was dealing with rampant unemployment. The department flatly refused to sanction such a salary.⁵⁷ James Lawless was the county secretary and the secretary of the department E.P. McCarron took a personal interest in the conduct of the county secretary. A few months later the council appointed Nuala Lawless, a daughter of the late Frank Lawless, and a niece of James Lawless, as a temporary typist in the surveyor’s office, an appointment later extended.⁵⁸ While the department sought to eliminate favouritism in appointments, others thought there should be preference for employment given to those who had made sacrifices in the independence struggle. Patrick Belton later recalled that Miss Lawless would not have needed a full-time job if her father had not sacrificed everything he had for his country.⁵⁹ The employees of Dublin County Council included both the winners and losers in independent Ireland.

Hustings and elections, 1927

With a general election imminent, the frequency of political meetings in Fingal increased. The economic realities of poverty and unemployment and the fresh memory of recent conflicts contributed to the use of animated and personalised

⁵⁵ Dublin County Council minute books, 29 July 1926 (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/24). O’Higgins used the expression ‘logrolling’ which is an American term for political cronyism.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 26 Aug. 1926 (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/24).

⁵⁷ Ibid., 30 June 1927, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/25).

⁵⁸ Ibid., 11 Aug. 1927 & 23 Feb. 1928 (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/25); Census of Ireland, 1911, online at <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai000012801/> accessed 26 May 2020. She was still employed on 27 Aug. 1931, according to minutes of that date listing all employees of the council.

⁵⁹ *Drogheda Independent*, 29 Dec. 1928.

language at the hustings. An examination of this prelude to the elections also gives us an insight into the personalities of some of the participants in Fingal politics and the attitudes of the political parties towards Fingal. Labour candidate P.J. Curran was fearless in his convictions, unrelenting in his fight for the worker, and held little back when he spoke in his home town of Balbriggan. The town had lost its T.D. when Jim Derham died and his replacement had not visited the town since. They had received promises from Michael Collins before his death to fund the rebuilding of the hosiery factory destroyed by the Black and Tans in 1920, but Kevin O’Higgins had reneged on this promise, preached Curran, ‘just as Judas betrayed Our Lord on the cross, for a few pieces of silver’, forcing many of the workers to emigrate.⁶⁰ Curran articulated the feeling that Balbriggan was betrayed and forgotten, intensified by a distrust of the politicians in government in Dublin. It was a common perception throughout Fingal, as we have seen in Balrothery R.D.C. discourse.

Cumann na nGaedheal emphasised the government’s record and the possible dangers of having de Valera or William Redmond in power.⁶¹ Redmond’s Irish National League party, founded in 1926 was seen as an electoral threat by Cumann na nGaedheal. Unlike the still abstentionist Fianna Fáil they would take their seats in the Dáil. Henry Dardis hosted O’Higgins at a Cumann na nGaedheal meeting in Skerries, where he warned of Redmond flirting with de Valera one day and the British Empire the next. It was about voting for a government, he said, not just a local representative, perhaps acknowledging that they had a local deficit, but also betraying an attitude of complacency in electoral matters. At Rush, he attacked Redmond as ‘an old man for an old party’. At Skerries, Fionan Lynch, the Minister for Fisheries, rejected the call by Patrick Mathews to support local candidates and maintained that Cumann na nGaedheal represented the whole county. At Balbriggan, Patrick White, the promoter of the new hosiery factory for the town, interrupted the minister Desmond Fitzgerald and asked how the government could pay £1,000,000 compensation for the burning of Liverpool docks but could not find the money for industry in Balbriggan. The row continued when Fitzgerald retorted that White was a

⁶⁰ *Drogheda Argus*, 16 Apr. 1927.

⁶¹ Marie Coleman, ‘Redmond, William Archer’, in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2009). Redmond was the son of I.P.P. leader John Redmond and one of the leaders of the Irish National League party, a pro-treaty opposition to Cumann na nGaedheal, comprised of old Home Rule supporters.

member of a party that asked Irishmen to sacrifice their lives to maintain a government that sent the men who burned the factory in Balbriggan.

At Skerries, Independent Nationalist candidate Paddy Belton was introduced as ‘a walking labour exchange, the friend of the county roadmen’. He condemned the farmers’ union alliance with Cumann na nGaedheal as representative of the landlords and not the farmers, and declared that the county had 40,000 rural voters but no rural T.D. to represent them. A vote for him would change that and he had his customary messages for his audience, maintaining that he personally hated politics and was only still in it because he felt a responsibility to the young men he had sworn into the I.R.B. and who had given their lives for Ireland. He would stay in public life until he ‘drove out those reptiles O’Higgins & company’.⁶² At election time, Paddy Belton was all things to all men, and promised that he could and would help everyone from the labourers to the large farmers and anyone in between. At meetings in Swords, he criticised the record in government of Kevin O’Higgins and Desmond Fitzgerald as ‘irresponsible’, and labelled them as ‘political adventurers’ only ever coming to Fingal to look for votes at election time. At a meeting in Rush a few days earlier they had criticised Belton’s protectionist policy as irresponsible. Belton reminded the audience that ‘a vote for Cumann na nGaedheal was a vote for Paddy Hogans’ bullock policy with nothing for the people but the emigrant ship’, a reference to the Minister for Agriculture’s support for the live cattle export trade to Britain.⁶³ Hogan espoused free market economic policies that made such exports more competitive, at the expense of protective tariffs or supports in other sectors. This harked back to the long-term antagonism of the labouring class towards the grazier displacement of employment opportunities.

The *Drogheda Independent* published a list of candidates before polling day and listed Belton as an independent. By 28 May, he had joined Fianna Fáil, de Valera’s party founded in May 1926, his candidature endorsed by Molly Adrien. Belton later claimed that de Valera had persuaded him to run as a Fianna Fáil candidate following discussions on the annuity payments issue.⁶⁴ The same newspaper also revealed a leaked report of the privately held Cumann na nGaedheal local selection convention,

⁶² *Drogheda Independent*, 12 Mar. 1927.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 12 Mar. & 14 May 1927.

⁶⁴ *Irish Independent*, 29 Dec. 1928.

which showed that long-serving P.J. Kettle had failed to secure the nomination.⁶⁵

Other more clandestine documents came to light much later, which showed leading ex-Unionists including Andrew Jameson and James Douglas requesting donations to Cumann na nGaedheal's election expenses, and warning of the consequences of a change of government.⁶⁶

Cumann na nGaedheal secured forty-seven seats in the election on 9 June, three more than the abstentionist Fianna Fáil, and Cosgrave was re-elected president when the Dáil met with the support of the Farmers Party and Independents. Of the eight T.D.'s elected for Dublin County only Patrick Belton, who farmed at Drumcondra was based in the rural north county area, while Labour leader Thomas Johnson lived in Clontarf. John Rooney the former Farmers Party T.D. from Lusk and the only local Cumann na nGaedheal candidate, polled poorly. Curran narrowly failed to secure election but did outpoll his running mate William Norton, a future leader of the Labour party. The constituency returned three Cumann na nGaedheal, two Fianna Fáil, two Independents and a Labour member. Belton proved himself a successful vote getter, with twelve per cent of the poll, over half of the Fianna Fáil first preference poll of twenty-three per cent.⁶⁷ Richard Mulcahy, elected for the Dublin North city constituency became the new Minister for Local Government and Public Health.

When Kevin O'Higgins was killed in Dublin on Sunday 10 July 1927, the government responded with the Public Safety Act that strengthened police and military powers but also introduced electoral and constitutional legislation to limit the ability of de Valera and Fianna Fáil to stay outside of the rules regarding the oath of allegiance. A further clause made it an offence to be associated with any campaigns for non-payment of annuities. In the same session, a vote to authorise pending annuity payments to Britain was also before the Dáil. Fianna Fáil was still abstentionist, but Belton took his seat to oppose this suite of legislation, all of which would have neutered, or possibly made illegal, his intentions regarding the campaign

⁶⁵ *Drogheda Independent*, 7, 14 & 28 May 1927.

⁶⁶ Brown, S. L., et al., Handbill from a group of politicians concerning matters relating to financial support for Cumann na nGaedhael and Independent candidates [who were supporting the Government party] in the 1927 General Election, Dublin, 1927, (N.L.I., Ephemera collection, EPH D157).

⁶⁷ Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918-92* (Dublin, 1982), p. 120; *Drogheda Independent*, 18 June & 2 July 1927.

not to pay annuities. He later claimed that de Valera had failed to give him guidance on whether he should have taken his seat to vote against the measures. He was expelled from Fianna Fáil, though he claimed he resigned.⁶⁸ Fianna Fáil did take their seats in the Dáil on 11 August 1927, signing the oath ‘as an empty political formula’.⁶⁹ Patrick Belton defended himself in the press, criticising de Valera’s ‘doubtful leadership, which had put himself and his party in a strait jacket’.⁷⁰ Belton was a larger-than-life character with little fear of political opponents and had become the conductor of anti-government opinion in Fingal. Political parties and institutions were merely vehicles for the advancement of his own political and personal goals. In this respect, he was not unlike the County Dublin Farmers Association of which he was a prominent member.

On 14 August in the by-election to replace O’Higgins, Gearóid O’Sullivan, the cousin of Michael Collins, who had a distinguished military career, retained the seat for Cumann na nGaedheal with over 70% of the votes.⁷¹ Within a week the now precarious majority held by Cumann na nGaedheal facilitated a Labour led vote of no confidence in Cosgrave’s government which he survived by a single vote 72-71, amid controversy over the absence of National League T.D., John Jinks, when the vote was called. Cosgrave reacted by calling another general election, mindful of the support and outrage caused by the death of O’Higgins. Cumann na nGaedheal gained fifteen seats, winning four in County Dublin where it secured fifty-three per cent of the vote, compared to a national return of thirty-eight per cent. The government was returned with Farmer and Independent support in an election that registered a turnout in County Dublin of over 70%. The local campaign centred almost exclusively on blaming de Valera not just for the death of O’Higgins, but those of Collins, Brugha and countless others. Joseph A. O’Neill, chairman of Dublin County Council ran as the fifth candidate for the government party, unelected trailing his four outgoing high-profile colleagues. Desmond Fitzgerald, Batt O’Connor and Gearóid O’Sullivan were elected for the government party with Major Bryan Cooper who had recently joined them. In this second election in September 1927, Patrick Belton, lost his seat,

⁶⁸ David Gahon, *The land annuities agitation in Ireland 1926-32*, (Ph.D. thesis, Maynooth University, 2017) pp 123-4.

⁶⁹ *Drogheda Argus*, 13 Aug. 1927.

⁷⁰ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 6 Aug. 1927.

⁷¹ *Drogheda Argus*, 27 Aug. 1927.

running as an independent and shedding almost 5,000 votes.⁷² Fingal had no local T.D. again.

The first election in 1927 saw Cosgrave almost lose power but then consolidate his hold on government after the second poll in September. However, with a full Dáil chamber after August, the parliamentary dynamic changed and the scrutiny of the opposition intensified. Fingal experienced two lively and combative electoral campaigns, but with no change at the end of it, other than Belton's growing reputation as a political hard man. He was becoming the self-appointed voice of North County Dublin.

The politics of balancing the council books: estimates, reliefs and roadworks, 1927-30

After the relative excitement of the general elections and the stimulation given to national politics by the arrival of Fianna Fáil in the Dáil, the mundane business of balancing the books occupied the debating chambers of all levels of local government in Fingal. The D.L.G.P.H increased the pressure on the councils to balance their books and control expenditure, while within the council chambers the political argument over expenditure intensified. The councillors faced an issue that was impossible to resolve to the satisfaction of all the aggrieved parties. To alleviate hardship for farmers there were calls to reduce the rates burden, but this meant reducing expenditure and thus reducing supports and reliefs for the working class. Without increased central funding or relief measures, the councils would never be in a position to address such problems, and the government was not disposed to increase expenditure in this direction. The primary mechanism in Fingal for addressing unemployment among rural labourers was the provision of road maintenance work. This required financing and therefore an increase in the rates, a reduction in other spending or grant aid from central government. These issues of the funding of services and by whom dominated council business for the next decade.

The divide between departmental policy and the reality faced on the ground by councillors in Fingal was widening. By the end of 1927, large groups of unemployed men walked to the Balrothery workhouse boardroom outside the town of Lusk to

⁷² Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918-92* (Dublin, 1982), p. 127.

make a case to the councillors and guardians attending their regular fortnightly council meeting. P.J. Curran again sought to invoke section 13 of the 1898 legislation to allow for special relief for able-bodied men but was defeated.⁷³ Within months families in distress and unable to pay rents were applying to occupy rooms in the now abandoned Balrothery workhouse at Lusk.⁷⁴ In the year ended 31 March 1927, Balrothery R.D.C. area had almost forty-four persons per thousand in receipt of home assistance relief, over twice the national average of eighteen per thousand.⁷⁵ The department had other priorities.

When Balrothery refused to adopt the estimates for main roads in February 1928, the county surveyor reported them to Dublin County Council and wanted the matter escalated to the department. Edward Rooney said that 'it was the most intelligent decision ever taken by any public body and if other councils followed suit, it might bring about national change'. Why, he asked, should local farmers have to pay for a road that was a 'railway for buses'. Patrick Belton added that the railways maintained the railway lines, but the bus companies did nothing to maintain the roads.⁷⁶ Chairman O'Neill said he could not condone the Balrothery action, but did support the principle. At Balrothery R.D.C., a pattern had emerged since the early 1920s regarding the annual estimates for roadbuilding, and by extension the alleviation of the misery of the unemployed. Those representing farmers and ratepayers, who were in the majority, approved local roads budgets while reducing those for national and trunk roads but this jeopardised and often reduced the quantity of work undertaken. They approved works only if costs could be minimised and the work had a definite benefit for those footing the bill. Curran and Fogarty, with providing employment and workers welfare their foremost objective, supported the county surveyor, who had statutory responsibility for the upkeep of the main roads. The Department of Local Government and Public Health continued to remind councillors of their legal responsibility for road maintenance. The government wanted as much done for as little cost as possible to the central exchequer. Eventually, having met a deputation, which included Edward Rooney, Colm Lawless

⁷³ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 17 Dec. 1927.

⁷⁴ *Drogheda Argus*, 30 June 1928.

⁷⁵ *Irish Free State Statistical Abstract, 1932* (Dublin, 1932), p.97.

⁷⁶ *Drogheda Independent*, 4 Feb. 1928.

and Thomas Smyth, the Minister agreed to reclassify the number of roads to qualify for grants under the Roads Fund.⁷⁷

Another standoff came to a head in early 1929 in a charged political environment when the Board of Works refused a loan to Balrothery R.D.C. for the building of labourers' cottages, on grounds that only expenditure for public health purposes was admissible. Thomas Smyth insisted that this was a public health issue on sanitary grounds.⁷⁸ When the department dismissed new grant applications for trunk road works, the rural council refused to commit to the annual roads estimate. The minister accused the Balrothery council of 'disrespecting the surveyor' and gave them the opportunity to reverse the decision. Led by Edward Rooney, the council refused and criticised Dublin County Council for not giving Balrothery its fair share of funding from motor taxation receipts, to fund the works. James Dickie was angry that the commissioner-managed Dublin Corporation received their grants, while Balrothery 'who were government supporters' did not, and took exception to the tone and language of the letter from E.P. McCarron on the matter. Following their failure to comply with the ministerial order to fund the roads programme, the Balrothery council was suspended in May and a local government inspector and engineer appointed as commissioners to take charge of affairs, who then passed the requisite budget. It is worth noting that on the same day, a 'caucus' of the members, but without Curran and Fogarty, met beforehand. They recorded a very public defence of the ratepayers and issued a statement: 'it is with great pleasure that we officially adjourn Balrothery R.D.C. indefinitely'.⁷⁹

The issue divided Dublin County Council as they had made the initial statutory complaint on the underfunding, but it now faced a dilemma. Some considered the new commissioners' estimates illegal, as the legally elected members did not prepare them. Others wholly disapproved of the Balrothery councillors' actions, while yet more did not see it as the responsibility of farmers 'to pay for roads for racing drivers'. The situation was compounded when no local contractors tendered for any of the commissioners' works while the ratepayers of Garristown took advantage and

⁷⁷ Balrothery Rural District Council Quarterly Minutes, 16 Jan., 12 & 19 Mar. 1928, (N.A.I., BG40/RAQ4).

⁷⁸ *Drogheda Advertiser*, 16 Mar. 1929.

⁷⁹ Balrothery Rural District Council Quarterly Minutes, 5 & 11 Mar., 22 Apr., 9 May & 9 June 1929, (N.A.I., BG40/RAQ4).

said that they would not pay any rates except those struck by a legally constituted council. A special meeting to find a solution took place on 5 June that year, mediated by Mrs Noel Cosgrave and John Shiel from the county council. Matters were resolved when the district councillors finally agreed to the estimates on the promise of an inquiry to review the mechanism of future roads funding and general expenditure. There was considerable local anger at this outcome. Notwithstanding the new increased estimate and corresponding rate increase, the grant from the Department of Local Government & Public Health was only approved when the commissioners were involved.⁸⁰ It was to be a short-lived victory; despite a slight increase in grants for 1930-31, Balrothery R.D.C. was dissolved under the terms of the Local Government (Dublin) Act, 1930. The last motion passed on 25 August 1930 was ironically a unanimous vote of thanks and appreciation to the county and district surveyors for their services.⁸¹

Similar challenges faced the town council in Balbriggan. In 1928, the commissioners failed to strike a rate at three successive meetings. The divisions were similar to elsewhere, as P.J. Curran wanted a higher rate to fund services and employment, while chairman Cumiskey and others wanted to keep costs down for hard-pressed ratepayers.⁸²

The contrasting political positions of the two council factions in January 1928 serve to highlight the difference in how the problems of hardship were viewed and how they might be resolved. While Dublin County Council sent a deputation led by P.J. Curran to meet the department to discuss additional unemployed relief for workers, Patrick Belton and Thomas Morgan Good called for restrictions on food imports into Ireland to create more jobs for agricultural workers.⁸³ It was still about balancing the needs of workers and farmers, with the limitations of local authority funding structures constantly pitting the one against the other. Patrick Belton championed the cause of the farmer and the ratepayer first, and that of the worker when benefited the farmer. Belton continued to press for a moratorium on annuities and concessions on

⁸⁰ *Drogheda Argus*, 18 & 25 May, 8 June; *Drogheda Independent*, 9 & 16 Mar. 1929; Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918-92* (Dublin, 1982), p. 131.

⁸¹ Balrothery Rural District Council Quarterly Minutes, 25 Aug. 1930, (N.A.I., BG40/RAQ4).

⁸² *Drogheda Argus*, 5 & 19 May 1928.

⁸³ Dublin County Council minute books, 19 Jan. 1928, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/25).

the rating of agricultural land.⁸⁴ Belton was to embrace the issue of annuities and agricultural rates more forcefully, as we shall see later. Grievances intensified when the government reduced Dublin County Council's agricultural grant of £10,371 by £2,477 to account for land annuity arrears.

Agrarian issues: the case of Mrs Menton and Hilltown farm

Belton's growing national public profile encouraged his enthusiasm to become involved in fresh initiatives. A new farmers' organisation, the Agricultural League was founded in August 1928 with Wicklow County Council chairman and ex-T.D. Christopher Byrne as chairman and Belton as secretary. This was a non-party group established to prioritise increased food production in Ireland, and thus attract smallholders and labourers to their ranks. They quickly organised a national conference in Dublin and soon branches were established in Rush and Garristown, led by John Monks and Andrew Mooney respectively, veterans of local agrarian agitation.⁸⁵ This was a threat to the more conservative Irish Farmers Union, and their president Richard Butler, who were seen to be too close to the Cumann na nGaedheal government and its policy favouring livestock exports. Butler had just failed to secure election to the senate for the second successive time.⁸⁶

In 1929, an episode unfolded near Swords, County Dublin that reprised the events and rhetoric of the days of the Land War. It is worth recalling as it provides a good illustration of the agrarian class structures, networks and divisions that still competed for advantage in independent Ireland, and of the double standards, opportunism and the unending land hunger that existed at every level.⁸⁷ The newspapers reported in dramatic terms a protest at the 150-acre Hilltown farm at Brackenstown in Swords in support of the eviction of a widow with nine children, Mrs Margaret Menton. The Land Commission, in disposing of the Staples estate, had secured an ejectment order against the tenant Mrs Menton. Patrick Belton and her near neighbours, P.J. Kettle and J.P. Cuffe, organised a group of one hundred farmers with sixty ploughs and threatened to plough part of the farm in defiance of both Gardaí and the court order.

⁸⁴ Dublin County Council minute books, 5 Nov. 1929, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/DCC/01/26).

⁸⁵ *Drogheda Independent*, 13 Oct. & 24 Nov. 1928.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 8 Dec. 1928.

⁸⁷ *Evening Herald*, 18 & 19 Apr.; *Irish Independent*, 19 & 22 Apr., 1 May; *Sunday Independent*, 21 Apr.; *Drogheda Independent*, 4 & 11 May 1929.

Kettle invoked the rhetoric of the Land War, of the three F's, and presented an emotive picture of a widow and her children ejected to the side of the road. Belton alleged the collusion of the Land Commission with the adjacent landholder, Harry Ussher of Brackenstown House, a racehorse trainer, accusing him of grabbing the farm for use as horse gallops. Mrs Menton herself declared to the *Evening Herald*: 'they will have to evict me – I am working this farm for my nine children, that they can succeed their father and carry on the business.' President William T. Cosgrave, amid the publicity, agreed to meet a deputation led by Belton and Kettle, listened politely, but declined to get involved.⁸⁸ A series of meetings, protests and an exchange of antagonistic correspondence in the local press followed. Harry Ussher was originally from Galway and his family had links to the original Molesworth estate at Brackenstown. He had purchased his estate of around 250 acres in 1922 from Captain Richard O'Callaghan and built up a horse racing business there. He wrote to the *Sunday Independent* that his business employed local men, and that he had an annual wages bill of £4,000 and bought all his feed locally. He added that he already had horse gallops on adjacent land that he leased from a brother of Mrs Menton and did not need the Menton farm. Coincidentally her brother had only recently bought his land from J.P. Cuffe. Mrs Menton did not live at Hilltown but at Blackhall Place in the city, where she ran the extensive dairying business inherited from her husband when he died in 1925.⁸⁹ William Menton and his father Denis had a considerable dairy business. They were regular suppliers to both the North and South Dublin unions from as far back as 1883.⁹⁰ When Denis died in 1901, he left an estate worth £5,461 to his family.⁹¹ Eight of the nine Menton children were at boarding school, the two boys at the prestigious Clongowes Wood College. The farm at Swords, with 200 dairy cows, was part of a wider lease and closer to 200 acres in total, in addition to another 100 acres at Santry. The secretary of the Department of Lands and Fisheries issued a statement that Mrs Menton was already the recipient of

⁸⁸ *Irish Times*, 22 Apr. 1929.

⁸⁹ Menton, William, administration papers, 1926, (N.A.I., Principal Registry of the High Court, CS/HC/PO/4/79/5108).

⁹⁰ North Dublin Union Board of Guardians minute books, Jan. 1883 - Jan. 1884, (N.A.I., BG 78/5/3/463-572; BG78/6/3/530); South Dublin Union Board of Guardians minute books, Jan. 1891 – Jan. 1892, (N.A.I., BG79/A44). William had an annual contract with N.D.U. in 1891 to supply seventy gallons a day.

⁹¹ Will of Denis Menton, 1901, N.A.I., online at http://www.willcalendars.nationalarchives.ie/reels/cwa/005014912/005014912_00154.pdf accessed 6 Jan. 2021.

over £7,000 in land purchase loans under previous land acts, with the limit under the 1923 Land Act, capped at £3,000. This meant that if the farm at Hilltown were to be divided, Mrs Menton was only entitled to that part of it for which £3,000 would be forthcoming in loan advances, with the balance divided among other applicants. Mrs Menton declined the £4,500 in compensation offered by The Land Commission for the balance.⁹² Belton wrote to the *Drogheda Independent* pointing out that William Menton had ‘started from scratch’ with a fifty acre farm at Santry and a dairy business in the city, and had purchased the Swords lease in 1915 for summer grazing for his herd, to avoid the uncertainty and cost of the eleven-month conacre lease system. Belton stated he knew Menton well, a neighbour of his at Santry. Belton farmed at nearby Drumcondra and told how Menton had helped him when he came out of prison after 1916. Belton’s agenda, alluded to by the secretary of the Department of Lands, was to frustrate the work of the Land Commission and dictate what land was divided and to whom it was allocated. Belton pointed out that there were other government lands in the area such as the old 150-acre remount farm at Lusk, and 200 acres at Collinstown aerodrome, better suited for redistribution rather than the Menton farm. Cuffe stated that as an auctioneer he could readily find about 300 acres in Swords for redistribution if needed. Hecklers at the protest meetings were not shy in reminding P.J. Kettle that he was no stranger to evicting people. The Land Commission delayed its decision for six weeks with the outcome evidently not newsworthy enough, as there is no further press coverage. Mrs Menton held on to the farm as a report in 1934 described how the Fingal Harriers hunt was diverted when the hounds chased a hare through Mrs Menton’s farm.⁹³ Valuation Office revision books for the Swords area after 1928 show no change of occupier or leaseholder other than Mrs Menton after 1928 up to her death in 1956.⁹⁴

There was an interesting letter to the editor of the *Drogheda Independent* on the proceedings written by an anonymous but obviously very interested and well-informed party, and mischievously signed by ‘Rosa Dartle’. She was a character in

⁹² *Drogheda Independent*, 4 & 11 May 1929.

⁹³ *Irish Times*, 2 Feb. 1934.

⁹⁴ Valuation Office revision books, Balrothery R.D.C.: Swords East D.E.D, (Valuation Office, book 2, 1908-1960); Death of Margaret Menton, 1956, Dublin North, Q4, 2/207 (G.R.O., Dublin).

Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, an orphan who asked uncomfortable questions. This 'Miss Dartle' asked uncomfortable questions, mostly addressed to Mr Kettle:

What was the size of the farm holding in dispute and the other Menton holdings? What about the attempt by the agitators to overturn the legal decision of the Land Commissioners? What about the 600-acre farms that the agitators themselves held and the accusation that Ussher was looking for a mere sixteen of the 270 acres in total that was for sale or redistribution? Was sixteen acres not a sensible price to stop Mr Ussher taking his enterprise from Swords to the Curragh or England? ⁹⁵

This episode highlights how the strong farmer class prioritised protecting their own interests, often at the expense of the class below. In this case, they prevented the division or disposal of grazing lands to smallholder applicants for use as tillage farms. It is an illustration of the continuous efforts of the organised farming groups in Fingal throughout the whole period of this study to protect and gain advantage. In 1929 they were still prepared to invoke the old rhetoric of land war and revolution, prepared to support grazier over tiller, large farmer over smallholder, and ever envious but mistrusting of the outsider or the old landlord order.

New agrarian campaigns: de-rating rows and tariffs

When agricultural land in the United Kingdom was fully de-rated in 1928, there were calls for similar legislation to be enacted in Ireland. Farmers in Britain and Northern Ireland had benefitted from rate relief of up to 75% since 1923, and this was both a source of competitive disadvantage and resentment to Irish farmers. When introduced initially, poor rates were based on a productivity valuation of all agricultural land and buildings, including dwellings. Later government grants were applied as partial relief to reduce agricultural rate liability. R.A. Butler, president of the Irish Farmers Union, had called for de-rating as far back as their congress in 1924, which prompted a partial relief from government facilitated through an additional loan mechanism in local authorities.⁹⁶ However, such an outright move as full de-rating was not feasible in Ireland, where over 70% of county rate valuations

⁹⁵ *Drogheda Independent*, 11 May 1929.

⁹⁶ *Irish Times*, 27 Mar. 1924

were on agricultural land.⁹⁷ This national consideration did not deter Irish farmers and towards the close of 1930 as momentum gathered in the campaign for protectionist tariffs and calls for a moratorium on annuity payments, de-rating was included in the range of demands and farmers' grievances. These calls anticipated the imminent report of a government commission to investigate de-rating. In November, a group of Dublin tillage farmers with these objectives in mind inaugurated the Farmers Protection Association, chaired by agricultural merchant, Thomas MacKeogh.⁹⁸ They received support from the Industrial Development Association, which offered it office accommodation at their premises in St. Stephens Green. Patrick Belton, always mindful of greater opportunities beyond Dublin, called for a national conference, and Joseph A. O'Neill called for grain tariffs. A conference took place a fortnight later at the Mansion House, with speeches claiming that conditions were now worse than the 1870s. It was noteworthy for the presence of a number of high-profile Fianna Fáil T.D.s including Thomas Derrig, James Ryan and Frank Aiken. The de-rating issue had significant potential that they might exploit as an issue in the forthcoming general election.⁹⁹ By February 1931, meetings had taken place at Lusk, Garristown and later Swords to establish Fingal branches, with John Rooney and P. J. Kettle again prominent.¹⁰⁰

An editorial in the *Irish Times* on 20 November 1930 entitled, 'The dangers of agricultural pessimism', reminded farmers that many others shared their experience of the worldwide depression. The Minister for Local Government and Public Health, Richard Mulcahy, speaking in Clondalkin, Co. Dublin, described the new Farmers Protection Association as 'a handful of farmers, some of whom never minded their business, endeavouring to disturb the thoughts of the hard working, industrious farming community, the mainstay of the country, by dragging them into false issues'.¹⁰¹ His comments were overtly critical of not just the individual agitators but

⁹⁷ Mary E. Daly, *The first department: a history of the department of agriculture* (Dublin, 2002) p. 145.

⁹⁸ Census of Ireland, 1911, online at <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai000105912/> accessed 28 Jul 2021.

⁹⁹ *Irish Times*, 1 & 13 Nov. 1930. .

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 19 Jan. & 24 Feb. 1931.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 9 Dec. 1930.

also the class of agitator, whom Mulcahy knew personally, from both his own political and revolutionary experience.

A joint meeting of Dublin County Council and the County Committee of Agriculture met in May 1931, at the request of the General Council of County Councils to consider the report of the De-Rating Commission. Joseph A. O'Neill and P.J. Kettle as appointees of the committee still had influence in matters of concern to farmers. They criticised the report as incomplete and irrelevant, and not fulfilling its mandate. The commission chairman had refused to hear submissions from Kettle or Belton, and they now requested a personal meeting with W.T Cosgrave. Calls for agricultural rate reliefs continued, with £12,263 in rates arrears in the two Balrothery collection districts.¹⁰² A deputation from the Farmers Protection Association, which included Swords landlord Elias Corbally met with Cosgrave and Mulcahy in July, had their grievances heard, but no specific progress was reported.¹⁰³ Cosgrave later wrote that conceding full de-rating in 1931 would have simply meant additional taxation and the destruction of local government, which was not an option.¹⁰⁴ De-rating and tariffs would continue to be farmers' issues that Patrick Belton would embrace and pursue well into the 1930s and will be examined in detail in the final chapter. The farmers now had a range of financial grievances that merged conveniently for lobbying and political agitation: annuities, de-rating and tariffs.

De-rating had its opponents, however, in the business community. The Association of Chambers of Commerce had come out against such relief as they would disproportionately benefit large farmers, not give any demonstrable stimulus to productivity, and leave too big a gap in tax revenue, given Ireland's dependency on agriculture.¹⁰⁵ Conversely, this had the potential to divide the farmers and ratepayers alliance.

¹⁰² Dublin County Council minute books, 28 May 1931, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/26).

¹⁰³ *Irish Times*, 20 Nov. 1930.

¹⁰⁴ William T. Cosgrave, 'De-rating of agricultural land', in *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, xxvi, No. 104 (1937), pp 648-654 at p. 652.

¹⁰⁵ *Drogheda Argus*, 19 July 1930.

Centre-periphery issues come to a head: removals, reviews and reforms, 1929-30

We have observed the tensions between centre and periphery from 1924 when the Ministry of Local Government set out its policy of structural reform, greater accountability and tighter management of local government. As the decade ended, Fingal experienced the culmination of this policy as troublesome or unreliable individuals were removed, the remaining rural district councils abolished and Dublin County Council restructured and its subsidiary boards refocused and streamlined.

At the annual meeting of the county council in July 1929, Joseph A. O'Neill and Mrs Cosgrave were re-elected as chair and vice-chair respectively, and Colm Lawless, son of Frank Lawless, as chairman of Balrothery R.D.C., became an ex-officio county councillor and replaced Thomas Smyth on all the committees on which he sat.¹⁰⁶ He had followed his father and grandfather into local government. In April 1929, his uncle, J.V. Lawless resigned his position as secretary to Dublin County Council, following the initiation of criminal proceedings by E.P. McCarron over alleged irregularities in the retention of fees by Lawless to the amount of £1,552 relating to the preparation of voters' lists in 1923. While Lawless faced charges of embezzlement and fraudulent conversion, his replacement as acting secretary quickly sought to clarify the unclear statutory situation on fees and entitlements.¹⁰⁷ This was the latest and potentially most serious development in the long running animus since 1916 between Lawless and McCarron. They represented two different political traditions in Ireland: Lawless a republican who fought in the struggle for independence, McCarron a career civil servant who had fulfilled his duties to the constitutional administration before and now after independence. Lawless pleaded not guilty in the Dublin criminal court with the defence that his actions were not deceptive as he was entitled to the money for the work undertaken, as was the practice before 1923. During the trial, the defence submitted correspondence from 1924 in evidence that highlighted McCarron's dismissive attitude to Lawless. Found guilty of fraudulent conversion, but not embezzlement, the judge sentenced him to eighteen months pending appeal.¹⁰⁸ When his case was heard a couple of months

¹⁰⁶ Dublin County Council minute books, 10 July 1929, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/26).

¹⁰⁷ *Drogheda Independent*, 6 & 20 Apr. 1929.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 27 July 1929.

later, a number of the charges were dismissed but a new trial was ordered on the count of fraudulent conversion. The charges, that related to expenses retained for costs associated with the preparation of voting registers in 1923, hinged on the matter of intent to defraud. Lawless always said he was prepared to repay any costs that he was not entitled to retain, but ill health had delayed his ability to do so, and he was later forced to resign his position. This offer, he claimed, was never communicated to the Department of Local Government by the county council. Found guilty, he appealed again and finally in January 1931 he was sentenced to twelve months.¹⁰⁹ After his release, Dublin County Council declined to pay Lawless his superannuation or pension, with the response that they ‘could not entertain the application’.¹¹⁰ By 1935, Lawless, now living modestly, and under the name Seamus Lawless, had become chairman of the Old I.R.A. and dedicated himself to pursuing pension claims, welfare entitlements and employment for Fingal brigade veterans of the revolutionary period. He called for the former government remount farm at Lusk, still let under conacre, to be redistributed among hard-pressed old I.R.A. men, now neglected and forgotten.¹¹¹ His old adversary E.P. McCarron was himself removed from his position in December 1936, following a disagreement over trust and confidences with the minister Seán T. O’Kelly. McCarron vigorously defended his position and record, John A. Costello pursued his case in the Dáil, but the dismissal stood.¹¹² McCarron had eventually removed from office James Lawless who had clashed with him repeatedly over fifteen years. As a revolutionary and a soldier, Lawless had rough edges but his commitment to that cause was genuine. His methods and practices as a council official were, however, out of step with what the new management under Cosgrave, O’Higgins and McCarron expected and demanded. The ongoing dissidence between the two serves as an interesting cameo to the centre-periphery struggle that was occurring between central and local government.

There were other instances in Fingal of those who did not adapt to the more rigorous standards set by the Free State government. At the end of the year, James Lawless’

¹⁰⁹ *Drogheda Argus*, 5 July 1930, *Irish Times*, 22 & 31 Jan. 1931.

¹¹⁰ Dublin County Council minute books, 25 July 1932, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/27).

¹¹¹ *Drogheda Independent*, 2 Feb., 14 Sept. & 7 Dec. 1935.

¹¹² Brendan O’Donoghue, ‘McCarron, Edward Patrick’, *Dictionary of Irish biography online* (Cambridge, 2014), online at <https://www.dib.ie/biography/mccarron-edward-patrick-a9569> accessed 9 Aug. 2021, licensed by <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>.

brother in law, R. J. Rooney, former chairman of Balrothery R.D.C. and now a county rate collector, was suspended for irregularities in his collection returns, with the case going to arbitration.¹¹³ He pleaded guilty in court to the embezzlement of £2,870 and sentenced to twelve months in prison, despite appeals for clemency based on his age of sixty years, thirty-one grandchildren and failing health. His fidelity bond covered the amount, and he blamed his 'downfall' on 'lax account management' during the War of Independence period. The judge referred specifically to his 'domestic extravagance'.¹¹⁴ Richard J. Rooney was one of the local elite political class, from a strong farming background, part of two of the leading nationalist dynasties in Fingal, carried away with power and its trappings. In September 1928, there had been several issues in relation to discrepancies in rates collections, which resulted in several resignations, including that of local I.R.A. leader in the War of Independence, Michael Rock.¹¹⁵

Institutions as well as individuals came under scrutiny and were earmarked for reform. Through 1929, Richard Mulcahy, Minister for Local Government and Public Health, pressed for the amalgamation of all the Dublin unions and the abolition of the remaining rural district councils. A review committee from Dublin County Council conferred with the Dublin Corporation commissioners on the government's proposals. They concluded that what the government envisaged was not a joint board of health, which they believed would be beneficial with the sharing of facilities, but a joint board of assistance. As this would be part of more populous city relief schemes, it would increase costs for rural county ratepayers. The committee was adamant that this should be a cost borne by central government as an unemployment payment and not a local relief charge. There were concerns too that some of the county rateable area would be sacrificed to the borough administrative area, reducing the county administrative size and its income. The report opposed the creation of a joint board of public assistance for both the county and county borough or city areas. When the Dublin City and County (Relief of the Poor) 1929 Bill was published, it was sufficiently amended from the earlier proposals with area specific relief works and

¹¹³ Dublin County Council minute books, 12 Dec. 1929 & 31 July 1930, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/DCC/01/25).

¹¹⁴ *Drogheda Independent*, 5 Apr. 1930. He died in 1956, aged 84 years.

¹¹⁵ Dublin County Council minute books, 25 Sept. 1928, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/25). Rooney was married into the Lawless family and a cousin of the Rooney family at Lusk.

cost allocations that the council rescinded their previous objections and accepted the new bill.¹¹⁶

When the Local Government (Dublin) Act 1930 came into effect on 17 July 1930, the rural district councils in County Dublin were finally abolished and their functions transferred to the county council and to the new boards of health and assistance for north and south Dublin. Rathmines and Pembroke transferred to the city administration and the former Unionist townships in coastal south Dublin was amalgamated with the new Dun Laoghaire borough, but remained part of Dublin County Council.¹¹⁷ This meant that the rural areas of County Dublin, and Fingal especially had to contend and compete with councillors representing the affluent coastal suburbs of south Dublin, with their urban priorities. It was a considerable distance travelled in terms of representative and political influence for the local polity in Fingal that was at its optimum when multiple layers of local government were introduced in 1898. Elections for the new council were set for 30 September 1930.

The twenty-four new county councillors met on 16 October at Rutland Square, at a meeting chaired by the outgoing retiring chairman Joseph A. O'Neill. It quickly became evident that the council divided straight down the middle. While Cumann na nGaedheal still did not officially contest the local election, there were six independent and non-party affiliated councillors who were known government supporters, who aligned with two Agricultural League and one Farmers' representative, and three from the United Citizens Party, representing the business and ratepayers interest. On the other side, led by six Labour party members, were four Fianna Fáil, one independent republican, P. J. Fogarty from Swords, and the independent, Andrew Cullen, from Dundrum. It was the beginning of political party alignments on Dublin County Council, with the origins in government versus anti-government interests, broadly reflecting the class divide of the ratepayers and the workers. Labour proposed P. J. Curran from Balbriggan for the chair, opposed by the Farmers representative, solicitor John J. Shiel, proposed by Patrick Belton. After a tie

¹¹⁶ Dublin County Council minute books, 27 June & 5 Sept. 1929, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/26).

¹¹⁷ *Local Government (Dublin) Act, 1930 (27/1930)*, online at <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1930/act/27/enacted/en/print#sec1> accessed 26 May 2020.

(12-12), Curran withdrew with Cullen proposed in his stead but another tie ensued, and O'Neill's casting vote elected Shiel. An attempt to postpone the election in these circumstances caused uproar when Cullen commented that 'there was no use because nobody had any chance of being elected unless they were members of Cumann na nGaedheal'. Belton, no stranger himself to political motions, proclaimed that the chamber was not the place for class politics. It was similar when John P. McCabe defeated Curran for vice-chairman, and most of the subsequent votes on committee membership were either unanimous or requiring the casting vote of the chair. Curran, Fogarty and Belton were elected unanimously to the new Dublin County Board of Health, with Belton also the county representative on both the governing body of U.C.D. and the General Council of County Councils, both high profile positions with national exposure and networking opportunities. Local union committees formed for the old Balrothery and North Dublin rural district areas, later reconstituted as boards of assistance, with several the defeated candidates co-opted.¹¹⁸ The divide on the council was effectively along class interests, those of ratepayers and the workers. When a Christmas relief work scheme for the unemployed paying £2 per week was proposed, Patrick Belton had it amended and reduced to 32 shillings per week, on a vote of 10-6.¹¹⁹ It benefitted 442 men in the north county, but in January, P.J. Fogarty felt the need to request that the department grant the county council the power to provide school meals and clothing for the children of those destitute due to unemployment.¹²⁰

While the north county area elected eleven of the twenty-four members, the four from the Blanchardstown – Castleknock – Celbridge electoral area were all from the old Celbridge rural district area, with only the seven Finglas – Balbriggan electoral area members representing regional Fingal interests. Curran had topped the poll, elected on the first count with Fogarty. Henry McCormack from Malahide was elected for the Labour party. The Agricultural League fielded six candidates, spread across the division, and secured the highest party vote. Long-term farmers' activists, P. J. Kettle in Swords and Andrew Mooney in Garristown polled poorly, but Patrick Belton secured their single seat on transfers. His ubiquitous capacity for political

¹¹⁸ Dublin County Council minute books, 16 Oct. 1930, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/26); *Drogheda Argus*, 23 Oct. & *Irish Times*, 25 Oct. 1930.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2 Dec. 1930, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/26).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26 Jan. 1931, (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/26).

involvement and exposure saw him elected at the same time to Dublin Corporation as part of the national group. James Tunney, a railway employee from Finglas won a seat for Fianna Fáil. The remaining councillors, James T. Ennis from Naul, whose family were graziers with a long history of political and agrarian activity and Henry Dardis were government supporters. The seven candidates elected from a field of eighteen were from across the Fingal area, and while detailed transfer data is not available, the indications are that transfers stayed local. Dardis, from Skerries, only polled 178 first preference votes, 360 short of the quota, lying tenth, but picked up transfers from three other local candidates in the town, including the veteran William Ganly.¹²¹ Fingal was represented by the three most spirited, vigorous and forceful members of the council: Curran, Belton and Fogarty. If Fingal lacked a voice in the Dáil, it certainly did not on Dublin County Council.

Another election looms, 1932

With an election imminent, Cumann na nGaedheal meetings in Fingal became more frequent. While the government party had strengthened its mandate in the second election in 1927, it had come in the Dublin County constituency at the expense of independents, as Fianna Fáil's vote only fell by two percentage points, and this was partly due to the loss of Patrick Belton's personal vote in Fingal.¹²² Fianna Fáil had since worked to develop party structures on the ground and increased the number of cumainn in the constituency from seventeen in 1930 to twenty-four in 1931.¹²³ When the campaign intensified the party's press adverts were as much anti Fianna Fáil as pro Cumann na nGaedheal. James Ennis, the party's only Fingal based candidate warned voters to be aware of de Valera, 'a shadowy and sentimental showman, leading a mythical party of hot air merchants'. Fianna Fáil campaigned in Fingal on developing tillage farming and introducing protective tariffs. Supported by P. J. Kettle and the C.D.F.A., independent John P. Cuffe described himself 'as a north county man to represent north county farmers, industry and labourers, lamenting the lack of grants and support for the area from the strangers who represented them in

¹²¹ *Irish Times*, 27 Sept. & 11 Oct. 1930.

¹²² Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918-92* (Dublin, 1982), pp 121 & 127. Between the June and September polls, the Fianna Fáil vote in County Dublin fell from twenty-three to twenty-one per cent while nationally it grew from twenty-six to thirty-five per cent.

¹²³ *Waterford News & Star*, 31 Oct. 1930 & *Irish Press*, 27 Oct. 1931.

the Dáil'. Labour's P. J. Curran advised people to vote for policies as well as personalities.¹²⁴

On 9 February 1932, a week before polling day, the Army Comrades Association was formed by ex-members of the National Army, under the leadership of Commandant Edmund 'Ned' Cronin, in anticipation of political retribution for the Civil War should de Valera and Fianna Fáil come to power in the election. Initially contemplated as a representative body for ex-army officers, and to commemorate fallen comrades, the A.C.A. was prepared to fulfil a more onerous role in an increasingly charged political environment. The election campaign had been peaceful, and no such eventuality arose.¹²⁵ What might happen when the results came in might be a different matter.

Conclusion

The 1920s and the first couple of years of the next decade were challenging years in Fingal, where the new normality, as we have seen from reports in the council minute books, was poverty for many and economic stagnation and struggle for most. The struggle between the centre and the periphery in the administration of local government remained, at times elevated to threats of dissolution for the junior partner. The humdrum of the local politics of funding and cutbacks was punctuated by local elections in 1925 and 1930, and the general election in 1927 that saw de Valera and Fianna Fáil take their seats in the Dáil for the first time. The arrival of a more substantial opposition in the Dáil sharpened political discourse and elevated the agrarian economic issues of agricultural rating, annuities and tariffs. The evolution of local politics saw the councils split into government and anti-government groups dominated by personalities on both sides. These groups pitted ratepayers against workers interests. Some local political families, like Ennis, Kettle and Rooney, reappeared after the years of conflict, while new personalities like P.J. Curran, Patrick Belton and P.J. Fogarty came to prominence. Fingal suffered from the lack of locally based T.D.s to represent them in the Dáil.

¹²⁴ *Drogheda Independent*, 6 & 13 Feb. 1932.

¹²⁵ Mike Cronin, 'Cronin, Edmund (Ned) ', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography*. (Cambridge, 2009).

The cleavage between Dublin County Council and the Department of Local Government and Public Health took a more personalised direction when the ongoing and escalating rift between E.P. McCarron and James Lawless led to the latter's dismissal. The divisions of the past, whether related to land, class, independence or the civil war, were never far from surfacing in Fingal or Fingal political life.

The structures of local government were a visible and tangible legacy of British rule that had delivered modest but undeniable improvements in living standards for the people of Fingal in terms of public health and sanitation, housing, welfare provision and local representation over the previous fifty years. They were the gateway to political influence before independence, where the local representatives and institutions such as Balrothery guardian and R.D.C. were the reality and only experience of government for many. It was their local democracy. They facilitated a modest access to local power and influence, and for some, like P.J. O'Neill, entry to the national political stage. The reforms of the 1920s were taking some of that away, and with it changing the nature of Fingal local politics.

Chapter 8

The evolution of Fingal politics under Fianna Fáil, 1932-48

When the votes were counted in the 1932 general election, Fianna Fáil secured seventy-two seats to Cumann na nGaedheal's fifty-seven, so the balance held by Labour, the Farmers Party and Independents was critical. After ten years, the electorate voted W.T. Cosgrave out of power on 9 March by 81 votes to 68. Dáil Éireann elected Eamon de Valera as president of the executive council for the first time.¹

This final chapter looks at the evolution of local politics in Fingal during the sixteen years of Fian Fáil government. Fianna Fáil's ascent to power gave confidence to their minority party presence on Dublin County Council and marked the origins of modern party alignments on that body. The council chamber increasingly became a political forum much to the disapproval of the majority ratepayers group who wanted to confine debate to purely council administrative business. This chapter will examine the potential challenges to democracy faced in the 1930s and 1940s from several foci of political or economic discontent including the Blueshirts, the I.R.A., right and left wing fringe groups and Christian crusade movements. Patrick Belton was involved in a number of these groups, which served to exaggerate their presence in Fingal. He embraced extra-parliamentary means to pursue his ideological and business objectives. Contemporary newspaper coverage suggests that such groups briefly captured the public imagination and were fleetingly a threat to the establishment.

The role, relevance, and nature of local government in Fingal was conspicuously challenged during this period. The chapter will consider the increasingly fractious divisions within the council and its continued difficult relationship with central government. This came to a head when Dublin County Council was dissolved in 1941. From 1937, Fingal returned two of the five County Dublin T.D.s, giving them a voice in the Dáil, which P.J. Fogarty regularly used to raise local Fingal issues.² The expansion of the Fianna Fáil organisation in Fingal helped cement Fogarty's

¹ *Dáil Debates*, vol. 41, no. 1, 9 Mar. 1932. The seven Labour T.D.s and three independents voted with Fianna Fáil to elect de Valera.

² *Ibid.*, vols. 69-105, 7 Oct. 1937 to 25 Apr. 1947. Fogarty was elected four times and served in the Dáil for ten years until his death and spoke 715 times in that period.

position on the council and in the Dáil. The impact of the Second World War and the Emergency brought challenges in terms of defending and feeding the country, coming so soon after the economic depression and the effects of the trade war with Britain.

By the war's end, Belton had died and Fogarty would soon suffer a public fall from grace. With local elections and the restoration of a reformed Dublin County Council postponed until 1948, there was a political hiatus in Fingal, with the expected improvements at the end of the emergency slow to materialise.

Crossing a line: Fianna Fáil in power and the party politicisation of the council chamber

In the 1932 general election, the eight-seat Dublin County constituency returned four Cumann na nGaedheal T.D.s, and the independent business candidate, John Good, who supported the government. This reflected the majority pro-treaty conservative preferences of the strong farmers of Fingal and the business and professional classes of the south county, where two-thirds of the population of the constituency resided. Fianna Fáil only won two seats, with twenty-nine per cent of the vote, considerably less than its forty-four per cent share nationally. There was only one Fingal-based T.D., P.J. Curran for Labour, who lived in Balbriggan. He was the last elected of the eight successful candidates, with less than one-third of a quota.³ The unsuccessful Fingal candidates included county councillor James T. Ennis, for Cumann na nGaedheal and Richard Duke (Fianna Fáil), a 1916 veteran who fought at Ashbourne. Long-time activist in agricultural politics, auctioneer and cattle dealer John P. Cuffe also failed to win a seat. Ennis and Cuffe came from influential political families in Fingal but found themselves eclipsed in a large eight-seat constituency that included the urban electorate of the former townships of Rathmines, Pembroke and Kingstown.

De Valera promptly announced his intentions to carry out his election promises: the suspension of the Public Safety Act, abolition of the oath of allegiance, the

³ Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918-92* (Dublin, 1982), p. 134; *Drogheda Independent*, 20 Feb. 1932; *Census of Population 1926*, Population of each county electoral division, online at https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/census1926results/volume1/C_1926_V1_T6.pdf accessed 4 Aug. 2021.

withholding of land annuities, the introduction of protective tariffs and the merging of the office of governor-general with that of the president. A new period in Ireland was dawning, and these policies would dominate and change society and the economy. It is important to note that the move to protectionism in 1932 under Fianna Fáil was consistent with a worldwide shift to protectionism after the crash of 1929 and in response to the Great Depression, with Irish tariff rates broadly similar to those in other European countries. It was only towards the end of the decade that they rose to higher levels.⁴

In his maiden speech in the Dáil, P. J. Curran articulated the priorities of many ordinary voters, when he said was more concerned with the ‘unfortunate worker trying to feed a wife and six children on a ten-shilling food ticket and looking for work’, than with the oath.⁵ Abolishing the Oath of Allegiance was a key election promise from de Valera in the election. He highlighted the lack of investment for the hosiery industry in Balbriggan, where he maintained that ‘the numbers employed could be doubled to over a thousand’. When national road grants were announced in the Dáil, ‘they sounded big, but by the time they got to the county level they were not so big’.⁶ As chairman of Balrothery board of assistance, he said he could make some efforts to alleviate hardship, but only within the stringent limits of departmental rules. We have seen in the previous chapters how Curran was uncompromising in using his positions on Balbriggan Town Council, Balrothery R.D.C. and Dublin County Council to create road works employment and protect relief measures against persistent opposition from government and ratepayer interests.

With the change in government, there was a more charged political atmosphere in the country. The evenly divided Dublin County Council now became an important forum for more overtly political discourse, extensively reported, as it had always been in the newspapers. This was especially the case for Fingal politics, now with only one locally based T.D. and no district council. Fianna Fáil councillors developed the habit of proposing congratulatory and supportive motions relating to the government. For example, a pledge of support in August 1932 for de Valera in the trade dispute

⁴ Kevin O’Rourke, ‘Independent Ireland in comparative perspective’, in *UCD Centre for Economic Research Working Paper Series; WP2016/20*, (Dublin, 2016).

⁵ *Drogheda Independent*, 14 May 1932.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9 July 1932.

with Britain was met with staunch opposition from Patrick Belton and the combined group of independent ratepayers and Cumann na nGaedheal supporters. This pattern went back and forth when at subsequent meetings each side would attempt to overturn the other's original resolution. It developed into a highly personalised and vitriolic rivalry between Fianna Fáil's P.J. Fogarty and Belton, who as leaders of the two factions came to dominate proceedings at council meetings.⁷ Belton's priorities were economic, while he accused Fogarty of always reverting to some matter of principle on patriotism or republicanism.⁸ Belton also clashed with Fianna Fáil's James Tunney over the manner of his [Belton's] departure from the party in 1927, with counter demands for apologies and accusations of slander.⁹ The preeminent political positions and forceful personalities of Fogarty and Belton were the driving forces behind the evolving party and political alignments on Dublin County Council. The workers and ratepayers sectoral alignment of the 1920s found a home in the formal parties that now represented their interests.

Having failed to win election to the Dáil in the Dublin North constituency, Patrick Belton used Dublin County Council as his public platform to continue promoting his agrarian reform demands. He attempted to halt the striking of a rate until the new government honoured its commitments on agricultural reliefs and the reallocation of retained annuities. He said if the farmer and the ratepayer could not pay, then there would be no option but to reduce the wages of the council road workers. His motions were ruled out of order as matters not relating to the business of the council. Eventually it was accepted that they were matters that did affect council business.¹⁰ Inability to pay rates had just resulted in some high profile and respected members of the local community appearing at Swords district court with decrees from Dublin County Council, which underlined Belton's argument.¹¹

⁷ Dublin County Council minute books, 19 Sept. 1932 (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/27); *Drogheda Independent*, 24 Sept. 1932. Fogarty alleged Belton's motives were dictated by 'a hatred of de Valera'.

⁸ *Drogheda Argus*, 24 Sept. 1932.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4 & 28 Nov. 1931. (Fingal County Archives, FCCA/CC/01/26).

¹⁰ *Drogheda Independent*, 28 May & 4 June 1932.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 14 May 1932. They included Christina Lawless, wife of Ned who had fought in 1916, farmer James Long, and merchant and former county cess collector, William Sneyd.

Agrarians and contrarians: rates, annuities and the Blueshirts, 1932-35

The early years of the de Valera administration were characterised by the emergence of a range of discontented groups. In Fingal, agrarian issues resurfaced and took centre stage in local council politics. The central issues were annuity payments and agricultural rates, rather than land redistribution. They were cost and profitability concerns for the stronger farmers. Land redistribution was a greater issue for smallholders and the landless.

Loan repayments to the British government for advances made to tenants to purchase their holdings under the Land Acts, known as annuities, were collected by the Free State government and remitted to Britain. A campaign to abolish annuity payments started by Peadar O'Donnell in 1925 became part of de Valera's election platform in 1932.¹² Land annuity payments accounted for some £3m in the early 1930s, in an economy where annual revenue was in the region of about £25m.¹³ About ten per cent of an average farmer's income was expended on annuity repayments, which as a fixed amount was more onerous in more difficult economic or market conditions. Collected by the Land Commission and paid into a purchase fund for remittance to Britain, they were guaranteed by the relevant local authority, which complicated matters as the council ratepayers, largely the farmers themselves, took up the slack for the defaulters.

At the end of June, de Valera kept his promise to withhold the payment of land annuities to the British government. The British countered within a fortnight with the imposition of a twenty per cent duty on about a third of Irish Free State exports to the United Kingdom, hitting agricultural exports, but especially the mainstay export of live cattle. After negotiations failed to resolve the issue, duties increased to forty per cent *ad valorem* on all Irish products. The Irish government responded in like terms on British imports in an economic trade war that dominated domestic life for the next six years. However, the Irish authorities still collected the annuities but retained them

¹² Deirdre McMahon, 'Land annuities', in S.J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, online at <https://www-oxfordreference-com.jproxy.nuim.ie/view/10.1093/acref/9780199234837.001.0001/acref-9780199234837-e-1047> accessed 8 Jan. 2022. O'Donnell was editor of the IRA newspaper An Phoblacht.

¹³ Donal Ó Drisceoil, 'When deV defaulted: the land annuities dispute, 1926-38', in *History Ireland*, iii 19 (2011) pp 42-45.

in Ireland, and farmers found themselves losing export markets, but still having to pay annuities and rates.¹⁴

Patrick Belton, who called for farmers to organise themselves when the tariffs were introduced, now questioned the legality of the annuity policy. The County Dublin Farmers Association hosted a large meeting at the Mansion House in September 1932, chaired by John Rooney from Lusk and it called for a national conference of ratepayers and farmers. There was not consensus on the annuities issue, with county councillor J. P. McCabe, a Blackrock based merchant, who described himself as ‘an unrepentant Redmondite’, adamant that the annuities must be paid. He was concerned with the possible legal threat to property title in the event of defaulting on annuity payments. At the resultant conference, the more moderate members curbed Belton’s militancy on annuities and agricultural rates; the graziers whose priority was their export markets supported them. The National Farmers and Ratepayers Association was formed the following month with the former leader of the Farmers’ party, Frank MacDermot, elected as president. From the outset, the association was riven by disagreement between militants and moderates, and between the political and the apolitical. MacDermot was happy not to pay annuities but drew the line at not paying rates. Some wanted farmer only membership, others wanted general ratepayer involvement. Some saw a movement based on issues alone, others as a vehicle for taking on the Fianna Fáil government. When the Dublin branch was set up in October, the prominence of the Army Comrades Association was notable.

The new organisation quickly absorbed the ailing Irish Farmers Union but was no more cohesive or organised. With political bias alienating Fianna Fáil farmer support, a rival but government-friendly organisation, the United Farmers Association was formed in July 1932.¹⁵ P.J. Kettle was a member of the standing committee. He was not a typical Fianna Fáil supporter, but as he was out of favour with Cumann na nGaedheal since 1927, he was prepared to get involved with any farmer organisations to further his cause.¹⁶ The County Dublin Farmers Association

¹⁴ Ryan, Raymond, ‘National farmers and ratepayers league’, in *Studia Hibernica* xxxiv (2006-7) pp 173-92; Kevin O’Rourke, ‘Burn everything British but their coal: the Anglo-Irish economic war of the 1930s’, in *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. li, no. 2 (1991), pp 357-366.

¹⁵ Raymond Ryan, ‘National farmers and ratepayers league’, in *Studia Hibernica* 34 (2006-7) pp 173-92; *Irish Independent*, 14 July & 28 Aug.; *Drogheda Independent*, 10 Sept. 1932. Belton maintained that tariffs were effectively the annuities in another form and therefore not paid twice.

¹⁶ *Drogheda Independent*, 7 Jan. 1933.

executive was now dominated by local Cumann na nGaedheal supporters of higher standing than Kettle, with John Rooney as chairman and James T. Ennis as secretary.¹⁷ By winter 1932, the economy had deteriorated further and drift toward political instability seemed more likely.¹⁸

Talks aimed at formalising the relationship between Cumann na nGaedheal and the National Farmers and Ratepayers League were disrupted by de Valera's election call on 2 January 1933 and prompted Frank MacDermot to form the independent Centre Party to contest the elections. After a campaign that was more ill-tempered and abrasive than the year before, Fianna Fáil returned with seventy-seven seats in the general election in February 1933, one seat short of an overall majority but a gain of five, putting de Valera in a stronger position than before and less reliant on the support of Labour and others. Fingal returned no members to the eighth Dáil, as Curran lost his seat to Fianna Fáil's Margaret Mary Pearse, sister of Pádraig Pearse. Fianna Fáil won three of the eight seats in Dublin County. Curran retired soon after from political life, resigning his seats on Dublin County Council and Balbriggan Town Council.¹⁹ The constituency was dominated by those with national profiles from the revolutionary period such as Fianna Fáil's Sean McEntee and Cumann na nGaedheal's Batt O'Connor and Gearóid O'Sullivan, as well as strong local candidates from Unionist business and traditions.²⁰ Henry Dockrell, Cumann na nGaedheal, the son of Sir Maurice and Lady Dockrell, had a formidable family political pedigree while John Good, a former chairman of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce was an independent T.D. in the business interest since 1923.²¹ All four Fingal based candidates lost even though they had significant local profiles on the county council and in farming organisations. Curran was an outgoing T.D., James Rooney (Centre Party) had been involved in the Easter Rising with his brother Edward, and his eldest brother John was a T.D. for the Farmers Party in 1923. James Ennis always had a difficult task trying to win the fifth seat for Cumann na nGaedheal. Thomas Mullen, a Fianna Fáil candidate was a teacher, living in Raheny

¹⁷ *Irish Times*, 9 Dec. 1932.

¹⁸ Mel Farrell, *Party politics in a new democracy: The Irish Free State* (London, 2017) p. 259.

¹⁹ *Drogheda Independent*, 18 Mar. & 1 Apr. 1933.

²⁰ Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918-92* (Dublin, 1982), p. 139-40.

²¹ Anthony White, *Irish parliamentarians: deputies and senators, 1918-2018* (Dublin, 2018), p. 152 & 222.

and with a notable War of Independence record.²² In such an electoral landscape, representation on local government bodies or through extra-institutional vehicles were the only options open to those who wished to pursue the issues and interests of the north county. The centre of power and influence had shifted to Leinster House. The only representation for the north county region in the Dáil was Patrick Belton. He was now a member of Cumann na nGaedheal and T.D. for the Dublin North city constituency, and he continued to prioritise the farmer interest.

With this new mandate de Valera moved to tackle the extra-parliamentary elements in Ireland that might threaten his progress, the Army Comrades Association and the I.R.A; as J.J. Lee states, the former by force and the latter by stealth.²³ The dismissal of Garda Commissioner Eoin O'Duffy, after alleged security breaches, were taken as a signal by both O'Duffy and some Cumann na nGaedheal supporters that some manner of purge was imminent. By July O'Duffy had become the leader of the A.C.A., now renamed the National Guard, and nicknamed 'the Blueshirts' due to the distinctive blue shirt uniform they began to wear. They espoused a broadly corporatist policy, and assumed the symbols and salutations of the popular European fascist movements, notably Mussolini's Italian 'Blackshirts'.²⁴ In September 1933, a defensive combination of government opponents brought a demoralised Cumann na nGaedheal, the fledgling agrarian activist Centre Party, and the growing Blueshirts movement together to form the United Ireland Party, or Fine Gael in Irish. O'Duffy was leader and Cosgrave was parliamentary leader. Coinciding with the closure of the British market for Irish cattle, the Blueshirts increasingly became an attractive vehicle for wealthy farmers to confront the government.²⁵ The Blueshirts stood for 'free speech, the defence of life and property and resistance to communism', with the appeal of youth, dynamism and purpose, and a range of social and cultural activities to escape the tedium of rural life while openly defying the government.²⁶ They had the potential to unite agrarian militants, disgruntled treatyites, an emerging right-

²² Anthony White, *Irish parliamentarians: deputies and senators, 1918-2018* (Dublin, 2018), p. 390.

²³ J. J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: politics and society* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 179.

²⁴ Mike Cronin, The Blueshirt movement, 1932-5: Ireland's fascists?, in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. xxx, no. 2 (1995), pp 311-332

²⁵ Brian Girvan, 'Republicanism of Irish society, 1932-48', in J. R. Hill (ed.) *A new history of Ireland VII, 1921-84* (Oxford, 2010) p. 133.

²⁶ *Irish Independent*, 21 July 1933, speech by Tom O'Higgins at Hibernian Hotel, Dublin.

wing faction in Ireland, and a rural youth looking for some form of fashionable activity.²⁷

The Blueshirts readily found support among the farming community in Fingal. O'Duffy held a joint Blueshirt and League of Youth rally in Balbriggan in February 1934, which began with a procession through the town. Two hundred additional Gardaí were drafted into the town. Michael Wade from the Cumann na nGaedheal branch in Balbriggan, a member of the County Dublin Committee of Agriculture and grazier James T. Ennis shared the platform with Belton, Ernest Blythe, Henry Dockrell and John A. Costello. The *Irish Independent* reported some 'free fights' on the edge of town but that the crowd dispersed peacefully after a night of fiery speeches challenging and disparaging de Valera and the government.²⁸ In May, Eoin O'Duffy appointed Belton to the national executive of Fine Gael and party spokesman on agriculture in the Dáil.²⁹ In June, Belton chaired a farmers' conference at the council offices at Parnell Square, wearing a Blueshirt uniform with no press admitted. In the following weeks, when campaigning for the local elections was at its height, there were scuffles and incidents at United Irish Party meetings, between Blueshirts and republican youths.³⁰ Local rivalry in Fingal had the potential to threaten violent confrontation on a couple of occasions. One of Belton's meetings in Swords, attended by thirty uniformed Blueshirt stewards, was shouted down by a rival meeting of some 200 Labour and Workers Union of Ireland supporters. Having traded insults for a while, the Blueshirts were booed as they marched out of the town. Swords always had a strong labour presence drawn from its agricultural labourer electorate. At Balbriggan Blueshirt women as well as men clashed with republicans returning from a Bodenstown Wolfe Tone commemoration, with Fogarty and Belton trading personal insults.³¹ In one case, in Skerries, three meetings took place close to each other at the same time, with insults traded and violence threatened but not materialising.³² The anti-annuity payment campaign, condoned by both Fine Gael

²⁷ Mel Farrell, *Party politics in a new democracy: the Irish Free State* (London, 2017) pp 264-5; Maurice Manning, *The blueshirts* (Dublin 1970) pp 69-71.

²⁸ *Irish Independent*, 24 Feb. & *Drogheda Independent*, 3 Mar. 1934.

²⁹ *Cork Examiner*, 8 Feb. 1934; *Irish Independent*, 28 May 1934.

³⁰ *Irish Times*, 1 & 11 June 1934.

³¹ *Drogheda Independent*, 19 May 1934.

³² *Ibid.*, 16 June 1934.

and the Blueshirts provided further opportunity for confrontation, with the disruption of seizures, sales and auctions.

The Land Act of October 1933 reduced annuity payments by 50%, provided support for those in arrears, increased the Land Commission purchase fund, and provided compensation for farmers whose land was appropriated. It was opposed by the Farmers and Ratepayers League, concerned about fixity of tenure, and fearful of land redistribution to Fianna Fáil supporters.³³ It did not lessen the calls for de-rating of agricultural land or full abolition of annuities. Councillor Richard Blake from Lucan and Patrick Belton intensified their attacks on the government at Dublin County Council calling constantly for relief for farmers.³⁴ When cattle licences were introduced in January 1934, Belton used his position as chairman of the National County Committees of Agriculture to voice his opposition to a move that would further reduce cattle prices.³⁵ The effects of the Economic War had already diminished cattle exports to the extent that the government was buying surplus beef for distribution at home.

The Farmers and Ratepayers League ultimately failed because it was permanently divided, large and small farmers had different issues and priorities, political biases and preferences were allowed to dominate, and the leadership lacked control over the autonomy of the branches. Absorption into a political entity such as the Centre Party and merging with Fine Gael deprived it of the focus needed to succeed as a sectoral pressure group. The County Dublin Farmers Association had been in existence for decades, controlled by the same small cohorts whose ultimate objective was their own welfare, protection and profit. They affiliated to and were involved in every organisation, farming or otherwise, that was of use or benefit to those objectives, and no cause was any greater than their cause. The removal of O'Duffy as leader of the Blueshirts in 1934 removed a level of protection for the organised and militant farmer campaigns.³⁶ Belton, however, continued his agrarian campaigning. He set up

³³ Raymond Ryan, 'National farmers and ratepayers league', in *Studia Hibernica* 34 (2006-7) pp 173-92, at p. 209.

³⁴ *Irish Times*, 30 Jan. & 29 May 1934.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 18 Jan. 1934;

³⁶ Raymond Ryan, 'Farmers, agriculture and politics in the Irish Free State', (Ph.D. thesis, U.C.C. 2005), p. 227.

the National Agricultural Association in January 1935 calling for a cessation to the payment of both annuities and agricultural rates.³⁷

Another incarnation of the County Dublin Farmers and Ratepayers Association emerged early in 1936. Laurence Roe, who had a court order against him for outstanding rates arrears for 1935, led a deputation with P. J. Kettle, John Rooney and Agnes McGrane to request extended payment terms from the council. They made the point that County Dublin had higher rates than the surrounding counties, whose farmers competed with them in the Dublin market. However, they had lower costs as they paid lower rates. Andrew Mooney had protested this same issue in Naul ten years earlier. In March 1936, Swords and Balbriggan district courts heard 340 cases related to rates arrears where the defence was simply the inability to pay. Joseph Kettle of Lispopple, brother of P. J. Kettle, said he had exhausted his savings, and he could pay annuities or rates but not both. At the end of the month, there were £89,000 arrears outstanding, about one-eighth of the total.³⁸ The council chairman, Patrick Belton, as a farmer himself, was more sympathetic than others.³⁹ When yet another Belton motion on the plight of farmers came before the council, Thomas Mullen of Fianna Fáil commented that one ‘almost expected to see farmers dying on the roadsides in the famine years, yet point-to-points, race meetings and football matches were never better attended by the farming community than at the present’.⁴⁰ Notwithstanding the difficulties that farmers were facing, this rhetoric underlined the class ideological difference between Fianna Fáil and the traditional conservative Fine Gael ratepayer alliance.

Alongside his assertions on behalf of the farming community, Belton was also expanding his business empire. As well as his political career on two councils and as a T.D, membership of multiple agricultural bodies, and his farming enterprise, Belton had begun to build houses on his lands at Drumcondra, Donnycarney and Artane, in an expanding development that would eventually include pubs and shops. He built over 120 houses between 1934 and 1939 and then further developed his licenced pub

³⁷ *Irish Independent*, 18 Jan. 1935.

³⁸ *Irish Times*, 14 & 28 Mar. & 4 Apr. 1936.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 14 & 20 Feb. & 10 Mar. 1936.

⁴⁰ *Irish Times*, 31 Mar. 1936.

business.⁴¹ He served four terms as chairman of Dublin County Council from 1934 to 1938 such was his energy, as was his capacity to embark on political crusades.

Divisions and diversions: politics in the council and Belton's crusades, 1933-38

The confrontations between the Blueshirts and republicans and Fianna Fáil supporters in the towns of Fingal were replicated in the county council chamber. The balancing of increased expenditure with falling rate receipts continued to dominate meetings from the beginning of 1933. Endless debates took place over the issue of local against central funding, the growing burden on ratepayers, increased relief demands from the boards of assistance, and growing costs and admissions at Grangegorman asylum. The chairman J.J. Shiel blamed the increasing board of health costs on complying with new government legislation on 'better housing for the labouring classes'.⁴² When the government reduced the agricultural grant in March 1933, after the council already committed to expenditure, there was uproar, with chairman J.J. Shiel calling the government behaviour 'dishonest'.⁴³ The council then repeatedly failed to strike a rate for the coming year. The dangers of further rates arrears came into focus when a tillage farmers' deputation, led by Laurence Roe, informed councillors that there was 'never such a time in history when agriculture was in such a bad condition', with the farmers 'reduced to absolute slavery'. The price of potatoes had fallen from 10 shillings per cwt (hundredweight) to 3s. 6d. a fall of two thirds in a market saturated by lack of its export channel.⁴⁴

Following the failure to strike a rate, Seán T. O'Kelly, Minister for Local Government and Public Health gave notice that he would use the courts rather than dissolve Dublin County Council. In the Dáil, Patrick Belton denounced the minister 'as playing England's game'.⁴⁵ In the meantime, the Munster and Leinster bank agreed to a £22,000 overdraft with the council to stop it from going bankrupt. Dublin County Council was not the only council in this predicament. The government issued writs of mandamus against Dublin, Cork, Tipperary and Kilkenny councils for failing to strike rates, to force them to comply with their statutory duty. The ten members

⁴¹ *Irish Times*, 18 Jan. 1934; 18 Feb. 1935; 9 Feb. & 3 Sept. 1936; 6 May & 9 Oct. 1937; 20 Dec. 1938.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 11 Apr. 1933.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 14 & 28 Mar. 1933.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 25 Apr. 1933.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 26 & 29 Apr. 1933.

who voted against striking a rate in Dublin County Council were named as special defendants, including Belton, James Ennis and Henry Dardis. The court found for the state, including costs, and the four councils were ordered to pass the requisite budgets.⁴⁶ Belton was in court again in October but this time at a military tribunal, when arrested, along with leading Blueshirt, Commandant Ned Cronin, for his involvement in the interference in the sale of cattle seized in lieu of unpaid annuities.⁴⁷

The division in the chamber was still substantially between the ratepayer and the farmers on one side, and government and labour interests on the other, notwithstanding other political differences. Sometimes, however, there were unexpected alliances. In August 1933, P.J. Fogarty took issue with new restrictions imposed by the Local Appointments Commission, calling it the 'centralising of bribery and corruption'. Belton supported him, candidly revealing his outlook, adding that 'the sons and daughters of Dublin ratepayers should be given preference' for jobs in the council.⁴⁸ There was some economic optimism for Fingal towards the end of 1932, when momentum gathered behind a campaign to have one of the new planned sugar beet processing factories located at Lusk. It proved futile as they were located elsewhere in the country.⁴⁹

When the local elections took place in 1934, Dublin County Council was finely divided with twelve United Irish Party-Fine Gael, ten Fianna Fáil and two independents. At the first meeting, the retiring John Shiel, who lost his seat, presided at a stormy seven-hour session at which Patrick Belton was elected chairman, with Thomas Morgan Good as his deputy. Excluded by the numbers from the board of health, the Fianna Fail councillors, led by P. J. Fogarty, proceeded thereafter to be as obstructive as possible.⁵⁰ James Ennis became chair of the county board of health, and Belton stepped aside on the agriculture committee, saying he had enough roles to contend with and Richard Blake took his place.⁵¹ Balbriggan Town Council also had a ratepayer/Fine Gael majority, with Phyllis Fullam of Fine Gael, daughter of Dr

⁴⁶ *Irish Times*, 5 May 1933. Writs of mandamus enforce statutory obligations or public duties.

⁴⁷ *Northern Whig & Belfast Post*, 4 Oct. 1933.

⁴⁸ *Irish Times*, 29 Aug. 1933.

⁴⁹ *Drogheda Independent*, 1 Oct. & 3 Dec. 1932.

⁵⁰ *Irish Times*, 13 June, 7, 11 & 18 July 1934.

⁵¹ *Drogheda Independent*, 21 July & 4 Aug. 1934.

William Fullam, former Balrothery medical officer, elected as its first female member.⁵² The rivalry in the council chamber escalated when Belton brought two Gardaí to a meeting after P.J. Fogarty threatened him with a blackthorn stick for attempting to change the times of the meetings from Monday evenings to afternoons. This would have been a more difficult time for Fianna Fáil and Labour members to attend, which they bitterly resented complaining it was a deliberate attempt to undermine them. When challenged, Fogarty retorted that Belton ‘couldn’t fire a shot in 1916 but could now use a knuckleduster’. This and subsequent meetings descended into standoff farces with the Fianna Fáil members ceremoniously walking out.⁵³ The council was in danger of becoming a personal platform for venting Fogarty and Belton’s mutual animosity. A comment by de Valera after the local election results described the opposition as using local councils to obstruct the government and attempting to militarise Irish politics.⁵⁴ It betrayed his suspicions of local government but aptly described what was happening on Dublin County Council.

The poor showing in the local elections put O’Duffy under pressure as leader of Fine Gael. Following attempts to remove him, O’Duffy resigned as leader on 18 September 1934. Cronin replaced him as leader of the Blueshirts. Belton defended O’Duffy and attempted to broker a compromise but Fine Gael expelled him for his efforts. The party saw Belton as no great loss, due to ‘his natural inclination to play a lone hand’.⁵⁵ After an initial musing that he might retire from political life, ‘tired of the vile rottenness of politics’, Belton spent the next eight months with O’Duffy, planning a new political party, the National Corporate Party, launched at the Mansion House in June 1935 with some 500 delegates, but little other interest or coverage.⁵⁶ Despite his admiration and support for O’Duffy, they had a strained relationship and although touted in the newspapers as the prospective leader, Belton never actually joined the new party.⁵⁷ Belton’s contact with the Blueshirts did not

⁵² *Drogheda Independent*, 30 June 1934; civil registration birth record, Phyllis Fullam, Dublin South, Q4, 1897, vol. 2, p. 678.

⁵³ *Strabane Chronicle*, 4 Aug. 1934; *Drogheda Independent*, 18 Aug., 1 & 8 Sept. 1934. The knuckleduster was a popular weapon among Blueshirt members in street fights with republicans.

⁵⁴ *Weekly Irish Times*, 7 July 1934.

⁵⁵ Maurice Manning, *The Blueshirts* (Dublin 1970) p. 155.

⁵⁶ Maurice Manning, *The Blueshirts* (Dublin 1970) pp 167-8, 198.

⁵⁷ Martin White, ‘The greenshirts: fascism in the Irish Free State, 1935-45’, (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 2004), p. 53; *Irish Press*, 20 Nov. 1934.

end there, however. As farmer arrests for non-payment of annuities increased, he chaired a joint conference of Blueshirts and the County Dublin Farmers Association to set up an 'agricultural and Blueshirt prisoners' fund'. Agnes McGrane, whose family had been involved in the farming group for many years, was appointed as secretary.⁵⁸ The network of families and farming organisations in Fingal was still as interconnected as ever, and under the Blueshirt umbrella, overtly more political.

A review of issues through 1935 and 1936 give a sense of what councillors faced. The costs of unemployment assistance were set by the government but were not met by central funding, and the shortfall had to be taken up by the ratepayers while at the same time the agricultural grants were reduced to cover annuity arrears. For some on the council, like William Rollins, this was the fault of the communist element in the Fianna Fáil government.⁵⁹ There was a sustained media campaign through late 1935 on the 'dangers of communism and where it lurked in Ireland'.⁶⁰ The council made modest progress in housing and sanitation schemes and there were plans to develop a seaside tourist area between Howth and Skerries.

After two years, Dublin County Council had another election in 1936. A turnout of around fifty-five per cent saw yet another finely divided chamber, with eleven Fianna Fáil, eleven United Irish Party/Fine Gael, and two independents, one of whom was Patrick Belton. Public confidence in the council was low following some recent decisions and court cases.⁶¹ Belton was re-elected to the chair for another term, and Fingal secured fair representation on the United Irish Party dominated subsidiary boards, which included female appointees Mary Ennis from Naul, a sister of James, and Phyllis Fulham from Balbriggan, both from old Parnellite political families now in the Fine Gael fold.⁶²

By 1936, the Blueshirt movement was all but dead if not buried, but the Spanish civil war presented an opportunity for the diehards around O'Duffy to reactivate their ideological cause. As well as a diversion from local issues, it provided a platform and

⁵⁸ *Irish Times*, 3 & 20 Nov. 1934.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 26 Feb. 1935.

⁶⁰ *Drogheda Independent*, 3, 10, 17 & 24 Aug. 1935. The newspaper carried a month long series of anti-communist articles written by clergy.

⁶¹ *Irish Times*, 26 & 30 May 1936. St Canices Public Utility Society in Finglas sued Belton for calling them 'swindlers', and the council had refused planning permission for a new factory in Balbriggan on traffic access grounds.

⁶² *Irish Times*, 9 July 1936.

opportunity for some to pursue political crusades that might not otherwise have presented themselves. Patrick Belton pursued such a crusade, bringing the ideologies and episodes that were alarming Europe to an Irish audience. Reports in the press of atrocities perpetrated on the Catholic clergy in Spain initiated a groundswell of support for the nationalist rebel forces under General Franco. In September 1936, Belton and Lord ffrench set up a branch of the Irish Christian Front at Fairview in Dublin in support of the Spanish stand against communism. James Tunney did likewise at Finglas.⁶³ At an Irish Christian Front meeting at Balbriggan in September 1936, P.J. Curran warned that ‘communism had come very close to Balbriggan’ and made claims of ‘Russian money coming into Fingal’. Local priest, Fr Joyce, in the chair, held up a copy of the pamphlet *Moscow News*, on sale in Dublin for two pence, which promoted the ‘unchristian Soviet Union’ should this be a quote? ⁶⁴ According to Belton, ‘if it were necessary to be a fascist to defend Christianity then I am a fascist.’⁶⁵ The I.C.F. had such support from large farmers that some feared it was another front for the Blueshirts and Fine Gael, and so its members were referred to as ‘the Blueshirts in tweed’.⁶⁶

Many of Belton’s colleagues on Dublin County Council were conspicuously involved at meetings which passed motions critical of ‘communistic Spain’.⁶⁷ 30,000 people attended an Irish Christian Front demonstration in College Green in October, led by a parade of 2,000 Catholic boy scouts. As the new president of the organisation, Belton said that they stood ‘alongside Germany and Italy as the bulwarks against communism in Europe’.⁶⁸ In Galway, he called for ‘an economic system based on the Papal Encyclicals’. This was not that far removed from O’Duffy’s Catholic corporatist model.⁶⁹ Within a month, a national church gate collection organised with the help of the Catholic hierarchy raised £30,000, and Belton travelled to Spain with £14,000 worth of Irish manufactured medical supplies.

⁶³ *Irish Times*, 15 Sept. & 19 Oct. 1936 & 5 Mar. 1955. Lord ffrench was married to Mary Margaret Corbally, of Rathbeale Hall, Swords whose father and brother were Balrothery guardians and district councillors.

⁶⁴ *Irish Independent*, 12 Sept. & *Irish Press*, 14 Sept. 1936.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 12 Oct. 1936.

⁶⁶ J. Bowyer Bell, ‘Ireland and the Spanish civil war’, 1936-39, in *Studia Hibernica*, 9 (1969) pp 137-63.

⁶⁷ *Irish Times*, 1 Sept. 1936.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 26 Oct. 1936.

⁶⁹ J. Bowyer Bell, ‘Ireland and the Spanish civil war’, 1936-39, in *Studia Hibernica*, 9 (1969) pp 137-63.

Never one to miss a publicity opportunity he met with Franco while dressed in his Dublin Corporation robes, and met with senior churchmen at the Irish College at Salamanca. Belton, however, stopped short of asking Irishmen to fight in Spain, while his former comrade led 700 men to fight with the *Bandera* Irish Brigade. Two hundred other Irishmen fought with republican socialist Frank Ryan in their self-styled Connolly Column in the international brigade.⁷⁰

The Irish left saw the Irish Christian Front as a real threat. *The Worker* newspaper ridiculed Belton as ‘the he-man from the midlands, the acknowledged leader of the ‘New Christianity’ in this island’.⁷¹ Noting his chequered party political history of expulsions, it specifically attacked Belton’s record as a developer, his reputation for underpaying his labourers and his poor relations with trade unions and concluded that the organisation was a ‘fascist racket’, composed of business and political careerists, hiding behind a smokescreen of Christianity, to exploit the working class.⁷² That could equally apply to the ratepayers and farmers who Belton so steadfastly represented. Peadar O’Donnell, likewise, viewed those in the Irish Christian Front as opportunists exploiting the Spanish civil war as ‘a battle for Christianity’ and the promotion of an anti-communist Catholic mass movement, while secretly pursuing a fascist agenda.⁷³ There was even a ballad written by left-wing songwriter, Diarmuid Fitzpatrick under the penname Somhairle MacAlastair, referring to Belton paying less than union rates to his construction workers, one shilling instead of 1s. 3d.

A bob an hour, says Paddy, a bob an hour says he
You would not be a Christian, if I gave you one and three
Stick it says O’Duffy, stick it, Pat, says he
Anti-Christian Bolshie stuff, paying one and three.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ J. Bowyer Bell, ‘Ireland and the Spanish civil war’, 1936-39, in *Studia Hibernica*, 9 (1969) p. 153.

⁷¹ *The Irish Worker*, 5 Oct. 1936.

⁷² Donal Fallon, ‘All’s loud on the Christian front’, on *Come here to me blog*, at <https://comeheretome.com/2014/12/17/all-loud-on-the-christian-front/> accessed 13 June 2020.

⁷³ Ute Anna Mittermaier, ‘Irish literary responses to the Spanish civil war, with particular reference to Peadar O’Donnell’s *Salud! An Irishman in Spain* (1937), in Susana Belenguer, Ciaran Cosgrove & James Whiston (eds.) *Living the death of democracy in Spain: the civil war and its aftermath* (Abingdon, 2015).

⁷⁴ H. Gustav Klaus, ‘The authorship of the Somhairle Macalastair ballads’, in *Irish University Review*, 26:1 (1996), pp 107-117. A ‘bob’ is slang for a shilling, one and three is one shilling and threepence (written as 1s 3d or 1/3). There was 12 pence per shilling and twenty shillings in a pound

Belton's anti-Semitism also came to the fore. He wrote to Cardinal McRory on the dangers of Jews and their connections with communism.⁷⁵ He made derogatory remarks in the Dáil about Jewish businessmen in Dublin and the need to curb 'undesirable Jewish immigration', complaining that the country was 'gathering up all the scattered Jews of Europe'.⁷⁶ At the Dublin board of health, he blocked an exemption for Jewish Kosher slaughter methods from the new slaughterhouse by-laws, maintaining that 'as a Christian country all the practices here should be Christian'.⁷⁷

In February 1937, at the Irish Christian Front convention, Belton had a very public disagreement with Liam de Roiste over the political direction the movement was taking, which prompted all the Cork delegates to walk out.⁷⁸ There was also an amount of £12,000 of the £44,000 collected never properly accounted for, and uncertainty that the aid destined for injured soldiers was not diverted to munitions purchases when distributed in Spain.⁷⁹ Bell contends that the Irish Christian Front did not produce the militant mass movement that Belton wanted, partly because he was a poor speaker, and partly because he needed a new script. The audience was bored and the middle class embarrassed by the repeated rhetoric and exhortations.⁸⁰ However, J.J. Lee has contended that the conditions did exist in Ireland in the first half of the 1930s that were conducive to the growth of fascism.⁸¹ Belton himself was aware of this when at a meeting in Ardee he declared that the 'breeding ground of communism in Ireland is the bad conditions in industry and agriculture, and in the cities, towns and rural areas. The emissaries of communism were in the country, and many, if not red are a dash of dark pink'.⁸² The unfulfilled expectations of the first decade and a half of independence created conditions that might have been exploited. The political success of Cumann na nGaedheal in maintaining law and order and a functioning democracy had come at the price of economic stagnation. Depression

⁷⁵ Fearghal McGarry, *Irish politics and the Spanish civil war* (Cork, 1999), p. 128.

⁷⁶ *Dáil Debates*, vol. 50, no. 6, 31 Jan. 1934 & vol. 65, no. 10, 10 Mar. 1937. The former questioned why Jewish businessmen should be making rosary beads in a Dublin factory.

⁷⁷ *Drogheda Independent*, 23 Jan. 1937. When the lights went out during the meeting, Belton joked that it was a Jewish plot.

⁷⁸ *Irish Times*, 4 Feb. 1936.

⁷⁹ Hilari Ragner, *Gunpowder and incense: the Catholic Church and the Spanish civil war*, [English translation], (London, 2007), p.74.

⁸⁰ J. Bowyer Bell, 'Ireland and the Spanish civil war', 1936-39, in *Studia Hibernica*, 9 (1969) pp 137-63.

⁸¹ J. J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: politics and society* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 182.

⁸² *Drogheda Independent*, 16 Jan. 1937.

and the economic war with Britain restrained de Valera's modest welfare and development plans. Belton and his supporters in the farming community of Fingal were unlikely agents. Ireland's would be 'fascists' were driven by self-interest and divided by factionalism that allowed them to be outmanoeuvred by de Valera and Fianna Fáil. Incidentally Belton, the defender against communism, narrowly lost his Dáil seat at the next election, to a Labour candidate who shared the platform with him on the Christian crusade at Balbriggan, Gerard McGowan.⁸³

Counting the costs: the end of the economic war and more elections, 1937-38

De Valera's dismantling of the Anglo Irish Treaty had been boosted by the abdication crisis in Britain in 1936, which allowed him to remove references to the crown in the 1922 constitution, passing the Executive Authority (External Relations) Act, and paved the way for a new constitution presented on 1 May 1937. Negotiations with the British government led to the resolution of the trading impasse with the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in April 1938, which ended the economic war and returned the treaty ports to the Irish government. It included the cessation of annuity payments for a one-off consideration of £10,000,000. The economic war had marginally reduced dependency on the United Kingdom market and allowed a modest development of Irish industry and agriculture based on import substitution and government intervention. Social policy finally included the disadvantaged, and livestock exports, while still the biggest sector was no longer the dominant economic policy concern. It also fostered a sense of national unity against Britain, but at a considerable sacrifice, notwithstanding the objections of those sectors who were losing the most, the large farmers and some international trading business.⁸⁴ Consumer prices had risen, and unemployment and emigration had soared since the start of the Economic War in 1932. The policy of self-sufficiency in agriculture and protectionism in industry only worked to the point of home market saturation, and then stagnated. When exports fell, the knock-on effect damaged the viability of the small farm economy. Export revenue was crucial to fund industrial development and raw material purchase, and the ambitious housing and welfare policies upon which Fianna Fáil relied to stay in power. The country still depended

⁸³ *Irish Times*, 15 Sept. & 19 Oct. 1936.

⁸⁴ Brian Girvan, 'Republicanism of Irish society, 1932-48', in J. R. Hill (ed.) *A new history of Ireland vii, 1921-84* (Oxford, 2010) p. 136-7.

on Britain as an export market, a source of imports, and as an emigration and labour market. Half of all exports remained in the livestock trade, a similar proportion to 1931.⁸⁵ The proximity to and reliance on the agricultural export trade to Britain in Fingal had left its large farmer and grazier community counting the cost in lost profits, savings and earnings, and there was no prospect in sight of an immediate improvement in fortunes. Smaller tillage farmers in Fingal did not suffer as badly. Their rates and annuity payments were less onerous, and they had an expanding market in Dublin city.

Just before Christmas 1936, local employment prospects for some labourers improved in the south of Fingal when the Minister for Industry and Commerce confirmed that the building of a new aerodrome at the former R.A.F. site at Collinstown, near Swords, would commence in January 1937 and the government purchased an additional hundred acres for the development.⁸⁶ The estimated cost of construction was £150,000, with half borne by the government, 38.5% by Dublin Corporation and the remainder of £17,250 by Dublin County Council. It would employ about 500 men over eighteen months. At the outset, there were industrial relations problems with rumours that local men employed on ground clearance work and trench digging were paid as little as twenty-nine shillings per week. The Dublin trades council confirmed a rate of forty-two shillings for a forty-seven hour week but the official union rate was fifty-five shillings for a forty-four hour week, so there were calls for the rate to be increased. As the men were only paid for actual time worked, any delay due to rain or stoppages would not be paid, so the average was often lower than forty-two shillings⁸⁷ By May, unresolved issues culminated in a strike at the airport, halting the works. The strike ended when the board of works agreed to reinstate the men at forty-two shillings per week following threats by Dublin County Council to withhold its contribution.⁸⁸ The councillors had little to lose. The airport work had deprived some of them of their farm labourers, and now they and the ratepayers were footing the unemployment assistance for the men on strike. There was further disruption to the work when union tradesmen refused to

⁸⁵ J. J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: politics and society* (Cambridge, 1989), pp 186-93.

⁸⁶ *Irish Times*, 22 Dec. 1936 & 19 Jan. 1937.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 26 Jan. & 24 Feb.; *Irish Press*, 2 Feb.; *Irish Independent* 20 Jan. 1937. P.J. Fogarty said at a council meeting that it was 42 shillings and four pence per week.

⁸⁸ *Drogheda Independent*, 8 May & 12 June 1937; *Irish Times* 22 June 1937.

work with the local non-union labourers. This was against background calls by P.J. Fogarty for the employment of more local men, especially in winter when local agricultural labour work was at its minimal.⁸⁹ Even a positive development like the airport construction was, therefore, not without its challenges in the closed labour market of the late 1930s.

When the general election was called in 1937, one man was more prepared than most. Councillor P.J. Fogarty was a turf accountant and insurance broker, with offices in Balbriggan and Swords, and a wide range of client contacts. He had taken to advertising his services in the press, accompanied by a picture of himself, and a tagline comment on the news of the day, in the style of election notices.⁹⁰ Gerard McGowan, a Balbriggan solicitor and the Labour candidate, called for local Fingal candidates to be elected, and warned the working voters 'not to be tricked by Fianna Fáil again'. Paddy Belton returned to the constituency, as an outgoing Independent T.D. from Dublin North East, due to the recent boundary revisions, joined by his close ally on Dublin County Council and running mate, John Corr. Fogarty and Belton renewed their council rivalry on the hustings, with Belton's language that of a man who sounded tired and somewhat withdrawn.⁹¹ With the constituency reduced to five seats from eight, there were losers, and only three T.D.s held their seats: Brady for Fianna Fáil, and Dockrell and Lavery for Fine Gael, all from the south county. Fogarty and McGowan were elected from the north county area, with the latter beating Belton for the last seat on Fogarty's surplus. Having failed so many times to get the better of his adversary on the council, Fogarty now passed him on his way to the Dáil.⁹² De Valera retained power, but just short of an overall majority, with the number of Dáil seats reduced from 153 to 138. On the same day as the election, a referendum approved the new constitution with fifty-five per cent of the vote.⁹³

During his ten-year Dáil career to 1947, Fogarty regularly raised questions regarding the acquisition and division of grazing estates in the northern part of Fingal, where he

⁸⁹ *Irish Press*, 4 Nov. & 9 Dec. 1937.

⁹⁰ *Drogheda Independent*, 13 Mar. 1937.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 19 June 1937.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 10 July 1937.

⁹³ J. J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: politics and society* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 202; Polling day was 1 July 1937.

claimed in 1938 that some 30,000 acres of fertile land could be distributed to landless men and uneconomic holders to address poverty and unemployment.⁹⁴ He called for the redistribution of smaller estates of untenanted land such as that of Mary J. Lyons at Ballyboghal, a farm of only eighty acres, and Joseph Christie's similar sized holding at Swords.⁹⁵ He criticised the slow progress of the Land Commission. His target was all grazing lands, pointing out that the labour intensive market gardening enterprises in Rush were confined to three to four acre holdings.⁹⁶

Irish Land Commission returns for the year ended 31 March 1938 indicate that there was 36,924 acres in County Dublin vested in the Land Commission under the 1923-36 Land Acts yet to be revested in tenant purchasers. This amounted to about seventeen per cent of the land in the county. In addition to this, the Land Commission had acquired or inspected a total of 26,610 acres of untenanted land.⁹⁷ 12,037 acres of this was yet to be divided. Newspaper reports only contain isolated cases of discontent or agitation, and it appears that most references to land division are from T.D.s making representations on behalf on individuals rather than groups. Changes in occupancy of holdings in the Valuation Office records show only a small number of estates divided exclusively among smallholders, with most transferred to existing larger tenants. Small transfers took place on the former largest estates but at later dates: the Cobbe estate at Donabate in 1940 and 1946, Evans at Portrane in 1947, Holmpatrick at Skerries in 1944 and 1945 and Trimlestown in Turvey, Donabate in 1936.⁹⁸ The Land Commission did not acquire the Palmer estate in Rush until 1964.⁹⁹ However, as elsewhere, land questions continued to be a popular cause for politicians to make political capital and gain electoral advantage.

In June 1938, Gerald McGowan warned in the Dáil of industrial issues when site clearance finished and building construction commenced at the airport, with the increased involvement of craft trades unions. He raised persistent complaints about the number of 'Cork and Kerry accents' heard on site, and the fact that the

⁹⁴ *Dáil Debates*, vol. 71, no. 1, 27 Apr. 1938.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 71, no. 6, 1 May. 1938.

⁹⁶ *Dáil Debates*, vol. 75, no. 10, 28 Apr. 1939.

⁹⁷ Irish Land Commission report for the year from 1 Apr. 1937 to 31 Mar. 1938 and for the period ended 31 Mar. 1938 (Dublin, 1938). This amount of untenanted land exceeded that reported in 1906.

⁹⁸ Balrothery revision books post 1922, various (Valuation Office).

⁹⁹ P.F. Whearity, unpublished paper, 'The rise and fall of a great estate: a case study of Kenure Estate, Rush, County Dublin', unpublished paper, (National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2008).

parliamentary secretary for the department responsible was the member for Cork.¹⁰⁰ In August when the main contractor started, most of the local men were laid off.¹⁰¹ Apart from future employment opportunities, the immediate vicinity in north County Dublin benefitted from ancillary investments linked to the airport including roads upgrades and water schemes, despite farmer complaints that it was they who were paying for everything.¹⁰²

The government suffered a surprise defeat following a vote on the civil service arbitration board in June 1938, and de Valera called a snap election so that the government would no longer be at ‘the mercy of sectional interests’, and in the hope that Fianna Fáil would be returned with an overall majority.¹⁰³ In the County Dublin constituency, Thomas Mullen won the Fianna Fáil seat back from Labour, and Patrick Belton, now in the Fine Gael fold again, won the second seat for the party alongside the outgoing Henry Dockrell. Brady and Fogarty held their Fianna Fáil seats. Fogarty increased his first preference vote by twenty-seven per cent on the 1937 poll.¹⁰⁴ During the general election campaign, Belton’s close Fine Gael colleague on Dublin County Council, Richard Blake died and attempts to co-opt a replacement produced what the *Irish Times* called the stormiest meeting in the history of the council. Arguments over the legalities of co-optation prevented Robert Holland, a Fine Gael building contractor, who had fought at Marrowbone Lane in 1916 and in the War of Independence, from succeeding Blake.¹⁰⁵ At the annual meeting on 28 June 1938, Patrick Belton declined to go forward for a fifth term in the chair, and eventually independent John Corr, Belton’s colleague on the committee of the Irish Christian Front, prevailed thanks to Fianna Fáil support. Belton declared himself unable to congratulate him as such an arrangement ‘disrespected the electorate that had sent him there’. Eventually, on 19 July, the council co-opted Holland.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ *Drogheda Independent*, 4 June 1938.

¹⁰¹ *Irish Independent*, 6 Aug. 1938.

¹⁰² *Evening Herald*, 1 May & *Irish Press*, 4 Oct. 1939.

¹⁰³ *Irish Times*, 28 May 1938.

¹⁰⁴ Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918-92* (Dublin, 1982), p. 151.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Holland witness statement, (Military Archives, B.M.H. W.S. 280). Holland was one of the Fianna Éireann boy scouts at the arms landing in Howth in July 1914.

¹⁰⁶ *Irish Times*, 8, 14 & 28 June & 19 July 1938; *Drogheda Independent*, 2 July 1938.

Emergency measures: Europe at war and Dublin County Council in trouble, 1939-45

In December 1938, in an attempt to reduce its rates, the chairman of Balbriggan Town Commissioners, P.J. Fogarty T.D. proposed that it should abolish itself, and transfer all its responsibilities to Dublin County Council to save money. The other members, mostly independent local businessmen who did not wish to lose their influence, called for a local ballot on the matter.¹⁰⁷ Events were overtaken by the publication of the Greater Dublin Tribunal report, which recommended the abolition of all the existing local government bodies and their replacement with a single metropolitan borough, with one urban and two regional rural management areas. There was broad initial support for the plans, on the basis that it would improve services and reduce costs, but some of the senior councillors, led by J.P. McCabe, thought the erosion of democracy and representation too high a price. That there was such immediate endorsement might indicate the financial helplessness felt by some councillors, or a growing fatigue with the increasingly adversarial nature of local government politics, constantly at odds both within the chamber and with central government.¹⁰⁸ The government did not welcome the findings because a strong authority would have made it more independent of the department. Dublin Corporation had reservations on financial grounds, which allowed the government to modify the recommendations in what became the County Management Act 1940.¹⁰⁹ Broadly, those who supported the fuller measures were from the professional class who saw the benefits of the efficiencies and effectiveness of regional planning, with opposition from the larger political parties and the civil servants suspicious of any loss of political control, or the costs of compensation in compulsory purchase mechanisms. This ensured a greatly diluted plan in 1943 with the result that Dublin did not put a proper metropolitan plan in place until 1957.¹¹⁰

The government passed the Offences against the State Act, and the Treason Act in response to the resurgence in I.R.A. activity in Britain and at home in 1939.¹¹¹ This

¹⁰⁷ *Drogheda Independent*, 3 Dec. 1938.

¹⁰⁸ *Irish Times*, 19 & 20 Dec. 1938; 10 Jan. 1939.

¹⁰⁹ County Management Act, 1940/12 [Éire] (13 June 1940).

¹¹⁰ David Dickson, *Dublin and the making of a capital city* (London, 2014) pp 509-10.

¹¹¹ Treason Act, 1939/10 [Éire] (30 May 1939) & Offences against the State Act, 1939/13 [Éire] (14 June 1939).

ignited a series of political rows on Dublin County Council with Fine Gael calling for the withdrawal of the legislation. The Fogarty-Belton personal rivalry re-surfaced when the former pointedly asked about the financial connections between the County Dublin Farmers Association and the Irish Christian Front. When the chair intervened, Belton merely replied with a shout of 'Up Franco'.¹¹² At the annual meeting, Belton ran again for the chair, but he was unsuccessful. Fianna Fáil members also voted to elect the long-serving James Ennis of Fine Gael, who had worked successfully with colleagues and adversaries for many years as chair of the subsidiary boards.¹¹³

When the war broke out and de Valera declared an emergency, confirmed neutrality and passed the Emergency Powers Act, 1939, there was a low-key reaction on Dublin County Council. Belton asked about war preparations and the county secretary confirmed their coordination role under the recently passed Air Raid Precautions (A.R.P.) Act 1939.¹¹⁴ Others were only concerned as to whether councillors would be entitled to additional petrol allowances to attend meetings. A system of parish councils was soon set up under local authority coordination, which also included the boy scouts, the Red Cross, and the Local Service Force (L.S.F.). Their priorities were training for emergencies and the provision of food supplies.¹¹⁵ P.J. Fogarty had different preparations for the war. He opened a new billiards club in Swords, with an opening offer of membership at six shillings for six months, where one could 'join the club and forget the war'.¹¹⁶ With an eye on opportunity as well as duty, James Dickie pledged the support and cooperation of the County Dublin Farmers Association for the government emergency measures provided they agreed to remunerative pricing and other protections for farmers' incomes. As the war progressed, they repeated their calls, supported by Dublin County Council, for the de-rating of agricultural land, the write-off of arrears and the provision of credit, so that the farmers could play their part in producing food for the country.¹¹⁷ It did not take long, however, for the consequences of the war in Europe to take their effect in

¹¹² *Irish Times*, 21 Feb., 28 Mar. & 18 Apr. 1939.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 27 June 1939.

¹¹⁴ Air Raid Precautions Act, 1939/21 [Éire] (26 July 1939) & Emergency Powers Act, 1939/28 [Éire] (3 Sept. 1939).

¹¹⁵ *Irish Times*, 26 Sept. 1939; 10 Aug. & 5 Nov. 1940.

¹¹⁶ *Drogheda Independent*, 25 Nov. 1939.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23 Sept. 1939 & *Irish Times*, 29 Oct. 1940.

Ireland, which, of course, was only coming out of the stagnation of the six years of economic war.

At the beginning of 1940, P.S. Doyle, chairman of the Dublin Board of Assistance warned that the estimate for the coming year would be £483,293, up £101,663 (+27%) with the cost of living aggravated by the war, rising unemployment, housing and welfare commitments and an increase in the numbers of sick, poor, and deserted families. The county demand was £36,268 of that amount, with anticipated rates of 22 s. per £1 valuation of property.¹¹⁸ When P.J. Rutledge, the new Minister for Local Government and Public Health introduced the County Management Bill to the Dáil, he said it was not the right time to implement the recommendations of the tribunal report. Instead, he proposed the merger of both city and county under a single city manager, with two assistants responsible for the county and Dun Laoghaire borough areas. Belton condemned the move as 'monstrous', accusing the minister of attempting to change the machinery of administration of a body for which he had no authority.¹¹⁹ When enacted, P.J. Herton, the city manager, extended his responsibility to the county as well, and the secretary of Dublin County Council, P.J. Murphy took on one of the assistant manager roles, removing a range of responsibilities from the elected councillors.¹²⁰ The assistance estimate decreased for the next year, 1941-42, due mainly to emigration to Britain, and men who left the unemployment register to join the defence forces.¹²¹

It is perhaps appropriate that in a decade where the county council found itself perennially occupied with the rates question that its demise originated with an investigation into defaulters among the councillors themselves. A court case in Lucan in April 1941 raised the issue of some councillors who had arrears of rates, followed by speculation at council meetings and in the press as to who they were.¹²² In July an audit found £198,918 of uncollected rates, identified two councillors in arrears, and some minor accounting discrepancies, mainly to do with lodgement delays. A full inquiry into the Balrothery Board of Assistance and the County Board of Health followed, conducted by a local government inspector and former city

¹¹⁸ *Irish Times*, 18 Jan. 1940.

¹¹⁹ *Irish Times*, 7 Mar. 1940.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 6 Dec. 1940.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 16 Jan. 1941.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 29 Apr. 1941.

commissioner in the 1920s, James McLysaght. The inquiry replicated the acrimony of the council chamber and proved the sad indictment of what the council had become, driven by embittered personalities. Patrick Belton appeared as a ratepayer rather than on behalf of the council, and was scathing in his criticism of ‘irresponsibility and extravagance’ by the council for providing a level of services beyond its means. P. J. Fogarty lamented that council business had become ‘nothing more than a political wrangle’ in recent years, and that ‘every encouragement not to pay rates was given by certain parties’, as he referred to ‘a former chairman with rates outstanding’. The pair clashed at the inquiry over allegations of favouritism in the appointment of Dr Richard Belton as a county medical officer, Fogarty alleging his father was involved. James Ennis believed that Belton had insinuated he was the defaulter. He claimed it was his deceased father, also named James, and that his own estate affairs were proper, and that the actual ratepayer liable was his mother.¹²³ The result of the inquiry was the dissolution of Dublin County Council and the two subsidiary boards on 26 September 1941, and their replacement with a commissioner, D. J. O’Donovan, who took over control of all three bodies.¹²⁴ Only the county agricultural committee remained. The perceived decline in reputation and standards on the council had caught up with its members, and they were finally redundant.¹²⁵ Local politics in Fingal had fallen from the administrative autonomy and influence it enjoyed in the first decade of the twentieth century to the point where its political elite was removed and its local government entrusted to outsiders. The evolution of local politics had regressed from the more respectable status and local prominence of the 1899 councils to this discordant and increasingly irrelevant assembly in 1941.

As the elected councillors departed from office, another group of local public figures accepted appointments to a range of positions as part of the military structure to aid the civil power in the event of invasion. The Local Security Force, or L.S.F, established as an auxiliary police force in May 1940, operated under the joint

¹²³ *Irish Times*, 5, 8, 15 & 22 July & 2, 7, 19 & 26 Aug. 1941; *Drogheda Independent*, 2 Aug. 1941.

¹²⁴ *Dáil Debates*, 29 Apr. 1942, vol. 86, no.9; 21 Feb. 1951, vol. 124, no.3 & 8 Mar. 1951, vol. 124, no. 10. O’Donovan was a local government inspector with the first Dáil department of local government in 1920, was dismissed in 1923 during the civil war and not reinstated until 1928. He was later dismissed as secretary of the Department of Social Welfare, for ‘persistent failure’ to obey the instructions of the minister in relation to a disciplinary matter of an officer in his department.

¹²⁵ *Irish Times*, 4 & 7 Oct. 1941.

administration of the military, the Gardaí, and the county commissioner. In January 1941, it divided into two groups, one of which came under direct military control as the L.D.F. (Local Defence Force).¹²⁶ Colm Lawless, Charles Gallen Jr and W.F. Cumiskey were a younger generation on the threshold of local service, whose fathers had been public representatives, working alongside experienced ex-military men like Lord Holmpatrick, who was a liaison officer with the county air raid precautions service, or A.R.P.¹²⁷

A few months after the appointment of the commissioner, the *Irish Times* columnist ‘Scrutator’ published an editorial opinion, which is a helpful analysis of the challenges in local government administration at the time. It outlined the changes in Dublin County Council, particularly its dissolution and the highly public inquiry about its ‘dirty linen’. While it welcomed the appointment of county managers and the suspension of local authorities in the pursuit of efficiency, it was highly critical of a mere centralisation of local inefficiencies to the Department of Local Government and Public Health, due to the incomplete enactment of the intended legislation. Responsibility and accountability were needed, and if not from local elected representatives, then from local commissioners, but not, he emphasised, to be hidden in the bureaucracy of the civil service. It further called for better coordination and harnessing of the potential for local volunteerism and participation through the network of parish councils, formalised through Emergency Powers Orders and in the forthcoming County Management Bill. The secretary to the department, Brian O’Nolan penned a spirited rebuttal on behalf of the minister, ‘deprecating the publication of such mischievous, uninformed and tendentious discourse on public affairs’, and was quick to point out the improvements made by commissioner O’Donovan, particularly the reduction in rates.¹²⁸ The level of arrears more than halved in two years, board of assistance demands reduced and the rate was brought down to an average of 14s. 10d. in the county area. Part of the savings was due to shortages in road working material, with shortages in tar due to import restrictions,

¹²⁶ Michael Kennedy & Victor Laing (eds.), *The Irish Defence Forces 1940–1949, The Chief of Staff’s Reports* (Dublin, 2011), p. 4.

¹²⁷ *Irish Times*, 4 Jan. 1941 & 15 Sept. 1942.

¹²⁸ *Irish Times*, 26 Jan. & 25 Mar. 1942. O’Nolan was a prolific author writing novels under the pen name of Flann O’Brien, and as the satirist Myles na gCopaleen.

and in stone due to a shortage of blasting gelignite. The true cost of the savings translated into a serious deterioration in the condition of roads.¹²⁹

The *Irish Times* kept up its scrutiny of local government, in a teasing article entitled ‘marionettes’, criticising the new Dublin administration as ‘unworkable’ and only creating a multiplicity of authorities and independent staffs. The minister replied in a long, forensic and pedantic letter, mostly correcting minute facts and details, that the intention was never to amalgamate but to unify the management structures. The author of the original article, ‘Civis’, reverted that the complicated reply from the minister reflected how complicated the whole endeavour had become. This correspondence, however, reveals the overriding objective of the government to control local administration, with the added benefit of reduced criticism from empty council chambers.¹³⁰

When reform legislation was introduced in early 1945, the minister Sean McEntee confirmed the postponement of local elections within the Dublin region until 1946 or 1948, until the new structures and boundaries were in place. The Local Government (Dublin) Bill envisaged the restoration of elected councils, underpinned by the investment of over £5,000,000 for urgent housing, water, sewerage and road schemes, delayed and curtailed due to the war. Mulcahy accused the government of politicising the councils and thus hampering the progress of normal business through unnecessary partisan division.¹³¹ De Valera confirmed Mulcahy’s assertion when he held the presidential and local elections on the same day, 14 June 1945, to suit the electoral needs of Fianna Fáil.¹³² In the absence of council meetings and councillors, commissioner D.J. O’Donovan and his team conducted all the business of the Dublin County Council. The monthly meeting was effectively an announcement, almost in the form of a press conference, of the various reports, recommendations, and schemes in hand. He forewarned an expectant public that any post-war improvements would come at a cost. A 1*d.* increase in the rural rate yielded £1,500 for investment, but in the borough yielded £9,500. If they wanted the same services as the city, there would be a price to be paid.¹³³ In the absence of councillors and

¹²⁹ *Irish Times*, 23 Feb. 1943.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 26 & 29 Jan. 1944.

¹³¹ *Irish Times*, 23 Feb. 1945.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 14 June 1945.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 24 Nov. 1945.

their clientelist tendencies, the realities of cost management and responsible local government were unambiguously impressed upon the electorate.

Censorship and paper shortages reduced newspaper coverage and quantity significantly during wartime. The weekly *Drogheda Independent* was reduced from sixteen pages in 1939 to four pages by 1942, and then to fifteen per cent of its pre-war length under additional government restrictions. At two pages per week, the *Drogheda Independent* effectively became an advertisement sheet, as it tried to remain solvent. By 1944, almost a full broadsheet page of adverts was for cinema and dances, indicating the priorities for at least part of the population.¹³⁴ In County Dublin during the emergency years, there was no local government forum for public discourse and the main local print media was reduced to subsistence. Political life in Fingal was at the equivalent of a standstill.

Without a public debating forum, local politicians maintained their presence and influence through involvement in local pressure groups. Henry Dardis in Skerries led a deputation of the town improvements committee to meet with the commissioner to press for investment for works in the town. John Monks did similar for the town of Rush, seeking funds for harbour improvements, lighting and drainage.¹³⁵ The *Irish Times* contended that this absence of local political activity, other than at general election time could lead to ‘a loss of interest that was too high a price for supposed administrative efficiencies’. It noted that ‘citizens had ceased to take any active or intelligent interest in the conduct of civic affairs, complacently accepting the decrees of central and local bureaucracies’. With the local elections postponed to 1948, the time was overdue to implement the reforms and return to democratic structures, elections, and debates.¹³⁶

As the war continued, those most hard-pressed included farm labourers, who began to organise themselves through the agricultural workers’ section of the Workers Union of Ireland led by James Larkin Jr. In 1943, he began recruiting members at meetings in north County Dublin, thirty years after his father had done so with the I.T.G.W.U. One-third of the agricultural workforce in County Dublin were

¹³⁴ *Drogheda Independent*, 2 May 1942 & 25 Mar. 1944.

¹³⁵ *Irish Times*, 21 Apr. 1945; *Drogheda Independent*, 19 Jan. 1946.

¹³⁶ *Irish Times*, 11 Nov. 1946.

labourers, an occupation perennially characterised by low pay, poor working conditions, bad housing and low social status, but difficult to organise due to the personal nature of the employer-employee relationship, and the scattered distribution of members.¹³⁷ By August 1944, Larkin claimed most of the Fingal labourers as members and called a strike at harvest time. Matters were resolved in an agreement with the recently formed Dublin Agricultural Association, which recommended a wages increase. John Rooney, president of the separate Irish Farmers Federation, shrewdly commented ‘that if the government put the farmers in a position to pay a better wage, then they would be pleased to do so’.¹³⁸ Patrick Belton agreed that ‘progressive agriculture could only succeed when agricultural workers were on the same pay as other workers’.¹³⁹ Nonetheless, he refused to accept the recommendation of the Dublin Agricultural Association and the workers on his 400-acre farm at Killiney and at Drumcondra remained on strike. Picketers targeted and stopped his produce at the Dublin markets as the dispute continued on his farms. He took out newspaper adverts declaring that ‘there could be food or strikes but not both’.¹⁴⁰ Belton wrote a public letter to de Valera seeking his advice as to what he should do in the light of food shortages and the potential loss of ‘his’ harvest due to the continuing strike.¹⁴¹ By the start of November Belton announced that the strike at Killiney was over and that his farm ‘was working normally now’, although Sean Dunne of the Workers’ Union of Ireland disputed this.¹⁴² Notwithstanding his lack of compliance on their wages recommendation, when the Dublin Agricultural Association formed into a national organisation, they elected Belton elected as their president, with the veteran farmer’s activist P.J. Kettle joining the committee.¹⁴³

An expectedly low-key wartime general election in 1943 saw Fianna Fáil lose ten seats, coincidentally the gain achieved by the new agrarian party Clann na Talmhan, focussed on small farmer issues in the west of Ireland. De Valera had attempted to extend the term of the Dáil for another year, but W.T. Cosgrave had refused to support such a measure. De Valera survived with a minority government as Clann na

¹³⁷ Daniel G. Bradley, ‘Speeding the plough: the formation of the Federation of Rural Workers, 1944-1948’, in *Saothar: Irish Labour History Society*, vol. 11 (1986), pp 39-53.

¹³⁸ *Irish Times*, 1, 5, 7, 10 & 16 Aug. 1944.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 10 Aug. 1944.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 8 Sept, 17, 21, 23 & 26 Oct. 1944.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6 & 26 Oct. 1944.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 1 Nov. 1944.

¹⁴³ *Irish Press*, 26 Oct. 1944.

Talmhan, whose preference was for a national coalition, were reluctant either to support Fine Gael or force another election.¹⁴⁴ The Dublin County constituency returned two Fianna Fáil, and two Fine Gael candidates while Labour took back the seat it lost in 1938. Fogarty, Brady and Dockrell all retained their seats. Liam Cosgrave, son of W. T. Cosgrave took the second Fine Gael seat and James Tunney the Labour seat. Senator Tunney, a former Fianna Fáil councillor, was a trade unionist who officially joined the Labour party in December 1942. Patrick Belton, again running as an independent lost his seat. Mary Ennis, the Balbriggan town councillor polled very poorly for Fine Gael. De Valera called another election within twelve months to restore the majority. Fine Gael, now under the leadership of Richard Mulcahy, lost more seats, with the party reduced to only thirty T.D.s. Tunney's career as a Labour T.D. was short-lived as Patrick Joseph (P.J.) Burke, a former psychiatric nurse living in Donabate, took the seat for Fianna Fáil and retained it for almost the next thirty years.¹⁴⁵ Belton persisted as an Independent candidate, but it was to be his last attempt, as he died in January 1945, with an *Irish Times* obituary describing him as 'the stormy petrel of Irish politics.'¹⁴⁶

Meanwhile his political adversary in Fingal, P.J. Fogarty sought to associate himself with expansion plans at Dublin airport by asking Minister Lemass about plans to develop the site after the war.¹⁴⁷ Fogarty was soon to be in the news for less favourable reasons than taking credit for local investment. Accused in the Dáil of influencing the transfer of a Garda sergeant in the Fingal area, he then appeared in court on a charge of providing misleading information regarding lorry permits and petrol allowances for a constituent in Naul. Defended by senior counsel Sean McBride and solicitor Christopher McGonigle, he lost both his case and appeal.¹⁴⁸ The following year, 1946, he was in court again, on a more serious suite of charges, indecent assault and interfering with a witness in the same case. When the witness withdrew her allegations, the full extent of the alleged interference came out, implicating an army officer, Major Joseph Flanagan and his wife. The witness Mrs

¹⁴⁴ Tony Varley and Peter Moser, 'Clann na Talmhan, Ireland's last farmers' party' in *History Ireland*, 3:2 (1995), pp 39-43.

¹⁴⁵ Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918-92* (Dublin, 1982) p.157 & 163; *Irish Times*, 18 Dec. 1942; Anthony White, *Irish parliamentarians: deputies and senators, 1918-2018* (Dublin, 2018), p. 59.

¹⁴⁶ *Irish Times*, 31 Jan. 1945.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 16 Jan. 1945; *Irish Press*, 15 May 1945; *Cork Examiner*, 21 July 1945.

¹⁴⁸ *Irish Times*, 21 Apr. & 19 May 1945.

Maureen Brown of Swords alleged the assault after Fogarty had given her a lift in his car from the town to her mother's house. McBride and McGonigle were again on the defence team. P. J. Rutledge, a government minister and practising barrister appeared on behalf of the Flanagans. Mrs Brown's husband was a soldier; she had worked for Mrs Flanagan, who had 'advised' her of the implications of proceeding with such a case. The witness proved unreliable and had previous convictions for fraud, but the case still went to trial for conspiracy, and attempting to interfere with a witness to pervert the course of justice. McBride maintained it was an attempt to blackmail Fogarty. John A. Costello, a Fine Gael T.D. and future Taoiseach, appeared for Fogarty. All the charges against the three defendants were set aside. The judge dismissed prosecution calls for a jury trial, and ruled no case to answer as persuasion itself was not an offence in law.¹⁴⁹ There was extensive press coverage, which must have been a difficult period for the normally ebullient Fogarty. He died in May of the following year at the age of forty-four years from tuberculosis.¹⁵⁰

Post-war optimism, de Valera's demise and the return of the council, 1945-48

Another farm strike occurred in March 1946 when 2,000 members of the W.U.I. went on strike at 300 farms in Dublin, again over pay and conditions, including the demand for an annual week's holiday. As this dispute ended in agreement, the rival and smaller Union of Agricultural Workers went on strike for the same concessions. In this confusion, the second strike was unsuccessful and both it and the organisation petered out. The Federation of Rural Workers, affiliated with the W.U.I. was formed soon after to concentrate on serving the sector.¹⁵¹ Industrial jobs and emigration had depleted the agricultural labour workforce to the extent that volunteers from the city came to help save the harvest that year in the north county when threatened by poor weather. The voluntary structures of the A.R.P. were successfully mobilised, supplemented by the release of road workers by the council, the First Battalion Old I.R.A., and students from U.C.D. Farmers, however, still complained that labourers looking for high wages was not helping matters.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ *Drogheda Independent*, 6, 13, 20, & 27 Apr.; 4 May; 13 July & 10 Aug. 1946.

¹⁵⁰ Death record, Patrick Fogarty, (G.R.O., Dublin North, 1947, Q2/2/248); *Irish Times*, 3 May & *Drogheda Independent*, 10 May 1947.

¹⁵¹ Daniel G. Bradley, 'Speeding the plough: The formation of the Federation of Rural Workers, 1944-1948', in *Saothar: Irish Labour History Society*, vol. 11 (1986), pp. 39-53.

¹⁵² *Irish Times*, 9 & 10 Sept. 1946.

The post-war rebuilding programme included 1,316 new council houses in Fingal, which was expected to grow with the expansion of the airport, and rehousing schemes for the city.¹⁵³ Among seventy-five applications to open new factories in north County Dublin was an industrial development in Finglas with paint and disinfectant factories, light engineering, and a large bakery. There was an application to open a holiday camp at Skerries, which would cater for 500 guests.¹⁵⁴ The good news widely heralded in the newspapers of announcements of projects to regenerate and rebuild the economy after the war gave the impression of a swift improvement in fortunes, but the same problems remained for the majority of people particularly the agricultural labourers of Fingal. Sean Dunne, secretary of the increasingly active Federation of Rural Workers, wrote to the *Drogheda Independent* condemning the attitude of the Agricultural Association of Ireland, persistently claiming inability to pay wages or grant the conditions expected by labourers. He pointed out that ‘since 1939 prices had doubled but wages only increased by about seventy-five per cent’.¹⁵⁵

In addition to the review of local government planning structures, the D.L.G.P.H. itself was radically overhauled when split into three new departments, Local Government, Health and Social Welfare.¹⁵⁶ The new secretary to the Department of Social Welfare was D.J. O’Donovan. The assistant commissioner at Dublin County Council, Proinsias MacBearnaid succeeded O’Donovan, which prompted renewed calls for the restoration of an elected council.¹⁵⁷ In the meantime, the vacant Fogarty seat required a by-election. Insurance broker Eamonn Rooney, son of veteran politician John Rooney, took a page out of Fogarty’s book, advertising his business with his photograph, then promoting himself as the Fine Gael candidate, ‘a Dublin man for Dublin County’.¹⁵⁸ The by-election took on a national rather than a local significance when the leader of the newly formed Clann na Poblachta party, Seán McBride, successfully took the seat. Some extraordinary local connections around the contest illustrate the proximal nature of political networks in Ireland. McBride,

¹⁵³ *Irish Times*, 6 Feb. 1946.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6 Sept. 1947.

¹⁵⁵ *Drogheda Independent*, 1 Feb. 1947.

¹⁵⁶ *Irish Times*, 19 July 1946; *Public Health Bill*, 35/1945.

¹⁵⁷ *Drogheda Independent*, 1 Feb. & 5 July 1947. MacBearnaid was previously acting county manager for County Louth.

¹⁵⁸ *Drogheda Independent*, 18 Oct. 1947; Anthony White, *Irish parliamentarians: deputies and senators, 1918-2018* (Dublin, 2018), p. 488.

and his election agent, solicitor Christopher McGonagle, had defended Fogarty at court in 1946. McGonagle was originally from Swords, and a nephew of the former Dublin county coroner and I.P.P. election agent, Christopher Friery, who was Maud Gonne McBride's solicitor. In 1916, he made personal representations for the release of Eamonn Rooney's uncles after their arrest and internment.¹⁵⁹ They were different generations of the same small political elite of Fingal and Dublin that continuously retained their status and influence. The Fianna Fáil vote halved with McBride elected on transfers from the Labour candidate, Sean Dunne from the Federation of Rural Workers.¹⁶⁰

Fianna Fáil had performed poorly in the 1945 local elections even though they were held on the same day as the Presidential election to maximise the appeal of the popular Fianna Fáil candidate Sean T. O'Kelly.¹⁶¹ The growth of Clann na Poblachta caused sufficient apprehension in Fianna Fáil to delay the general election until the constituencies could be revised to optimise the government party's vote. The Dublin constituencies were long overdue a revision and under-represented for some time. Revisions had little urgency when Fianna Fáil was winning elections, and the opposition parties disorganised, but this was a new threat. As soon as this was completed, de Valera attempted to stop Clann na Poblachta momentum by calling a winter election for 4 February 1948.¹⁶² The Labour party had already started to organise its county branches for both the general and the expected local elections. Gerard McGowan, the former Labour T.D., was involved in setting up a Clann na Poblachta branch in Balbriggan. P.J. Burke took charge of Fianna Fáil affairs in the new three-seat constituency, which now included a predominantly rural electorate stretching from Balbriggan through Lucan to Tallaght but excluding the rest of the south county. Burke was well aware of this when he led a deputation of men from across Fingal to meet the Minister for Lands, who were aggrieved with delays in Land Commission sales. They also identified outstanding sites of untenanted land that they sought, including the still undivided former Remount Farm at Lusk.¹⁶³ The

¹⁵⁹ Anna McBride-White & A. Norman Jeffares (eds.), *The Gonne-Yeats letters, 1893-1938* (New York, 1993), p. 228; *Internment of Irish prisoners the United Kingdom*, (T.N.A., Home Office, HO 144/1456/313106). Friery represented Maud Gonne, Sean McBride's mother in the famous Collis libel case in 1900.

¹⁶⁰ *Drogheda Independent*, 18 Nov. 1947.

¹⁶¹ *Irish Times*, 20 June and *Cork Examiner*, 21 June 1945.

¹⁶² J. J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: politics and society* (Cambridge, 1989), pp 293-4.

¹⁶³ *Drogheda Independent*, 15, 22 & 29 Nov. & 13 Dec. 1947; *Irish Press*, 23 Jan. 1948.

latter had been sought locally for redistribution since burned by the I.R.A. in 1921 and was commented on during the Menton case in 1929. The report of the Irish Land Commission for the year ended 31 March 1949 showed that of the 28,778 acres of untenanted land identified in the county in 1906 for potential redistribution, there were still 10,934 acres undivided.¹⁶⁴

In the general election, Burke for Fianna Fáil, Rooney for Fine Gael and Dunne for Labour, were elected. Christopher McGonagle narrowly lost the seat that Clann na Poblachta had won the year before, but the party won sufficient seats to be part of the first inter-party government led by John A. Costello of Fine Gael.¹⁶⁵ The austerity of the 'Emergency' had not abated and heavy snows in the spring of 1947, after the poor harvest of 1946, led to widespread lay-offs, shortages of food and fuel, and the introduction of bread rationing. The optimism of the announcements of building programmes had not yet translated into tangible benefits, against rising prices, falling incomes and higher taxes. Amid a multitude of strikes in 1947-48, the ballot box registered the electorate's dissatisfaction.¹⁶⁶ When Fine Gael leader Richard Mulcahy stepped aside, John A. Costello was elected Taoiseach by 75-70, with the support of all but a couple of independents. Fianna Fáil remained the largest party in the Dáil with sixty-seven seats and secured 41.9 per cent of the vote but were ten percentage points below where they had been in 1938. This reflected the growing social unrest, economic stagnation and discontent after the war years and, as Richard Dunphy puts it, 'a sense of weariness with the party and its leaders'.¹⁶⁷

New local government structures were established ahead of the reconstitution of Dublin County Council, including in May 1948 the Dublin Housing Consultative Council, under a director of housing, with expert members like building contractor George Crampton, Leo Crawford, representing the construction unions, and Maurice

¹⁶⁴ Irish Land Commission, *Report of the Irish Land Commission for the year ended 31 March 1949*, (Dublin, 1949) p.30.

¹⁶⁵ Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918-92* (Dublin, 1982) p. 171.

¹⁶⁶ Brian Girvan, 'Republicanisation of Irish society, 1932-48', in J. R. Hill (ed.) *A new history of Ireland VII, 1921-84* (Oxford, 2010) pp 158-9; J. H. Whyte, 'To the declaration of the republic and the Ireland act', in J. R. Hill (ed.) *A new history of Ireland vii, 1921-84* (Oxford, 2010) pp 264-9.

¹⁶⁷ Richard Dunphy, *The making of Fianna Fáil power in Ireland, 1923-1948* (Oxford, 1995), p. 304.

Dockrell, Fine Gael T.D. for Dublin South, and director of a large builders' providers.¹⁶⁸

The long-awaited local elections took place on 6 October 1948 for the restored Dublin County Council. The twenty-five-member council was returned with ten Fine Gael, nine Fianna Fáil, two independents and two each for Labour and Clann na Poblachta. The Balrothery area had five councillors elected, with Sean Dunne T.D. of Labour heading the poll, Eamonn Rooney T.D. and Mary Ennis for Fine Gael, and James Andrews of Rush and Joseph Duignan of Malahide for Fianna Fáil. Alderman Jack Belton, recently elected a T.D., son of the late Patrick Belton, now running his father's building and pub businesses, was elected in the Donnycarney area, as was Senator Jim Tunney in Finglas. Henry Dardis failed again, and Christopher McGonagle narrowly failed to win a seat for Clann na Poblachta. When the council met there was little sign of the rancour of the days before its dissolution. Henry P. Dockrell, Fine Gael, another son of Henry M. Dockrell, was elected to the chair with Tunney as his deputy. The north county was well represented on all the new committees and the following week Mary Ennis was elected chair of Balrothery Board of Assistance, like her brother before her.¹⁶⁹ Political and family continuity amid the change was plainly evident in the chamber as it sat down to resume its business on behalf of its citizens. Members of the Dockrell and Belton families remained involved in national and council politics for the next forty years. P.J. Burke and James Tunney's sons became government ministers as Fingal returned to some of the influence it enjoyed in the time of Andrew Kettle and P.J. O'Neill.

Conclusion

De Valera's constitutional priorities may have delivered his 'imagined republic' in all but name but in Fingal, the issues relating to employment, poverty, housing, taxation, land and agriculture remained through his term in office, as the arguments and preoccupations in the minutes of meetings of Dublin County Council have

¹⁶⁸ *Drogheda Independent*, 1 May 1948; *Dáil Debates*, 14 June 1956, vol.158, no.3; Anthony White, *Irish parliamentarians: deputies and senators, 1918-2018* (Dublin, 2018), p.152. Maurice was son of Henry M. Dockrell T.D., and grandson of Sir Maurice and Lady Dockrell.

¹⁶⁹ *Irish Times*, 21 Oct. & 2 Nov. 1948; *Drogheda Independent*, 30 Oct. 1948; Anthony White, *Irish parliamentarians: deputies and senators, 1918-2018* (Dublin, 2018), p. 21 & 152.

shown.¹⁷⁰ The problems of the 1930s continued throughout the war years with the modest and progressive but uneven improvements delivered by de Valera's administration requiring constant updating. Local politics in Fingal, as seen through the prism of Dublin County Council, moved to a party political division, into government and anti-government alignments, led by strong personalities like P.J. Fogarty and Patrick Belton. Fingal remained under-represented in the Dáil in the 1930s, which may have played a part in the emergence of the activist movements in which Belton played key roles. By this time, Fingal politics had essentially become a personal battle between Belton and Fogarty. Their relentless hostility damaged the reputation of the council, and this may have contributed to its dissolution. The Fingal area was without council representation from 1941 to 1948 and had little voice at the centre of national government. The underfunded and divided Dublin County Council came under scrutiny and found wanting but ultimately restored in 1948. Its role was questioned and its integrity, financial probity, and fitness for purpose examined, although this had been building progressively since 1922 when James Lawless and E.P. McCarron had disagreements. The 'Scrutator' and 'Civis' articles highlighted an ideological basis for the balancing of the continuing central-periphery confrontation in local government. Between 1932 and 1948, seven general elections and two by-elections took place in the north county, which ensured that national political issues retained prominence. From 1937, P.J. Fogarty was the Fianna Fail T.D. and Belton served for six years from 1938 to 1944. Boundary revisions in 1948 ensured three T.D.s in the new North County Dublin constituency. The two sets of elections in 1948 and new political options gave rise to optimism. When Dublin County Council sat for the first time in seven years, while the structures and the hopes for the future were new, the issues remained the same. Some of the names were familiar, as a new generation of local political dynasties took their seats and the opportunity to represent their community interest in local government, as had their forbears.

¹⁷⁰ The term 'imagined republic' is derived from Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities' to describe the origins of nationalism and de Valera's adherence to the republic but falling short of declaring one as long as partition remained. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London, 1983).

Conclusion

This thesis has set out to provide a comprehensive examination of the evolution of local politics from 1870 to 1948, using the north Co Dublin district of Fingal as a case study. The thesis scrutinises the political generations of Butt, Parnell and Redmond through to the revolutionary period of 1920-23, and beyond independence to the governments of Cosgrave and de Valera, 1922-48. The main focus of the thesis has been the evolving leadership, personalities, and organisations in Fingal politics, as seen primarily through their activities and discourse within the changing institutions of local government in Fingal, reaching from the County Dublin grand jury and Balrothery poor law guardians of the 1880s to Dublin County Council and Balrothery R.D.C. post-1898. The study is grounded in a wealth of primary sources, many of which have never been mined by historians, which has ensured that all facets have been examined.

The introduction to this thesis began with a brief biographical insight to a man who lived through this entire momentous period of change and upheaval and was a central participant in many of its phases. P.J. Kettle was a player on the stage of Fingal political life until he died in 1950. He served on local government as a poor law guardian, district and county councillor and took part in the farming and political organisations, cultural movements and the events that shaped Fingal politics and society. In retrospect, the period 1870 to 1948 can be viewed as an extended period of revolution beginning with the pivotal events around 1870 that challenged the status, wealth, and power of the landed class – events such as disestablishment of the state church, land reform, and the origins of Home Rule. The disappointments in the quest for self-determination were compensated by the extension of the franchise, and land and educational reforms, most notably the Wyndham Act in 1903 and the University Act in 1908. The 1898 Local Government Act facilitated the full admission of nationalists to extended local administrative power, which was a vehicle to gain experience and responsibility in advance of the greater autonomy that Home Rule promised. The poor law boards of guardian had been an important step in this progression, with the new county and district councils now absorbing the responsibilities of the dissolved county grand jury. The cultural revival at the end of the nineteenth century helped generate the momentum for a political consciousness

that developed into an alternative to constitutional nationalism, and which later separatist and physical force republicans harnessed during the Irish revolutionary struggle. The conflicts of 1912 to 1923 from Ulster to the battlefields of Europe to the Easter Rising, War of Independence and the Civil War represented a succession of convulsions that changed the political landscape, partitioned the country, and sowed the seeds of a political divide in independent Ireland that remained for generations. Yet the First World War brought the constitutional nationalists of Fingal into an unexpected closer relationship with local Unionists, the Dublin Castle authorities, and the British war effort, emphasising how complex local politics and society could be.

In the 1920s, the prioritising of nation-building and economic stabilisation by the Irish Free State government contrasted with the realities of unemployment and poverty found in the records of the local councils in Fingal. This preceded the turbulent economic and political challenges of the 1930s and the enforced self-reliance of the war years before Ireland reached modest levels of political equilibrium and optimism.

Recording the activities and experiences of the key political actors such as Kettle, their connections and backgrounds has given an understanding of who were the pioneers, influencers, and leaders in the evolution of Fingal politics. As a local case study firmly based on accounts, reports, minutes, personal papers, speeches and preferences, a more nuanced appreciation of the individual is possible. The real value of such a localised study is that it allows for a microscopic examination of a more comprehensive range of insights and perspectives. The detailed analysis of original archives can reveal personal dimensions and realities that might otherwise be overlooked.

The analysis of meetings and connections, and the identification of commercial, social, cultural, and familial relationships underscored the importance of elite networks in local politics. Extended family networks like the Hamilton family, the Kettle, Ennis, McCourt, Rooney, Lawless and O'Neill families and their intermarriages ensured familial loyalties underpinned political ones. In the post-Famine period, prominent Fingal politicians played roles on both the national and local stage. The Conservative M.P.s George Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Edward

Taylor and Ion Trant Hamilton moved in senior British political circles from the 1850s and were pervasive in their patronising of political, administrative and philanthropic institutions and organisations in Ireland, even if their attendance at meetings in Fingal was sometimes wanting. George Alexander Hamilton, H.A. Hamilton and Ion Trant Hamilton were all cousins, and related to the Woods and Taylor families. They served together on church vestries, political committees and the county grand jury. J.P. Byrne and William Bowden broke new ground as Catholic tenant officers on the Balrothery board of guardians in the 1860s, but as moderate nationalists were closer in economic and social class to their landlord colleagues than to their fellow co-religionist tenant farmers. Andrew Kettle and Laurence McCourt were of a similar class and their close involvement with the national leadership of the Land League and Home Rule movements put a Fingal presence at the heart of political events. Andrew Kettle married Laurence McCourt's daughter and was close to her uncle Thomas McCourt, chairman of Balrothery guardians, and they were both close business associates. Andrew Kettle's sons, Tom and Laurence, were founder members of the Irish Volunteers with Eoin MacNeill in 1913, whose brother was later chairman of Dublin County Council. Daniel Macken, Patrick McCabe and James Ennis came to prominence in the land struggle, and as strong farmers and graziers were leaders and men of substance. All the politically active and prominent nationalists were 'men of property', in a position to take on political responsibility and well placed to benefit from any rewards that accrued.

From 1899, Joseph and P.J. O'Neill dominated Dublin County Council and the latter moved to a national profile on the General Council of County Councils, and later as Director of National Service during the First World War. Frank and James Lawless were key figures in the revolutionary movement, Sinn Féin and in a multitude of cultural organisation, fought in 1916 and were leading figures in the War of Independence. Three Lawless brothers fought in 1916, alongside Frank's sons and daughters, and some of his employees. Some of Thomas Ashe's ex-pupils fought with him at Ashbourne. He formed the Black Raven pipe band with John Rooney, whose father was a county councillor and whose brothers fought in 1916. The Rooneys were cousins of Balrothery R.D.C. chairman Richard J. Rooney who was married to Julia Lawless, Frank's sister. Balrothery guardians elected two women as officers in 1920, Molly Adrien and Lily Fogarty.

A new generation of local leaders, P.J. Curran, Patrick Belton and P.J. Fogarty, led their parties on council business in the 1920s and 1930s. The Belton family serve as a notable example of a political dynasty with Patrick's sons and later grandchildren following him into politics. Four generations of the Dockrell family were involved in County Dublin politics, and while not from Fingal, had connections through the county council, including Lady Margaret Dockrell's brother William Shannon, who was solicitor to the grand jury and then the county council. The Rooney and Ennis families were present as political players at the beginning of this study in 1870 as poor law guardians and their descendants were prominent in Fingal politics on Dublin County Council and as T.D.s in 1948. Joseph A. O'Neill followed his father as chairman of North Dublin R.D.C. and his uncle P.J. O'Neill as chairman of Dublin County Council.

This matrix of connections replicated itself on all sides where marriage, social, political, and professional ties underpinned political alliances and behaviours. Viewing local politics through these influential personalities allowed a [composite] narrative to be written of what was happening and who was important, drawing on an extensive range of primary sources. What was unexpected was the level of contact and engagement with Westminster politics and the British state undertaken by nationalists such as Andrew Kettle, appearing at inquiries, or P.J. O'Neill accepting positions on committees and boards.

Generational differences caused political resentment in Fingal. Hutchinson's description of the I.P.P. as 'an ageing oligarchy, preoccupied with parliamentary manoeuvre' is central to their eventual rejection, and can be applied in Fingal to both the local nationalist and Unionist elites. Both held on to power to an extent that the next generation either was unable to inherit, disinterested, or had moved beyond to a revolutionary position.¹ Tom Kettle and his cohorts epitomise this. Suspicious of the Gaelic revivalists, but more liberal and progressive than their parents' generation, this group found their progression to leadership blocked by a generation unwilling to give up the power and influence that they themselves had assumed since the 1880s. After independence, former members of the Fingal political elite like Richard Butler, J.P. Cuffe, P.J. Kettle and William Ganly were frustrated at their loss of influence to

¹ Hutchinson, *The dynamics of cultural nationalism* p. 167.

the younger cohort of national politician who were now in power the Cumann na nGaedheal government.

During the course of this research, some unexpected loyalties and behaviours were revealed. For instance, Ion Trant Hamilton M.P. was derided by Andrew Kettle but praised as a model landlord by Kettle's Land League colleague and Hamilton's tenant, Andrew Derham. Another unexpected dimension was the depth of political animosity and class division within nationalism, between Home Rulers and Sinn Féiners, and between farmers and labourers. This was clearly evident in Andrew Kettle's emphatic opposition to his nephew P.J. Kettle running against P.J. O'Neill in Swords in 1905, and in the attitude in turn of P.J. Kettle and his U.I.L. colleagues to Frank Lawless seeking co-option to Balrothery council as a Sinn Féin candidate in 1911. Michael Dunne displayed a similar attitude towards Sinn Féin in 1914, which underpinned an attitude of political condescension. The uncompromising response of the nationalist farming elite to the strikers during the 1913 Lockout in Swords underscored their mistrust and fear of unionised labour and its political ideologies of Larkinism or socialism. They fully their new role as 'poachers turned gamekeepers'.

Another of the questions posed in this thesis is the degree of continuity and change that occurred in Fingal during the period under study. Between 1870 and 1948, the sequence of important national events was punctuated by phases of political, economic and social progress and consolidation at local level. Many of these improvements were helped by the continuity delivered by the local government institutions. The overtly apolitical local administrative focus of poor law guardians' business in Balrothery in the 1890s, driven by William Boylan, Anthony Hussey and T.W Hamlet is an example of this. This was a moderate nationalist chairman and two Unionists officers working together beyond politics to deliver services and value for money to the ratepayers. There was a similar period of continuity within the chambers of Dublin County Council in the first decade after the Local Government Act, when the nationalist councillors proved they could manage, administer, and work with their Unionist colleagues. Hoppen has stated that the default condition in Irish local politics was localism, and this is borne out in the case of Fingal, where council business always reverted to local matters as priorities. This is not surprising as it is the first duty of local government to take care of local matters. In independent Ireland, Fingal local politics, as seen through the prism of the county council,

evolved from the socio-political and economic divisions of ratepayer farmers versus labourers to a party-political alignment based on the parties that represented their interests. This evolution mirrored the national political alignment in the Dáil after Fianna Fáil entered the Dáil in 1927.

One of the constants in politics in Fingal was the land question, and more specifically farmers' issues such as rent levels, rates, annuities and the demands of agricultural labourers for land or wages. Each had their champion to pursue their cause: the 1913 strike cast farmers and labourers against each other in bitter and violent opposition in the fields of Fingal, later Patrick Belton and P.J. Fogarty argued over the same issues in the chamber of Dublin County Council. Farming organisations, especially the County Dublin Farmers Association, where P.J. Kettle was always prominent, acted as a constant pressure group for over fifty years. Notwithstanding the national struggle, matters repeatedly reverted to the same sectoral issue for farmers, and this escalated to new and higher levels during the time of Patrick Belton, who unashamedly used his position as chairman of Dublin County Council to push agrarian issues. Fingal was a much more settled region in the late nineteenth century, compared to other parts of the country, with good land, good landlord-tenant relations, and with adequate work for labourers given the extent of tillage production there. It did not experience the same levels of agrarian unrest as elsewhere. Land transfer was slow, and many landlords continued to farm themselves. The agricultural labouring class were ultimately disappointed with the resolution of the land question, and their demands for improved pay and conditions continued through to the 1960s.

1909 a police report on the U.I.L. in Swords concluded that 'members do not appear to join with any intention of pressing any important Irish question, but to use it as a lever for personal benefit for themselves should the opportunity arise'.² As this thesis has shown, this was the nature of local politics in Fingal.

A study of the evolution of local politics in Fingal is also the history of the evolution of local government. In the late nineteenth century, franchise reform and the restructuring and expansion of the responsibilities of the poor law guardians in the

² RIC Inspector General and County Inspectors' monthly confidential reports, *The British in Ireland*, CO/904, POS 8329: Jan. 1909.

1870s occurred at a time when nationalists were beginning to take seats on these bodies. We have seen that Balrothery was ahead of elsewhere in the election of Catholic tenants to officer positions. They then proceeded to take control of dispensary committees and especially agricultural committees giving them control of decisions on issues that mattered most to them. The Local Government Act changed the complexion of local government completely and nationalists took control of Dublin County Council and Balrothery and North Dublin R.D.C.s. Despite increased oversight by the L.G.B., the councils in the first decade of the twentieth century adapted quickly to the system and learned how to optimise their autonomy and local powers. The local elections in 1920 saw a shift to Sinn Féin, which replicated the 1918 general election results at national level. The constitutional nationalist cohort who had controlled local government in Fingal for the previous twenty years was displaced. Some like Thomas L. Smyth, Balrothery P.L.U. chairman from 1911 to 1920 reinvented themselves and re-emerged in the 1920s. The declarations of allegiance to Dáil Éireann in 1920 brought the councils into the front line of the War of Independence, more so when they started to divert the rates collected to the Dáil. This was a critical role in the prosecution of the war and helped significantly undermine British rule. However, the experience also saw greater scrutiny from central government that continued after independence, and culminated in the abolition of Balrothery R.D.C. in 1930 and the dissolution of Dublin County Council in 1941. Under Fianna Fáil, the centralisation of power and influence continued. The level of control exerted, or demanded, by the Dáil Department of Local Government in 1920 was as great if not greater than that of its predecessor the L.G.B. It was an early indicator of the type of relationship envisaged by the architects and pioneers of an independent Ireland and commenced the centre-periphery contest that persisted through to the reform of Dublin County Council in 1948.

Fingal had one third of the seats on Dublin County Council in 1899, and this declined to less than a quarter in the 1920s and 1930s. With also the loss of Fingal based T.D.s, the area suffered from a lack of representation and its share of government attention or allocation of resources. The election of P.J. Fogarty in 1937 partly alleviated this but truly commensurate local representation was not achieved until constituency boundary changes were introduced in 1948, and a three-seat county constituency established.

The question of whether there was a counter-revolution in Fingal depends on whether there was a revolution in the first place and what form it took. There was undoubtedly a revolution in the land tenure system, firstly in rent controls and then in the transfer of land, although as previously stated not to same extent as elsewhere. Major landowners such as Cobbe, the earl of Howth, Woods, Palmer, Holmpatrick and Talbot remained in possession of the better part of their estates right up to the 1940s. The Ennis, Rooney and Kettle families were large tenant farmers and graziers who benefitted from land purchase and used this security and status to continue to influence local politics. There was military conflict and a political revolution but no social revolution, no overthrow of the social class system. The economic experience of Fingal as documented in the minute books of its local councils in the 1920s substantiates this. The political leaders of Sinn Féin after 1917 - Frank Lawless and M.J. Derham, and to a lesser extent Daniel Brophy and Peter Kelly - did not live long enough or remain in politics to advance their influence or power. Lawless and Derham both died unexpectedly in accidents in 1922 and 1923, while Brophy and Kelly left political life during the Civil War. Their successors in Sinn Féin were displaced as officers on Balrothery R.D.C. and Dublin County Council by those whose politics were a throwback to the old constitutional nationalism and the Home Rule movement; men such as Thomas L. Smyth, James Dickie and Joseph A. O'Neill. Those who had acquired wealth and power in Fingal prior to 1922 retained it and in time reappeared in local politics as stalwarts of Cumann na nGaedheal, Fine Gael and in various Ratepayers and Farmers' parties.

J. G. A. Pocock has characterized Ireland's political experience in the later nineteenth century as 'revolutionary politics in a context of increasing stabilisation'. He argues that the revolutionary movement 'derived its energy from a series of chronic social and cultural conflicts that were in the process of being remedied'. Reform legislation was a greater threat to separatists than the crown forces.³ The Local Government Act and the institutions it created was crucial in the advance and improvement of local administration, crucial in providing the apparatus to effectively prosecute the War of Independence and crucial to the evolution of local politics in Fingal. Local politicians

³ Tom Garvin, 'The Anatomy of a Nationalist Revolution: Ireland, 1858-1928', in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. xxviii, no. 3 (1986), pp. 468-501.

in Fingal quickly and successfully assumed the responsibility and authority that these institutions presented them, to the extent that after independence the shift from periphery to central control made this period the high point in the autonomy and influence of Fingal politics.

Appendix 1: Officers of Balrothery Board of Guardians 1863-98

Board Term	Chairman	VC	DVC
1863-1864	Talbot Malahide	John Baker/J.P. Byrne	Walter Rickard (1860)
1864-1865	Talbot Malahide	J.P. Byrne (AP)	Walter Rickard
1865-1866	Talbot Malahide	J.P. Byrne	Walter Rickard
1866-1867	Talbot Malahide	J.P. Byrne	Wm Bowden
1867-1868	Talbot Malahide	J.P. Byrne	Wm Bowden
1868-1869	Talbot Malahide	J.P. Byrne	Wm Bowden
1869-1870	Talbot Malahide	J.P. Byrne	Wm Bowden
1870-1871	Talbot Malahide	Henry Baker	Wm Bowden
1871-1872	Talbot Malahide	Henry Baker	Wm Bowden
1872-1873	Talbot Malahide	Henry Baker	Wm Bowden
1873-1874	Talbot Malahide	Henry Baker	Wm Bowden
1874-1875	Henry Baker	Wm Bowden	Thomas McCourt
1875-1876	Henry Baker	Wm Bowden	Thomas McCourt
1876-1877	Henry Baker	Wm Bowden	Thomas McCourt
1877-1878	Henry Baker	Wm Bowden	Thomas McCourt
1878-1879	Henry Baker	Wm Bowden	Thomas McCourt
1879-1880	Henry Baker	Wm Bowden	Thomas McCourt
1880-1881	Henry Baker	Wm Bowden	Thomas McCourt
1881-1882	Henry Baker	Thomas McCourt	Patrick McCabe
1882-1883	Charles Cobbe	Thomas McCourt	Patrick McCabe
1883-1884	Henry Baker	Thomas McCourt	Patrick McCabe
1884-1885	Henry Baker	Patrick McCabe	Daniel Macken
1885-1886	Henry Baker	Andrew Derham	Daniel Macken
1886-1887	Henry Baker	Daniel Macken	John Lowndes
1887-1888	John Lowndes	Daniel Macken	Joseph Lawless
1888-1889	Thos McCourt	Daniel Macken	Wm Boylan INL
1889-1890	Thomas McCourt	Daniel Macken	Wm Boylan INL
1890-1891	Thomas McCourt	Daniel Macken	Wm Boylan INL
1891-1892	Thomas McCourt	Daniel Macken	Wm Boylan INL
1892-1893	Thomas McCourt	Wm Boylan	A S Hussey
1893-1894	Wm Boylan	A.S. Hussey	T.W. Hamlet
1894-1895	Wm Boylan	A.S. Hussey	T.W. Hamlet
1895-1896	Wm Boylan	A.S. Hussey	T.W. Hamlet
1896-1897	Wm Boylan	A.S. Hussey	T.W. Hamlet
1897-1898	Wm Boylan	A.S. Hussey	T.W. Hamlet
1898-1899	Wm Boylan	A.S. Hussey	T.W. Hamlet

Compiled from Balrothery P.L.U. Board of Guardians minute books and from newspaper reports.

Appendix 2: Officers of Balrothery Board of Guardians 1899-1925

Board Term	Chairman BalR PLG	VC BalR PLG	DVC BalR PLG
1899-1900	Wm Boylan	A.S. Hussey	T.W. Hamlet
1900-1901	Wm Boylan INL	T.W. Hamlet	R.J. Rooney
1901-1902	Wm Boylan INL	T.W. Hamlet	R.J. Rooney
1902-1903	Wm Boylan	R.J. Rooney	P.J. Kettle INL
1903-1904	Wm Boylan	R.J. Rooney	P.J. Kettle INL
1904-1905	Wm Boylan	R.J. Rooney	P.J. Kettle INL
1905-1906	R.J. Rooney	P.J. Kettle	R.A. Butler
1906-1907	R.J. Rooney	P.J. Kettle	R.A. Butler
1907-1908	P.J. Kettle	R.A. Butler	John Hartford
1908-1909	R.A. Butler	Thos L Smyth	John Hartford
1909-1910	R.A. Butler	Thos L Smyth	John Hartford
1910-1911	R.A. Butler	Thos L Smyth	John Hartford
1911-1912	Thos L Smyth	John Hartford	Thomas Bateman
1912-1913	Thos L Smyth	John Hartford	Thomas Bateman
1913-1914	Thos L Smyth	John Hartford	Thomas Bateman
1914-1915	Thos L Smyth	John Hartford	Thomas Bateman
1915-1916	Thos L Smyth	John Hartford	Thomas Bateman
1916-1917	Thos L Smyth	John Hartford	Thomas Bateman
1917-1918	Thos L Smyth	John Hartford	Thomas Bateman
1918-1919	Thos L Smyth	P. J. Kettle	Thomas Bateman
1919-1920	Thos L Smyth	P. J. Kettle	Thomas Bateman
1920-1921	Mary Adrien	Daniel Brophy	Lily Fogarty
1921-1922	Mary Adrien	Daniel Brophy	Lily Fogarty
1922-1923	Mary Adrien	James Woods	Lily Fogarty
1923-1924	Mary Adrien	James Woods	Lily Fogarty
1924-1925	Mary Adrien	James Woods	VACANT

Compiled from Balrothery P.L.U. Board of Guardians minute books and from newspaper reports.

Appendix 3: Officers of Balrothery R.D.C. & Dublin County Council 1899-1941

Board Term	BRDC Chair	BRDC VC	BRDC DCC Rep	Dub Co Co Chair	Dub Co Co VC
1899-1900	P.J. O'Neill	Chas Gallen	Chas Gallen	P.J. O'Neill	J. J. Reilly
1900-01	P.J. O'Neill	Chas Gallen	Chas Gallen	P.J. O'Neill	R. K. Clay
1901-02	P.J. O'Neill	Chas Gallen	Chas Gallen	P.J. O'Neill	R. K. Clay
1902-03	P.J. O'Neill	A.S. Hussey	A.S. Hussey	P.J. O'Neill	R. K. Clay
1903-04	P.J. O'Neill	A.S. Hussey	A.S. Hussey	P.J. O'Neill	R. K. Clay
1904-05	P.J. O'Neill	A.S. Hussey	A.S. Hussey	P.J. O'Neill	R. K. Clay
1905-06	P.J. O'Neill *	A.S. Hussey	A.S. Hussey	P.J. O'Neill	Capt C. C. Vesey
1906-07	P.J. O'Neill	A.S. Hussey	A.S. Hussey	P.J. O'Neill	Capt C. C. Vesey
1907-08	P.J. O'Neill	R.J. Rooney	John P. Cuffe	P.J. O'Neill	Capt C. C. Vesey
1908-09	R.J. Rooney	A.S. Hussey	A.S. Hussey	P.J. O'Neill	Capt C. C. Vesey
1909-10	R.J. Rooney	A.S. Hussey	A.S. Hussey	P.J. O'Neill	Capt C. C. Vesey
1910-11	R.J. Rooney	A.S. Hussey	A.S. Hussey	P.J. O'Neill	Capt C. C. Vesey
1911-12	R.J. Rooney	A.S. Hussey	A.S. Hussey	P.J. O'Neill	Capt C. C. Vesey
1912-13	Michael Dunne	A.S. Hussey	A.S. Hussey	P.J. O'Neill	Capt C. C. Vesey
1913-14	Michael Dunne	Thos Wade	Michael Dunne	P.J. O'Neill	Capt C. C. Vesey
1914-15	Michael Dunne	Thos Wade	Michael Dunne	P.J. O'Neill	Capt C. C. Vesey
1915-16	Michael Dunne	Thos Wade	Michael Dunne	P.J. O'Neill	Capt C. C. Vesey
1916-17	Michael Dunne	Thos Wade	Michael Dunne	P.J. O'Neill	Jas Mahony
1917-18	Michael Dunne	Thos Wade	Michael Dunne	P.J. O'Neill	Jas Mahony
1918-19	Michael Dunne	Thos Wade	Michael Dunne	P.J. O'Neill	Jas Mahony
1919-20	Michael Dunne	Thos Wade	Michael Dunne	P.J. O'Neill	Jas Mahony
1920-21	Peter Kelly (SF)	Wm Ganly	Peter Kelly	Henry J. Friel SF	James McNeill (SF)
1921-22	Chr Brown (SF)	Wm Ganly	Chr Brown	Henry J. Friel	James McNeill
1922-23	Thos Monks SF	Chr Brown	Thos Monks	Friel/McNeill	James McNeill
1923-24	Thos Monks	Chr Brown	Thos Monks	MI Costello	PJ Connolly
1924-25	Thos Monks	Chr Brown	Thos Monks	Costello/Connolly	PJ Connolly

1925-26	Thos L Smyth	Jas Dickie	Thos L Smyth	Wm McCabe	J.A. O'Neill
1926-27	Thos L Smyth	Jas Dickie	Thos L Smyth	J.A. O'Neill	Mrs Mary Cosgrave
1927-28		Edw Rooney		J.A. O'Neill	Mrs Mary Cosgrave
1928-29	Jas Dickie			J.A. O'Neill	Mrs Mary Cosgrave
1929-30	Colm Lawless			J.A. O'Neill	Mrs Mary Cosgrave
1930-31	Colm Lawless	Jas Dickie		John J Shiel	Andrew Cullen
1931-32				John J Shiel	Andrew Cullen
1932-33				John J Shiel	Andrew Cullen
1933-34				John J Shiel	Andrew Cullen
1934-35				Patrick Belton	Thos Morgan Good
1935-36				Patrick Belton	Thos Morgan Good
1936-37				Patrick Belton	Thos Morgan Good
1937-38				Patrick Belton	Thos Morgan Good
1938-39				John Corr	James T Ennis (FG)
1939-40				James Ennis (FG)	JJ Clare (FF)
1940-41				James Ennis (FG)	JJ Clare (FF)

Compiled from Balrothery P.L.U. Board of Guardians minute books and from newspaper reports.

Appendix 4: Members of Parliament at Westminster, 1868-1918.

Constituency	Year	Election	No of Seats	Elected Member(s)	Other Information
County Dublin	1868	General Election	2	Thomas Edward Taylor (Con) Ion Trant Hamilton (Con)	Defeated Peter Paul McSwiney (Lib)
County Dublin	1874	General Election	2	Thomas Edward Taylor (Con) Ion Trant Hamilton (Con)	Unopposed
County Dublin	1874	By-Election	1	Thomas Edward Taylor (Con)	Defeated C.S. Parnell Vacancy due to Taylors's appointment as Chancellor of Duchy of Lancaster
County Dublin	1880	General Election	2	Thomas Edward Taylor (Con) Ion Trant Hamilton (Con)	Unopposed
County Dublin	1883	By-Election	2	Edward King-Harman (Con)	Defeated Edward McMahon (Lib) Vacancy due to death of Taylor
North County Dublin	1885	General Election	1	J.J. Clancy (IPP)	Unopposed
North County Dublin	1886	General Election	1	J.J. Clancy (IPP)	Unopposed
North County Dublin	1892	General Election	1	J.J. Clancy (INI)	Defeated Joseph Mooney (INF) & E.H. Woods (U)
North County Dublin	1895	General Election	1	J.J. Clancy (IPP)	Defeated Daniel Wilson (U)
North County Dublin	1900	General Election	1	J.J. Clancy (IPP)	Unopposed
North County Dublin	1906	General Election	1	J.J. Clancy (IPP)	Unopposed
North County Dublin	1910	General Election	1	J.J. Clancy (IPP)	Unopposed
North County Dublin	1918	General Election	1	Frank Lawless (SF)	Defeated J.J. Clancy (IPP)

Compiled from Brian M. Walker, (ed.), Parliamentary election results in Ireland: 1801-1922 (Dublin, 1978)

Appendix 5: T.D.s elected to Dáil Éireann, 1918-48.

Constituency	Year	Election	No Seats	Parties Elected	Fingal Based T.D.s
County Dublin	1921	General Election	6	6 x SF	Frank Lawless (SF) M. J. Derham (SF)
County Dublin	1922	General Election	6	3 x SF (Pro-treaty) 1 x Lab; 1 x Ind 1 x Farmers	Michael J. Derham (SF) John Rooney (Farmers Party)
County Dublin	1923	General Election	8	3 x CnG 3 x Ind; 1 x Lab 1 x Republican	Michael J. Derham (SF)
County Dublin	1924	By-Election	1	1 x CnG	None
County Dublin	1926	By-Election	1	1 x Lab	None
County Dublin	1927 (Jun)	General Election	8	3 x CnG 3 x Ind; 1 x Lab 1 x FF	Patrick Belton (FF)
County Dublin	1927 (Aug)	By-Election	1	1 x CnG	Same
County Dublin	1927 (Sept)	General Election	8	3 x CnG 3 x Ind 2 x FF	None
County Dublin	1930	By-Election	1	1 x CnG	None
County Dublin	1932	General Election	8	4 x CnG 2 x FF 1 x Ind; 1 x Lab	P.J. Curran (Lab)
County Dublin	1933	General Election	8	4 x CnG 3 x FF 1 x Ind	None
County Dublin	1935	By-Election	1	1 x FG	None
County Dublin	1937	General Election	5	2 x FG 2 x FF 1 x Lab	Gerard McGowan (Lab)
County Dublin	1938	General Election	5	3 x FF 2 x FG	P.J. Fogarty (FF) Thomas Mullen (FF) Patrick Belton (FG)
County Dublin	1943	General Election	5	2 x FG 2 x FF 1 x Lab	P.J. Fogarty (FF) James Tunney (Lab)
County Dublin	1944	General Election	5	3 x FF 2 x FG	P.J. Fogarty (FF) P.J. Burke (FF)
County Dublin	1947	By-Election	1	1 x CnP	Caused by death of Fogarty x1 P.J. Burke (FF)
County Dublin	1848	General Election	3	2 x FG 2 x FF 1 x Lab	P.J. Burke (FF) Eamon Rooney (FG) Sean Dunne (Lab)

Compiled from Brian M. Walker, (ed.), Parliamentary election results in Ireland: 1918-92 (Dublin, 1982)

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Abstract

The Evolution of Local Politics in Fingal, North County Dublin, 1870-1948.

This thesis examines the evolution of local politics in Fingal through the experiences of its political elite, who exercised varying degrees of power and influence through local government in the generations from 1870 to 1948. It concentrates on local political leaders, their personalities, motivations, ideals, activities, alliances and rivalries and their responses to and relationship with a changing national political landscape. It explores the effect of reforming legislation on political life in Fingal, enquiring whether a measure of autonomy was achieved through local government before independence, and whether this continued after 1922.

It also considers the nature and extent of the social as well as the political revolution that occurred, and attempts to determine the extent to which any counter-revolution took place in Fingal after independence. The period from 1870 to 1948 can be characterised as one of continuity and change, frequently local continuity at a time of national change. The significance of intervening periods of progress and consolidation between momentous episodes are often underestimated. The questions of land, class and nationalism permeate the entire period, but not in lockstep with the national narrative. In the mid-nineteenth century, Fingal was home to some of the most senior figures in the Conservative party and governments in the United Kingdom. Individuals from Fingal played leading roles in the Land War, but their native region was quiet. It was the only rural location involved in the Dublin Lockout in 1913. Fingal men were military participants in the Easter Rising, but the area remained relatively quiescent thereafter in the War of Independence and the Civil War. In the 1920s and 1930s, unemployment, poverty and agrarian discontent dominated the local council debates and a lack of Dáil representation added to a sense of political neglect.

This thesis examines the debates and conduct on these local government bodies as a window on what was happening in local society. Local government can be a bridge between the state and local society, a visible manifestation of the state in people's lives, but an amplifying chamber for their fears and concerns.

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