



KILDARE COUNTY COUNCIL, 1899-1926

by

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Abbreviations

A.C.G.B.I.	Automobile Club of Great Britain and Ireland
J.K.A.S.	Journal of the County Kildare Archaeological Society
K.C.C. mins.	Minutes of Kildare County Council
K.C.C. fnce. cmte.	Kildare County Council finance committee
K.C.B.H.	Kildare County Board of Health
<i>K.O.</i>	<i>The Kildare Observer</i>
N.A.	National Archives Dublin
N.L.I.	National Library of Ireland
LGB	Local Government Board
<i>L.L.</i>	<i>The Leinster Leader</i>
RDC	Rural District Council
UDC	Urban District Council
U.I.L.	United Irish League

Map of Kildare showing the names of the twenty-one electoral divisions in the county council elections, 1899-1920



CONTENTS

Acknowledgements		iii
Abbreviations		iv
Map of Kildare		v
Introduction		1
Chapter 1	Local government in Kildare before 1899	21
Chapter 2	The first Kildare County Council, 1899-1902	62
Chapter 3	Consolidation and development, 1902-11	123
Chapter 4	Responding to national events, 1911-16	174
Chapter 5	The council in a time of change, 1916-18	221
Chapter 6	The council through the war of independence, 1919-21	279
Chapter 7	The council under the Free State, 1922-26	342
Conclusion		407
Appendix 1	The poor rate in Kildare, 1899-1927	418
Appendix 2	The origin of the poor rate	425
Appendix 3	Kildare County Council elections, 1899-1925	433
Appendix 4	Committees of Kildare County Council, 1920	439
Appendix 5	Table of officials' salaries, 1919	440
Appendix 6	Kildare county councillors, 1899-1926	441
Bibliography		450

Introduction

There was something of a revolution in Ireland in 1899. In March of that year the grand juries in each of the thirty-three administrative counties met for the last time to conduct the business of local government. They consisted, as always, of the twenty-three leading property owners of the counties, selected by the High Sheriffs. Before the end of the next month they had been replaced, under the Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898, by elected county councils, chosen by a wider franchise than was ever before used in any election in Ireland. Apart from three token former grand jurors on each council, as *ex-officio* members, the old landlord class had been completely replaced by new men. This thesis is a study of that revolution as it occurred and was carried through in Kildare.

Perhaps the worst legacy of the Irish experience of the nineteenth century is a lack of self-confidence, a nagging doubt that the country possessed the ability, politically and administratively, to conduct its own affairs. It is an insidious legacy because it is heard more often in the windy nationalist rhetoric that proclaims the opposite, than it is directly referred to, and it is a sad legacy because even when the political and military revolution was complete, the sense of inadequacy remained. Thus the ultimate victory of the coloniser is in capturing the mind and self esteem of the colonised.

We can see this phenomenon clearly in the initial responses of nationalist Ireland to the Local Government (Ireland) Act of 1898, which established the system of representative local government that is more or less what we have today. The editorial in the *Leinster Leader*, on the Saturday before the local government elections of 1899, said that a wise use of local self-government would provide irresistible arguments for home rulers as the country stood on the brink of

the ‘supreme reform’,¹ as it termed full Home Rule. If Ireland were seen to handle local government well, then it would prove that the country was fit to be trusted with national self-government. The editorial ended: ‘This wise use begins on Thursday’ (local election day, 6 April 1899).²

The first chairman of Meath County Council, P.J. Kennedy, a nationalist M.P. said that:

in his endeavour to make the council a success he was actuated by the belief that much depended on the actions of bodies established by the Local Government Act as to the future of Ireland. He was, he said, utterly convinced that Irishmen were well capable of the administration of public business in Ireland.³

This sense of the Local Government (Ireland) Act of 1898 being in some way a test of the nation’s ability to govern itself even found its way into the apparently positive policy statements of nationalists as they prepared to implement the act. At a meeting held in Ballitore county Kildare, early in 1899, to select nationalist candidates, the first of four planks of nationalist election policy was put as follows: ‘The first great measure everybody has before him is Home Rule (applause). This local government board is an intermediate system of education for Home Rule’.⁴

Even at national level this sense of Ireland needing to prove its ability, if only to itself, is evident. John Redmond welcomed the act as the ‘most important initiative in Irish politics in his generation, in that it helped prepare nationalists for the responsibility of self-government, by giving them an opportunity of acquiring administrative experience’.⁵ This is the cautious, self-doubting frame of mind in

¹ *L.L.*, 1 Apr. 1899.

² *Ibid.*

³ Denis Boyle, *A history of Meath County Council, 1899-1999* (Navan, 1999), p. 48.

⁴ *L.L.*, 28 Feb. 1899.

⁵ Joseph Lee, *The modernisation of Irish society 1848-918* (Dublin, 1973), p. 127

which many Irish nationalists embarked on the enterprise of local government in 1899.

Others, both locally and nationally, took a more positive attitude to it, recognising the measure, as being revolutionary in its possibilities. At the selection meeting mentioned above, the parish priest of Ballitore spoke in the following terms: 'Everyone was aware of the revolution that had been caused by the act coming into force, by which the people of Ireland had got a good deal of authority into their hands'.⁶ John Redmond later described the effect of the act as a social revolution that '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 the local affairs of Ireland'.⁷ One of the aims of this thesis is to test the extent and nature of this claimed revolution by a close study of the implementation of the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1899, in County Kildare.

Historiography

The historiography of the period tends to note the significance of the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898 and its faults or strengths without studying closely how it actually functioned. F.S.L. Lyons, in *Ireland since the Famine*, says of it that in social terms 'the effect of the Local Government Act was not far short of revolutionary',⁸ while in his contribution to *A new history of Ireland vol. vi*. he calls it, 'one of the most important measures to have been carried by a British government

⁶ *L.L.*, 28 Feb. 1899.

⁷ 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), p. 12.

⁸ F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine* (London, 1971), p. 207.

during the entire nineteenth century'.⁹ He goes on to note that it was 'an invaluable forum for training in self-government'.¹⁰

Joseph Lee, in *Ireland, 1912-1985*, merely notes the poor reputation the county councils had, without any comment on their political, social or administrative significance or success. He says that the 'local councils established under the 1898 Local Government Act soon acquired a reputation for indifference to petty financial detail'.¹¹ In his earlier *The modernisation of Irish society*, Lee had described the 'augean stable of corruption and confusion',¹² which flourished under the county councils.

Eunan O'Halpin, in his *The decline of the Union*, agrees with Lee in speaking of the corruption of the new councils. He says bluntly that, 'Irish local administration remained extremely corrupt'.¹³

This thesis will attempt to test both the claims of corruption and of indifference to financial matters against the evidence in the case of Kildare County Council. An initial impression from the available sources suggests that Kildare County Council was never indifferent to the fine detail of the financial aspects of administration. Indeed, it was at almost all stages of its history very careful with the ratepayers' money. Also, with regard to corruption, while there is evidence of a network of friends helping each other to some of the spoils of office, gross corruption, in the sense of any actual illegal activity played no part in the council's story.

⁹ F.S.L. Lyons, 'The aftermath of Parnell, 1891-1903' in W.E. Vaughan ed., *A new history of Ireland vi: Ireland under the Union, ii, 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996), p. 89.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ J.J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: politics and society* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 106; *ibid.*, pp 161-2.

¹² J.J. Lee, *The modernisation of Irish society, 1848-1918* (Dublin, 1973), p. 128.

¹³ Eunan O'Halpin, *The decline of the Union: British government in Ireland, 1891-1920* (Dublin, 1987), p. 16.

Two contemporary commentators are much more positive in their assessment of the early years of the councils. Horace Plunkett, writing in 1904, is quite clear in his *Ireland in the new century*, when he states:

Notwithstanding some extravagances in particular instances, it can already be stated positively that local government in Ireland, taken as a whole, has not suffered in efficiency by the revolution it has undergone.¹⁴

Writing later, but referring to the earliest years of the new local government system, A.M. Sullivan, in his *Old Ireland, reminiscences of an Irish K.C.*, makes a similar claim about the efficiency of the councils:

The Local Government Act gave to Ireland an opportunity of training her people in self-government. It left indeed very little trace of 'British' government as directly affecting the lives of the people. The administration of the act was marred as far as possible by the meddling of the party politicians, but in spite of this the county councils were soon trained into a state of first-rate efficiency and the local administration of Ireland by Irishmen was a credit to the country as a whole.¹⁵

This thesis will try to assess the extent to which these claims for the efficiency of the new form of local government can be sustained by the evidence in the case of Kildare County Council.

Barbara Shannon, in her study *Arthur Balfour and Ireland*, deals with the Local Government (Ireland) Act from its origins in liberal unionist and Conservative Party politics of the 1890s. The act here is seen as part of the higher politics of Westminster and answering a long held demand by unionists for local government reform.¹⁶ She does not note the irony of the effects of the act on unionism, an irony which is noted by Pauric Travers in his *Settlements and Divisions, Ireland 1870-1922*, when he concludes that while the land acts took the land from the unionists, the Local Government (Ireland) Act, took away their local political influence. 'It is

¹⁴ Horace Plunkett, *Ireland in the new century* (London, 1904), p. 240.

¹⁵ A.M. Sullivan, *Old Ireland, reminiscences of an Irish K.C.* (London, 1927), pp 137-8.

¹⁶ Catherine B. Shannon, *Arthur J. Balfour and Ireland, 1874-1922* (Washington, 1988), pp 99-101.

arguable that it also doomed the cause of southern unionism. Deprived of property and power, they [southern unionists] were a class without a *raison d'être*'.¹⁷

There is a further irony in the fact that what was a Conservative Party measure had its origins in classic European liberal theory of the nineteenth century. Jan Palonski, writing in *The Historical Journal* in 2002, notes that in late nineteenth century Europe, local government reform was intrinsic to the nature of liberalism in theory and in practice: 'At an ideological and practical level, local government was integral to the liberals' concern for efficient and representative government'.¹⁸

Shannon's earlier unpublished thesis on the subject is largely positive about the ability of the councils to carry out their business and the success of the local administrative system generally. She says that, 'the chosen representatives of the people did not prove unequal to the satisfactory administration of the local during the first six or seven years of its operation'.¹⁹

In contrast to this, a thesis on Limerick County Council in the early years comes to a different conclusion noting that, 'the council's administration during the first six years of popular local government was less than wholly successful'.²⁰ The poor financial state of Limerick's council in mid-1905 is cited as evidence of this. This study of Kildare County Council will help to provide some evidence on one side or the other of this assessment of the early councils.

Mary Daly's study of the relationship between central government and local authorities in the twentieth century, *The Buffer State: the historical roots of the*

¹⁷ Paucic Travers, *Settlements and divisions: Ireland, 1870-1922* (Dublin, 1988), p. 66; for a discussion of southern unionism see also, Patrick Buckland, *Irish Unionism, 1885-1922* (Belfast, 1973) and David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish life: provincial experience of war and revolution* (Cork, 1993)

¹⁸ See Jan Palonski, 'Liberalism and local government in late nineteenth century Germany and England', in *The Historical Journal*, vol. 45, no. 02 (2002), pp 381-409.

¹⁹ Catherine B. Shannon, 'Local government, the politics and the administration' (Ph.D. thesis, University College, Dublin, 1963), p. 404.

²⁰ Colman Moloney, 'Limerick County Council, 1899-1932' (M.A. thesis, UCC 1977), p. 39.

department of the environment, gives a good overview of many of the important issues involved, but she explicitly confines herself to the view from the Custom House, the headquarters of the Local Government Board until independence, and later, of the Department of Local Government. Her interest is mostly in the post-independence era and she only sketches the earlier period in outline.²¹

Earlier general studies of local government tend to have their own particular focus that limits their scope. Desmond Roche's updating of an earlier book by John Collins, *Local government in Ireland*, although it gives a very good outline of the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898, is again concerned mostly with local government in post-independence Ireland and from a public administration perspective rather than from a political and historical one.²²

This tendency to write about local government from the point of view of public administration is seen also in the many articles on the issue in the journal *Administration* since its first appearance in 1953. These articles tend to be descriptive of what is actually happening or prescriptive of what should happen, in local government, but do not engage in historical analysis. The book by Collins and Roche mentioned in the previous paragraph had its origins in a series of articles from 1953 to 1955.²³

Virginia Crossman's *Local government in nineteenth century Ireland* is very useful for establishing the continuity of service in local administration between the old system and the new. Many of the same issues such as road maintenance and emergency repairs to bridges and public buildings occupied the grand juries and the

²¹ Mary E. Daly, *The Buffer State: the historical roots of the department of the environment* (Dublin, 1996), p. 2.

²² Desmond Roche, *Local Government in Ireland* (Dublin, 1982).

²³ See especially, J. Collins, 'The beginnings of county administration' in *Administration*, vol. i no. 1 (Spring, 1953), pp 40-4; idem., 'The evolution of county government' in *Administration*, vol. i no. 2 (Autumn, 1953), pp 79-88.

county councils, which replaced them under the 1898 act. However, she only gives a very brief final chapter to the new measures and makes no attempt to assess their success or failure.²⁴

This would more or less be the sum of writing on nineteenth century local government in Ireland were it not for the centenary of the act in 1998 which stimulated many publications on the topic, mostly from the county councils themselves,²⁵ but also including a few works of wider scope. Among the latter is Diarmaid Ferriter's survey of some of the major issues of local government throughout the first one hundred years of the act. Published by the National Archives, *Lovers of liberty, local government in twentieth century Ireland*, includes facsimiles and photographs of many of the sources, such as county council minutes and local newspaper cuttings ranging across the century.²⁶ It is not, however, an in-depth study of the topic.

A book of essays, *County and town, 100 years of local government*, originating as a series of Thomas Davis lectures to commemorate the centenary of the act, was published in 2001, edited by Mary Daly. Daly's own essay in this collection deals with local appointments and the setting up of the Local Appointments Commission in 1926. Her focus is primarily on the period immediately post-independence and from the central government's perspective.²⁷

²⁴ Virginia Crossman, *Local Government in nineteenth Ireland* (Belfast, 1994), pp 91-7.

²⁵ See Kildare County Council, *Kildare County Council, 1899-1999: first election and first meeting* (Naas, 1999).

²⁶ Diarmaid Ferriter, '*Lovers of Liberty*': *local government in twentieth century Ireland* (Dublin, 2003), passim.

²⁷ Mary Daly, 'Local appointments' in Mary Daly, (ed), *County and town: 100 years of local government: lectures on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898* (Dublin, 2001), pp 45-55.

I hope in this thesis to study the issue of local appointments in county Kildare under the new form of local government and to try to determine how those making them and seeking them in the early years of the act viewed such appointments.

Another essay in Mary Daly's collection, by John Coakley, deals with local elections and national politics. He states that in 1899 nationalist councillors were divided into followers of John Dillon, John Redmond or Tim Healy, but that from 1902 onwards 'a powerful new organisation, the United Irish League, dominated southern Irish politics at local and national level until after the First World War'.²⁸ One of the aims of this thesis is to examine the precise nature of the dynamic that existed between Kildare County Council, the United Irish League and the Irish Parliamentary Party.

The dual mandate has recently been abolished in contemporary Irish politics. It was flourishing in the early years of the twentieth century. In the early days of Kildare County Council, Matthew Minch, nationalist M.P. was also a county councillor but he was very far from getting his own way at the local level. He was bested in the appointment of a chairman of the council and was not nearly as influential in the financial affairs of the council as locals like Stephen J. Brown and John T. Heffernan.

In this thesis I would like to explore whether it can be assumed that because a county council was composed of a majority of nationalists that a particular party line was followed in all, or even in some, local issues. Given the intense localism of politics noted by Mike Wheatley,²⁹ it is more likely that a subtler type of

²⁸ John Coakley, 'Local elections and national politics' in Mary Daly, ed. *County and town*, p. 83.

²⁹ Mike Wheatley, 'The politics of the Irish Party and Sinn Féin: Laurence Ginnell in Westmeath', (unpublished research paper, 2003).

relationship existed between the councils and the United Irish League and Irish Parliamentary Party.

Patrick Maume's study of Irish nationalism in the post – parnellite era is one of the few books to refer at all to the General Council of County Councils, established by Sir Thomas Esmonde and John Sweetman. Maume notes the distrust that the organisation was held in by the United Irish League: 'The UIL leadership suspected him (Esmonde) of wishing to create an assembly of notables that could rival the party and deal independently with the government'.³⁰ This thesis will attempt to describe the precise relationship between the General Council of County Councils and nationalist politics at the level of Kildare County Council.

Pauric Travers's essay, in the Thomas Davis collection mentioned above, is entitled 'A bloodless revolution' and is a good account of the extent of the change in the personnel and the political allegiance of those in local government that came about immediately as a result of the Local Government (Ireland) Act. It does however tend to take its examples from the west of Ireland. Thus the influence of the United Irish League is noted in the first county council elections in 1899. A study of the United Irish League in Offaly points out that the organisation played no role in the first election and shows how it began a serious decline in influence following the ranch war of 1906-9 as the social and class divisions within nationalism began to manifest themselves much earlier than had been realised.³¹

Many of the county councils published their own histories to mark the centenary in 1999. Some of these are commemorative booklets and brochures, but there are a few serious academic studies among them. Diarmaid Ferriter's

³⁰ Patrick Maume, *The long gestation: Irish nationalist life, 1891-1918* (Dublin, 1990), p. 31.

³¹ John McEvoy, 'A study of the United Irish League in King's County, 1899-1918' (M.A. thesis, NUIM 1992), p. 6. and p. 174.

Chuimhnigh ar Luimneach, a history of Limerick County Council is very good on the post-Independence period but sketchy on the earlier era, 1889-1918.³²

Denis Boyle's *A history of Meath County Council*, is better on the early period, dealing with the administrative and political challenges facing the new body as it established itself from 1898 to 1920.³³ Unfortunately the book was published without references or notes.

Brendan Long's *Tipperary S.R. County Council, 1899-1999*, is one of the very few that deals head on with the issue of jobbery and local influence in appointments. Among others, it tells the story of the conflict between the council and the Local Government Board over the appointment of a new county secretary in 1900. Following an examination of his fitness for the job the LGB wrote to the council stating, 'The Board are satisfied from the scrutiny of [his] examination paper that he does not possess the required qualifications for the position. His writing and spelling alone are too faulty to qualify him for this important office, and his knowledge of arithmetic seems to be confined altogether to the most elementary rules'³⁴. In the end the council was forced to back down and appoint someone else. If there was jobbery it was not allowed to flourish in this instance.

Donal A. Murphy's *Blazing tar-barrels and standing orders, a study of North Tipperary's first two county councils and sets of district councils*, benefits from confining itself to the 1899 and 1902 elections and gives a useful analysis of the social and economic background of those who sought election. He questions just how representative the new councils actually were, noting the 'severe disparity between the means of the majority population, as measured in acreages of landholdings, and

³² Diarmaid Ferriter, *Cuimhnigh ar Luimneach: a history of Limerick County Council, 1889-1998* (Limerick, 1998).

³³ Denis Boyle, *A history of Meath County Council, 1899-1999* (Meath, 1999).

³⁴ Brendan Long, *Tipperary S.R. County Council, 1899-1999: a century of local democracy* (Tipperary, 1999), pp 24-9.

those they elected'.³⁵ This thesis will also look at the whole question of who became Kildare county councillors. What is evident from the minutes of Kildare County Council in the first years, is that the volume of work was such that meetings were much more frequent than the quarterly meetings required under the act. When it is considered that the important committees like the finance and the proposal committees, began to meet days before the main council meetings in order to get their work done, it is evident that being a councillor was very time-consuming and was not something that people who had to work full-time for their livelihood could undertake.³⁶ Murphy reminds us of the fact that farmers were often so busy with the grind of daily work that they 'were inhibited from public service'.³⁷

The history of Mayo County Council, *Public spirited people: Mayo County Council, 1899-1909*, likewise confines itself to a short period, 1899-1909, and similarly benefits from a more in-depth treatment. It shows that the emerging United Irish League was already having an impact in the West and even when its nominees failed to get elected they were promptly co-opted onto the council. One of the founders of the Land League, James Daly, was elected to Mayo County Council for the Castlebar district and the study concludes that, 'almost every councillor elected directly to that first council had an interest in the land question'.³⁸

Brian Donnelly's history of Wicklow County Council, *For the betterment of the people*, describes the local network of nationalist ties that began during the land war and was in place when the new council was formed and also when jobs were

³⁵ Donal A. Murphy, *Blazing tar-barrels and standing orders: North Tipperary's first county and district councils, 1899-1902* (Nenagh, 1999), pp 185-6.

³⁶ *Kildare County Council Minute Book, 2 April 1899- 25 Nov. 1899*; the bound volumes of minutes in Kildare are often incorrectly labelled: this volume actually contains minutes until Jan. 1900.

³⁷ Murphy, *Blazing tar-barrels*, pp 185-66; see also R.V. Comerford, *The Fenians in context* (Dublin, 1985), p. 248.

³⁸ Joe McDermott, *Public spirited people: Mayo County Council, 1899-1909* (Mayo, 1999), pp 14-6.

being offered in the new administrative structure. One example he gives is that of the new head clerk of the council, Simon J. Doyle, whose father was a former land leaguer and a member of the Rathdown board of guardians.³⁹

It might have been expected in Mayo, where the land league originated, that its influence would live on, but it is less expected to find that in Kildare, networks of political allies first formed in the land league era were still dominant in the county when the new county council is elected. At the first ever meeting of Kildare County Council, John T. Heffernan was proposed as temporary chairman. Heffernan had virtually run the Kildare land league during the land war in 1880-2 and had continued his interest in the land and nationalist issue throughout the period of the Irish National League.⁴⁰ The meeting then selected a permanent chairman, Stephen J. Brown, a solicitor from Naas, who was also involved in the land war and who had represented Heffernan when the latter was detained under the Coercion Act of 1881.

It would be easy to assume from this that a simple pattern of tenant farmers and their urban associates smoothly assuming the reins of local power from the retreating landlord class, was at work, but things were more complicated than that. Heffernan was by now a substantial landowner himself and he was proposed as temporary chairman by Matthew Minch, the Irish Party M.P. who was also a prosperous businessman. When the nominations for the permanent chair were put forward, Minch's nominee, Edward Fenelon, opposed Brown. Among Brown's supporters were Heffernan, Lord Frederick Fitzgerald, Marquis of Kildare and uncle of the duke of Leinster, Ambrose More O'Ferrall, Sir Gerald Dease and George Mansfield, all leading landowners in the county.⁴¹ Whatever was going on in Kildare

³⁹ Brian Donnelly, *For the betterment of the people: a history of Wicklow County Council* (Wicklow, 1999), pp 16-18.

⁴⁰ Thomas Nelson, *The land war in County Kildare* (Maynooth, 1985), pp 18-21.

⁴¹ K.C.C. mins. 22 Apr. 1899.

it was certainly no simple social revolution. It appears more like the emergence of a new oligarchy than a sudden overthrow of the great in favour of the landless poor. It will be one of the main aims of this thesis to explore in the case of Kildare, the nature of the 'revolution' that the coming of elected local government has been claimed to be.

Chapter one of this thesis will give an account of the history of local government in Kildare prior to the advent of the county council in 1899. It is against that background that any claim for the revolutionary nature of the new system must be assessed.

Chapter two will give an account of the social and economic background of the first Kildare County Council members, elected in April 1899 and serving until 1902. It will also look at the most important administrative and political issues that preoccupied the council.

Chapter three will be a narrative of the years from 1902 to 1911, during which the county council system became embedded in the life of the county, and will narrate the major events of that period, as they were experienced by and through Kildare County Council. It will also examine the consequences for the council's finances of the sale of the duke of Leinster's vast estates in the county under the Wyndham land act of 1903.

Chapter four will be an account of how Kildare County Council and its members responded to the political changes in Ireland from 1911 to 1916. The hopes of constitutional nationalists were raised and then disappointed through the various stages of the home rule crisis; the Great War had a direct personal impact on the lives of many people in the county and this was all reflected in the county council chamber.

Chapter five will examine how the council reacted to events from Easter week 1916 through to the end of 1918 and the growth of the political influence of Sinn Féin on the people whom the county councillors had been elected to represent in 1914. With the Sinn Féin victory in the general election in December 1918 the dislocation between the political opinions of the electorate and of the county council elected in 1914 became more pronounced.

Chapter six will examine the response of the council to the growing military chaos of the war of independence and the conflicting demands on its loyalty from the local government board and the underground Dáil Department of Local Government. After the local government elections in June 1920 an almost completely new council, dominated by Labour and Sinn Féin came into power in the county. The council's reaction to the truce and the subsequent treaty will be seen in the context of the general nationwide slide into civil war.

Chapter seven will examine how Kildare County Council fared under the Irish Free State from 1923 to 1926. The labour dominance of the council's policy continued largely unchallenged locally, though frequently challenged by the Free State Department of Local Government. In 1925 the balance of influence on the council reverted to the side of the farmers and they did not waste any time in undoing the pro-worker policies that the labour councillors had managed to bring in since 1920.

The conclusion will attempt to draw together the main themes of the narrative of the council's history up to 1926. It will try to assess to what extent it can be said that Kildare County Council succeeded in its primary function of administration of local government in the period.

A note on primary sources

The main primary sources for this thesis are the minute books of Kildare County Council and the reports of the council's activities in two local newspapers, *The Leinster Leader* and *The Kildare Observer*. The minute books and microfilm copies of both papers are available in Kildare County Library Local Studies Department, in Newbridge.

The Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898 established the modern democratic system of local government. The act established 33 administrative county councils, 214 rural district councils and 68 urban district councils, to be elected every three years by all male and female ratepayers, and all male non-rate paying occupiers and lodgers. Women who qualified as voters were eligible for election to the rural and urban district councils but not to the county councils. Poor Law Boards continued to exist but their membership was now the same as the rural district councils, except where a poor law union crossed county boundaries, in which case a separate election of its board was held.⁴² By April 1899 all these local authorities were up and running, supervised and closely monitored by the Local Government Board, based in the Custom House in Dublin. The system required a great deal of administration and has given rise to a vast quantity of documents and records of all sorts, of which county council minutes form one small but significant part.

⁴² Virginia Crossman, *Local Government in nineteenth century Ireland* (Belfast, 1994), pp 93-6.

Originally, under the act, county council meetings were to be held every three months, as “Quarterly meetings”, but almost immediately this proved to be too infrequent and within the first year, at least in the case of Kildare, meetings were held at least every month and with adjourned meetings taken into account, often more frequently. The volume of work simply required more meetings.

County councils originally had no executive separate from the councillors and work was distributed among various committees, the most important being the finance committee. In Kildare this was at first scheduled to meet one hour before the main council meeting, but again the volume of work very soon forced this meeting back to some days before the main meeting.

Another important committee was the proposal committee which decided what works the council surveyor should embark on over the subsequent period. In Kildare the membership of both these committees was almost identical and the meetings of both were held together, usually on the Thursday before the main council meetings on Mondays.⁴³

Since the whole area of hiring and firing of staff, the appointment of rate collectors and the sanctioning of the spending of money on works proposed by the district councils was in the control of these two committees, it can be seen how much power and influence was in the hands of the nine people who made up both committees. The minutes of all committees are also extant and included at the back of the official minute book of Kildare County Council.

For the first six months the minutes of Kildare County Council are in manuscript form, a lovely copperplate hand that is easy to read. The council then

⁴³ *Kildare County Council Minute Book, 2 April 1899 to 25 Nov 1899*. This book is incorrectly titled and should read “22 April” as this was the date of the first council meeting.

engaged an official printer, the Leinster Leader Ltd., and the minutes from then on are in printed form stuck into the minute book.

In terms of content, the minutes of the meetings of Kildare County Council during this period are quite detailed and record debates and arguments as well as decisions taken. They are in no way inferior to the local newspaper accounts of the meetings in this regard. Luckily Kildare County Council also seems to have kept many of the original minutes as recorded at the meetings, and these are labelled 'Rough Minutes'. They are quite untidy and much scribbled in the margin and re-arranged by arrows and crossing out. These 'Rough Minutes' are available for both the printed and the earlier manuscript minutes in the official record.

Diarmaid Ferriter in his history of Limerick County Council discusses this issue and concludes that 'there can be few complaints about the quantity or quality of the Limerick County Council minute books - even standing alone they are a vital illustration of invaluable primary source material and give an accurate indication of the whole gamut of local government activities in Limerick throughout the century'.⁴⁴ The same applies to Kildare County Council minutes.

The Local Government Act, 1994, section 65, requires local authorities to 'make arrangements for the proper management, custody, care and conservation of local records and local archives and for inspection by the public of local archives'.⁴⁵ As an aid to implementing the act the National Archives conducted a survey of local authority archives in 1995, to find out their extent and condition. The National Archives was involved partly to advise but also because they themselves do not have the capacity to handle all of the material that is assumed to have been generated by

⁴⁴ Diarmaid Ferriter, *Cuimhnigh ar Luimneach: a history of Limerick County Council 1898 – 1998* (Limerick, 1999), pp 12-3.

⁴⁵ Frances McGee, 'The local authority archives survey' in *Irish Archives*, nos. 3.2 (Autumn, 1996), p. 21.

over a century of local administration, even though before the 1994 Act some county council material had found its way into Bishop Street. In all, 114 local authorities were surveyed. The results of this survey conclude that a vast quantity of material exists but that many local authorities are not yet taking their responsibilities under the act seriously.⁴⁶ However, given that the act is just over ten years on the statute book the comment in the introduction to the fourth edition of Helferty and Refaussé's *Directory of Irish Archives* that 'more than 50 per cent'⁴⁷ of local authorities have failed to employ a professional archivist as required under the act, could equally be viewed positively as saying that nearly fifty per cent have done so and that this is surely an improvement on the position before the legislation.

The other main primary sources are the two local newspapers. The *Leinster Leader* was first published in 1880 and proclaimed its nationalist credentials from the start, promising to 'strenuously and faithfully maintain the great principles of Irish nationality and liberal progress'.⁴⁸ The *Leader* very largely maintained this viewpoint throughout the period covered by this thesis. During the period 1916 – 24 it did become more cautious and conservative despite the fact that its editor at the time of the Easter rebellion was an IRB member, Michael O'Kelly who was one of the first people arrested in Kildare as the British army reacted to the events of Easter week 1916 in Dublin.⁴⁹ O'Kelly never got back his job with the paper, in spite of a campaign by local labour and Sinn Féin politicians on his behalf in 1925.⁵⁰

The *Kildare Observer*, was founded in 1879 and was quite explicitly unionist and conservative in outlook, but was good at adapting the tone of its reporting to suit

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp 21-8.

⁴⁷ Séamus Helferty and Raymond Refaussé (eds), *Directory of Irish Archives* (4th ed., Dublin, 2003), p. 7.

⁴⁸ The *Leinster Leader centenary supplement* (Naas, 1980).

⁴⁹ See below, p. 228.

⁵⁰ K.C.C. mins. 18 Mar. 1925.

the changing circumstances, so that while it expressed itself anxious about the change that would be sure to result from the Local Government (Ireland) Act, it was generally positive in its assessment of how the new elected council was performing. It tended, during the period from 1916 to 1922, to support the British and unionist point of view, though once the results of the local government elections in 1920 put Sinn Féin and labour supporters into controlling positions on every county council in Ireland, outside of north-east Ulster, it did advise that, 'from the point of view of England, the only sane attitude would be to make an effort to ascertain how the national aspirations, as disclosed first by the parliamentary elections eighteen months ago and now by the county council and district elections, can be met'.⁵¹

Other primary sources include the police sub-inspector's monthly reports to Dublin Castle, in the National Archives, and a small collection of private papers belonging to John T. Heffernan, now in the manuscripts section of the National Library of Ireland.

It is worth noting here that the records of the LGB were almost completely destroyed when the I.R.A. burned down the Custom House, Dublin, in May 1921.⁵² The annual reports of the LGB are, however, extant and are a significant primary source.

⁵¹ K.O., 12 June 1920.

⁵² T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin and F.J. Byrne (eds), *A new history of Ireland: a chronology of Irish history to 1976* (Oxford, 1982), p. 400.

Chapter 1. Local government in Kildare before 1899

The subject of this thesis is local government in Kildare, more specifically, representative local government, as it developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and from which the modern county council system emerged. Of course, local government of other, less representative, types had existed in Ireland for centuries. Indeed, it may be argued that local government existed before central government, in that for most of the history of Ireland there really was only the former, as a myriad of tiny autonomous geopolitical units proliferated in pre-Norman Gaelic times. After the Norman invasion and during the subsequent attempt to extend Anglo-Norman forms of administration into Ireland, local government was often the area of meeting and conflict between the centralising monarchy with its representatives in Dublin and the local powers in the regions. These local powers were of both Gaelic and Norman origin. There follows an account of the various forms and types of local government in Ireland generally, and Kildare in particular, prior to the advent of the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898, under which the modern county council system was established.

The area now known as Kildare was not, before the Norman invasion, a distinct geographical or political entity. Four Gaelic territories occupied, approximately, the land that would eventually emerge as the later county Kildare. These territories were, Cairbre Ui Ciardha, or Carbury in the extreme north west of the area, Ui Faelan, or Offelan in the northeast and east, Hy Muireadhaigh, or Omurethi in the south, and about half of the territory of Ui Failghe in the west.¹ A more authoritative version of this is given in a later survey of the topic, with Carbury being omitted and Leix being added in

¹ See Lord Walter Fitzgerald, 'The ancient territories out of which the present county Kildare was formed, and their septs' in *J.K.A.S.*, vol.1 (1891-95), pp 159-168.

the southwest.² The dominant septs or tribes controlling these territories were the O'Byrnes and the O'Tooles in the east and the O'Connors and the O'Dempseys in the west.

The administrative systems by which these territories were governed tend to be seen by historians in comparison to those in the Anglo-Norman areas and to suffer in the comparison. D.B. Quinn and K.W. Nichols, in *A new history of Ireland, vol. iii*, describe them as 'personalised and undeveloped' and 'of a most rudimentary kind'.³ Steven G. Ellis, in *Ireland in the age of the Tudors*, is just as direct: 'The administration of Gaelic lordships was rudimentary'.⁴ Katherine Simms's study of the subject, *From kings to warlords*, which focuses only on Gaelic Ireland, tends, not surprisingly, to see the administrative systems there more positively and with a greater sense of the details and nuances of what is found.⁵ She admits that the basic political unit, the tuath, was 'so small as to have left evidence of only two administrators or royal officers, the king's 'brethem' or judge and his 'rechtaire' or 'seneschal'. She notes, however, that during the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries the political trend of smaller 'tuatha' being subsumed into larger conglomerate territories meant that Ireland consisted of 'no more than a dozen 'overkingdoms,' some of which had themselves become subordinate to dominant neighbours by the end of the period'.⁶ These larger units of political power needed a consequently more elaborate system of administration. She notes a distinction

² See F.J. Byrne 'The trembling sod: Ireland in 1169' in A. Cosgrove, ed., *A new history of Ireland vol.ii: Medieval Ireland, 1169-1534* (Oxford, 1986), pp 21-25; J. Otway-Rutven, 'The medieval county of Kildare' in *I.H.S.*, xi. no. 43 (March 1959), pp 181-199.

³ D.B. Quinn and K.W. Nicholls, 'Ireland in 1534' in T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin and F.J. Byrne (eds), *A new history of Ireland, iii: Early modern Ireland 1534-1691*, (Oxford, 1976), p. 26.

⁴ Steven G. Ellis, *Ireland in the age of the Tudors, 1447-1603* (London, 1998), p. 45.

⁵ Katherine Simms, *From kings to warlords: the changing political structure of Gaelic Ireland in the later middle-ages* (Boydell Press, 1987), pp. 79-95.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

in this system between administrators of aristocratic background who held hereditary offices, and paid professional servants of more plebeian origin.⁷

Among the hereditary functions which a lesser king might perform for his overlord were; 'chieftainship of the horse', 'command of the foot', 'guardianship of hostages and prisoners', 'standard bearer', 'chief of the treasures' and 'chief of the banquet'. The most important office seems to have been that of 'rechtaire', also called a 'seneschal' or even 'chancellor'.⁸ The apparently incongruous duties attached to this position illustrate just how far removed Gaelic society was from modern concepts of administration and 'local government'. Along with political and military counsel and support, the 'rechtaire' was also expected to carve and serve at his lord's banquets. This service may or may not have been purely honorary, but it is not without parallel in feudal society in England. Geoffrey Chaucer in commending the squire in *The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* says of him:

Curteys he was, lowly, and servisable
And carf biforn his fader at the table'.⁹

The custom in Gaelic society may have been along these simple lines of chivalric courtesy and honour.

A fascinating insight into how these ties of service and submission were created is given in a recent study of 'fosterage' and 'gossiprid' by Fiona Fitzsimons. She describes five different types of fostering, the ultimate aim of all of which was the same, namely, 'to create strong and persistent loyalties' especially when practised among the ruling classes. 'Gossipred' she defines as 'a pledge of fraternal association between a

⁷ Ibid., p. 84.

⁸ A succinct account of these Gaelic officers and administrators can be found in K.W. Nicholls, *Gaelic and gaelicized Ireland in the middle ages* (2nd edition, Dublin, 2003), pp 44-46.

⁹ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Prologue to The Canterbury Tales* (York medieval texts, 1980) ll 99-100.

lord and a client whereby the former got service and the latter received protection, patronage and ...preferential treatment of his suits in court'.¹⁰

Kenneth Nicholls describes other such devices for binding lesser chiefs to their overlords in Gaelic Ireland. Among these were 'kenaght' or buying, which was a payment made to an overlord in return for protection. This was a late medieval development also known as a 'slainte' for the protection it purchased. A more ancient tie was that of 'tuarastal', which bound the receiver to the service of the giver.¹¹

Besides these aristocratic offices one of the most frequently mentioned servants of the Gaelic lords was the 'maoir', or bailiff, and debt collector. In the later middle ages these were 'recruited from a comparatively low social class'.¹² The maoir employed by an overlord would make a circuit through not just his lord's territory but also through that of a 'vassal chief'.¹³ He might be supported in his collection of fines or dues by a group of armed kernes, perhaps the 'ceithearn tigh' or 'household-troop' of their lord. These household troops were generally mercenaries, either Irish or gallowglass and appear to have fulfilled a police role in maintaining an overlord's authority over his vassal chiefs.

The ambiguity involved in the existence of hereditary offices and paid servants is just as marked in the area of the administration of the law. The hereditary claims of the judges or 'breitheamhs' to positions with the various chiefs stretched back to time immemorial. Such judges often held positions with different and sometimes opposing chiefs. This inevitably led to conflicts of interest. The more powerful of the overlords

¹⁰ Fiona Fitzsimons, 'Fosterage and gossipry in late medieval Ireland: some new evidence' in Patrick J. Duffy, David Edwards and Elizabeth Fitzpatrick (eds), *Gaelic Ireland c. 1250 – 1650: land lordship and settlement* (Dublin, 2001), pp 139-44.

¹¹ K.W. Nicholls, *Gaelic and gaelicized Ireland in the middle ages*, pp 46-9.

¹² Simms, *From kings to warlords*, p. 83.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

seem to have gotten around this problem by appointing judges from outside the hereditary legal families.¹⁴

This change in the appointment and indeed function of the overlord's *breitheamh* seems to have coincided with a change in the understanding of an overlord's role in relation to the law. Traditionally a breach of the law was an issue between the perpetrator and a victim, even in circumstances that to modern eyes appear to be criminal cases, such as theft, or even violence and murder. The role of the *breitheamh* was to arbitrate according to the law between the two parties or their families. There was no role at all for the king or overlord. This situation changed by the end of the middle ages. It was now seen as a king's responsibility to actively prosecute those who broke the law and to actively impose the rule of law rather than be a passive observer of it in action. Two immediate benefits accrued to kings as a result of this change. Firstly, their authority was often and publicly asserted throughout their own and their subordinate territories by such prosecutions, and secondly, there were, as Simms says, 'financial advantages accompanying this extension of responsibility,' since they had the considerable extra revenue of the fines which they imposed on offenders.¹⁵

These were the major administrative officers and their functions which the evidence suggests existed in Gaelic Ireland (and to which may be given the entirely anachronistic term, 'local government') as they were before the Norman invasion, and as they evolved over time and under the influence of English ways, and indeed as they continued to do, until centralised English political authority was finally imposed on the whole island during the seventeenth century. It may be assumed that some combination of these offices and functions operated throughout the area now called Kildare, as the O'Connor chiefs imposed their power on the sub-chiefs such as the O'Dempseys in the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

western part of the territory, and the O'Tooles and O'Byrnes jostled for dominance in the east, while the McMurrugh claims extended in the southernmost parts of the area.

A recent study by Elizabeth Fitzpatrick of the gathering-sites in Gaelic lordships gives some indication of where the significant events and ceremonies of local administration of the kingships took place. She describes 'the habitual assembly sites of ruling families – the *tulach tinoil*, or 'hill of gathering', where *oireachtais* or parleys and inauguration ceremonies were held'. The sites chosen for such parleys and gatherings were usually in elevated places such as *Sliabh Gabhra*, the inauguration place of the Maguire of Fermanagh. Such sites were more likely to have seen service for the important communal and ceremonial events in the local political and tribal calendar rather than for the day-to-day administration of the lordships.¹⁶

Both the functions and their officers were still very much attached to the households of their respective kings or chiefs, of whatever status and power. In comparison to nineteenth and twentieth century systems of local government they may indeed seem 'rudimentary', but they do not appear significantly less sophisticated than the system for administering local government which was introduced after the coming of the Normans in the late twelfth century and which is the subject of the next section of this survey.

The Normans introduced into Ireland, on a gradual basis, the forms of local government they had been familiar with in England and which they had already introduced to their territories in Wales. The key features of this system were already in place in England when they arrived there in 1066. The country was divided into shires (counties) and the shires sub-divided into hundreds and each of these had its own court, that of the latter meeting every month and of the former, twice a year. The shire court

¹⁶ Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, 'An *Tulach Tinoil*: gathering-sites & meeting-culture in Gaelic Lordships' in *History Ireland*, (Spring 2001), pp 22-26.

was presided over by the sheriff, or 'shire reeve' who was already the principal local agent of the crown.¹⁷

Before looking at the details of the version of this early Norman local government system that was introduced into Ireland, it is perhaps worth considering the differences between liberties and royal counties. This is especially important for Kildare which had an interesting history of being either one or the other at various times, from the earliest Anglo-Norman land grants down to the fall of the house of Kildare in 1534. In terms of the actual administration of the territory it mattered little which it was, liberty or county, at any given time, but it certainly altered the political context in which such administration took place and it changed completely to whom those responsible for its administration answered.

In Ireland, lands reserved directly by King Henry II were shired first. Thus Dublin was a shire by the 1190s and probably earlier.¹⁸ Cork and Waterford had a sheriff in common by 1207-8 and Munster was a shire by 1211-12. By 1254 Munster had divided into the separate counties of Limerick and Tipperary.¹⁹

Large areas of Ireland were held from the crown as liberties, namely the liberties of Ulster, Meath and Leinster. Initially, the grantees, John de Courcy, Hugh de Lacy and Strongbow, respectively, had 'almost royal rights, with complete control of all administration and all jurisdiction, to the exclusion of royal officials' in their territory.²⁰ These extensive rights were considerably restricted in two significant ways by King John. In 1205 he reserved to himself all rights in the 'crosslands' or church property, even when such property was in a liberty. These included the politically important right

¹⁷ A.J. Otway-Ruthven, *A history of medieval Ireland* (2nd ed., New York, 1980), p. 173; P.J. Meghen, 'The administrative work of the grand jury' in *Administration* vol. 6. no. 2 (Autumn 1958), pp 247-9.

¹⁸ A.J. Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish shire government in the thirteenth century' in *I.H.S.*, v, no. 17 (Mar. 1946), pp 1-28.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Otway-Ruthven, *A history of medieval Ireland*, p. 181.

to make appointments to the episcopacy. Three years later he reserved to himself four specific 'royal pleas', those of arson, rape, treasure trove and forestall, again even within the areas of the liberties in Ireland. At the same time he reaffirmed the principle of 'jurisdiction in error', whereby the lords of the liberties only governed their territories as long as they upheld the king's law in doing so.²¹

For administrative convenience the large liberty of Leinster was divided into four counties (though as yet not 'royal' counties), Wexford, Kilkenny, Carlow and Kildare. It is not known exactly when Kildare was first made a county but there was a sheriff of Kildare by 1224. The county boundaries and status were confirmed and consolidated by the sharing out of the Marshall inheritance of Leinster among the five daughters of William Marshall 1 in 1247, following the death of the last of his childless brothers, Anselm, in 1245. The details of this division of the liberty need not concern us here but the result for Kildare was that by 1270 (when Margaret, countess of Lincoln, widow of one of the childless Marshall brothers, Walter, finally died) most of the lands and the rights of Kildare, were in the possession of the de Vescy family and it was being administered by them as a liberty.²² Indeed, it was the vigour with which William de Vescy insisted on his rights to the exclusion of the king's that led to the county being taken into the direct control of the crown in 1297.

The parliament of that year, among other attempts to arrest the serious decline in the fortunes of the colony and the peace on the marches, proclaimed Kildare a royal county.²³ The new status quo lasted for only a few years and in 1317 the county was

²¹Ibid., p181-2; C.A. Empey, 'Liberties' in S.J.Connolly, *The Oxford companion to Irish history* (Oxford, 1998), p. 314.

²² See A.J. Otway-Ruthven, 'The medieval county of Kildare' in *I.H.S.*, xi, no. 43 (Mar. 1959), pp 181-199.

²³ For a discussion of the political context in which the shiring of Kildare took place see, James Lydon, 'A land of war' in Art Cosgrove, ed. *A new history of Ireland ii medieval Ireland, 1169-1534* (Oxford, 1987), pp 270-273; Gerard McGrath 'The shiring of Ireland and the 1297 parliament' in James Lydon, (ed.), *Law and disorder in thirteenth-century Ireland: the Dublin parliament of 1297* (Dublin, 1997), pp 107-124.

restored as a liberty for the second earl of Kildare as a reward for his defence of the crown during the Bruce invasion. This liberty lasted until 1345 when the county was again taken back into the king's hands.²⁴ It remained a royal county from then until the early sixteenth century when for a few years its status was in doubt. D.B. Quinn and K.W. Nicholls in their survey of the country in *A new history of Ireland vol. iii*, are definite in their description of it as a liberty under the control of the Gerladines but note the opposition to this power by the lesser gentry of the county, such as the Aylmers and Suttons.²⁵

Steven G. Ellis, in *Ireland in the age of the Tudors*, says that 'Henry VIII permitted the establishment of an effectively new liberty of Kildare (c.1514-34)'.²⁶ Mary Ann Lyons in *Church and society in County Kildare* gives a more cautious assessment of the extent of the reality of the supposed liberty and concludes that 'as a result of the uncertainty surrounding the restoration of the earl's liberty in the 1510s and the ambiguity which shrouded its status as a franchise, controversy arose in the 1530s concerning the legal validity of the liberty, and more importantly, the ninth earl's alleged abuse of that liberty'.²⁷

When Kildare was a liberty its chief government official was, strictly speaking, the lord or the lady of the liberty. As A.J. Otway-Ruthven says in his *History of medieval Ireland*, 'the lord of a liberty was a royal agent. The law which he must execute within his liberty was the law of the land, and the royal writ of error would ensure that he did so'.²⁸ In Kildare's case the first lord of the liberty was Strongbow, as

²⁴ A.J. Otway-Ruthven, *A history of medieval Ireland*, p. 174.

²⁵ D.B. Quinn and K.W. Nichols, 'Ireland in 1534' in T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin and F.J. Byrne (eds), *A new history of Ireland iii: Early modern Ireland, 1534-169* (Oxford, 1976), pp 5-6.

²⁶ Steven G. Ellis, *Ireland in the age of the Tudors 1447-1603: English expansion and the end of Gaelic rule* (London, 1998), p. 176.

²⁷ Mary Ann Lyons, *Church and society in County Kildare, c. 1470-1547* (Dublin, 2000), p. 48; see also D.B. Quinn 'Anglo-Irish local government, 1485-1534' in *I.H.S.* i, no. 4 (Sept. 1939), pp 377-81.

²⁸ A.J. Otway-Ruthven, *A history of medieval Ireland*, p.187.

lord of Leinster, followed by his Marshall heirs, William 1, and in succession, his childless brothers, until the death of the last of them in 1245. Two years later the entire Marshall legacy in Ireland and in Wales was divided among the five daughters of William. Then most of the county was held in dower by the widow of Walter Marshall, Margaret, countess of Lincoln until her death in 1270. From then until 1290 Agnes de Vescy held it as a liberty in its own right when it passed to her son William de Vescy. It was he who was forced to surrender the liberty to the king and for a few years it was administered directly by the king's officials. In 1317 it was returned to liberty status under Thomas FitzThomas, second earl of Kildare.²⁹

The chief administrator of a liberty was known as a 'seneschal'. He occupied the same place in the government of a liberty as the justiciar did in the country as a whole. He had military, exchequer and judicial functions on behalf of his lord. In spite of being the lord of the liberty's official, his appointment had to be notified to the exchequer in Dublin where he had to account for his lord's returns and he was obliged to take an oath to the king.³⁰

At the head of local government in the royal counties and in the counties of the liberties, was the sheriff. Though no doubt overshadowed by the seneschal in the liberties, his was still a very significant office. He was assisted in his duties in Kildare by chief sergeants, one for each cantred (barony).³¹

²⁹ See A.J. Otway-Ruthven, 'The medieval county of Kildare' in *I.H.S.*, xi, no. 43 (Mar. 1959), pp 181-199.

³⁰ A.J. Otway-Ruthven, *History of medieval Ireland*, p. 184.

³¹ Irish shires were never divided into hundreds as those in England were, but into 'cantreds' which roughly corresponded to the ancient Gaelic tuaths which the Normans found on their arrival and equated with the Welsh 'cantref' with which they were familiar: by the sixteenth century the word 'barony' was being used to describe what had earlier been called 'cantreds': see A.J. Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish shire government in the thirteenth century' in *I.H.S.*, v, no. 17 (Mar. 1946); Neal Garnham, 'Barony' in S.J. Connolly, *The Oxford companion to Irish history* (Oxford, 1998), p. 39.

The sheriff was the 'principal local representative of royal government'.³² He was the agent responsible for the collection of the bulk of the ordinary revenue of the crown. He was also in charge of spending such sums as he was ordered to for the repair of the king's castles, the purchase of provisions for wars, and the expenses of agents of the central government.

The sheriff also had important functions in relation to the royal courts. When the justiciar and later the justices held sessions or eyres in the localities it was the sheriff who had to assemble the pleas and the personnel necessary. He was responsible for the custody of prisoners and the collection of debts recovered through the courts and he had to execute royal writs of all kinds. He also had his own twice yearly court, known as the 'sheriff's tourn', in each cantred, which enquired into a range of administrative and judicial matters and tried minor offences.³³ Besides these duties, the sheriff had military functions and could be required to assist the keepers of the peace in putting down unrest or warding off attacks by the native Irish.

Such was the importance of the office of sheriff that the treasurer and barons of the exchequer strictly controlled appointments, originally under the English great seal or the Irish justiciar and later by the treasurer and barons of the exchequer. In 1355 this procedure was replaced by a form of annual election under which a sheriff was chosen by an assembly of the 'best men of the county' to serve for one year, after which he could not be reappointed until all his returns were accounted for in the exchequer.³⁴

Despite the heavy workload and the close scrutiny of the financial returns, the office of sheriff was a lucrative one and it was eagerly sought. In the thirteenth century

³² A.J. Otway-Ruthven, *A history of medieval Ireland*, p. 176.

³³ *Ibid.*, and see also, A.Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish shire government in the thirteenth century', in *I.H.S.* vol. v. no. 17 (Mar. 1946), pp 1-28.

³⁴ A.J. Otway-Ruthven, *A history of medieval Ireland*, p. 176.

it was seen as an important stage in the career of professional administrators. In later periods most county sheriffs 'seem to have been country gentlemen'.³⁵

The sheriff needed a fairly extensive staff to carry out his many functions. Sergeants who did most of the routine work of serving writs and collecting debts assisted him. Unlike sheriffs however, the sergeants were hereditary officials and not always as subject to the former's direction as one might expect. Generally there was a chief sergeant in each county and a sergeant in each cantred. Kildare was somewhat exceptional in this respect in that the sergeant in each cantred was described as a 'chief sergeant of fee'.³⁶

Another significant official of local government in the medieval period was the coroner. He was elected by an oath of twelve men in the county court. The duties included the expected ones of enquiring into unnatural deaths but also a range of judicial functions relating to the law of sanctuary and the recording of all private criminal accusations. It was not a sought-after office and could sometimes be avoided by bribing the sheriff.³⁷

Finally there were the keepers of the peace, appointed, as in England, from the early fourteenth century onwards, to assist the sheriff in maintaining order. They were drawn from the gentry of the county and were, in Ireland, often the first defence against raiding Gaelic neighbours. In England the 'keepers of the peace' evolved into 'justices of the peace' and replaced the sheriff as the crown officer directly responsible for the government of the county and came to be recognised as the first and only local organ of its executive.³⁸ In Ireland they did acquire minor judicial duties but their main function

³⁵ Ibid. p. 179.

³⁶ A.J. Otway-Rutven, 'Anglo-Irish shire government in the thirteenth century' in *I.H.S.*, v, no. 17 (Mar. 1946), p. 23.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 26.

³⁸ Bryan Keith-Lucas, *The history of local government in England* (2nd ed., London, 1970). p. 14.

remained military and they only much later gained a role in public administration in their counties.³⁹

These then are the forms and structures of local government that emerged from late medieval Ireland and that existed at the beginning of the long period of conflict and conquest that may be said to have begun with the ending of the Kildare dominance in 1534 and to have lasted until the establishment of the protestant ascendancy at the end of the seventeenth century. A number of significant developments took place during that period which set the pattern for local administration for the next two hundred years. Most notable in this was the emergence of the county grand juries as the most significant instrument of local authority, a position they maintained until the radical reform of the entire system under the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898.

The story of the grand juries is a reminder that for most of the period of this survey 'local administration' meant the imposition of the law of the central authority and the collection of the king's taxes. The idea of local government as being about the provision of services to the people is a phenomenon of the second half of the nineteenth century at the earliest. It may be that the decision to allow relief as of right – rather than at the discretion of the givers - to distressed famine victims from 1847 onwards was the moment at which a recognisably modern concept of local services emerged.⁴⁰

Grand juries were panels of between twelve and twenty-three notable landholders in a county called together originally by the county sheriff to hear and rule on indictments presented at the twice-yearly assize courts of the circuiting judges. Originally known as the 'grand inquest' the jury's main task was to enquire into the validity of indictments for a range of both civil and criminal cases. If the jury found

³⁹ See Steven G. Ellis, 'The administration of the lordship of Ireland under the early Tudors' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Queens University, Belfast, 1978), p. 337.

⁴⁰ See Virginia Crossman, *Local government in nineteenth century Ireland* (Belfast, 1994), p. 48.

such an indictment to be a 'true bill' it was sent forward for trial in the appropriate court.⁴¹ Despite the accretion of a huge range of public administration tasks from the 1630s to the 1830s this judicial role of the grand juries remained its primary function. The title 'grand inquest'⁴² remained in use to cover this judicial area of responsibility. In 1855 at the summer assizes in Kildare, the Lord Chief Justice in his opening remarks to the grand jury addressed them as follows: 'Mr foreman, my Lord Marquis of Kildare and gentlemen of the grand inquest of the county of Kildare'.⁴³

The system of circuits of assizes⁴⁴ established in medieval Ireland seems, by the early sixteenth century, to have largely broken down and the functioning of the county grand juries with it. As Steven G. Ellis's unpublished study, 'The administration of the lordship of Ireland under the early Tudors' describes it, 'It seems evident...that in the late medieval period the system of regular commissions of oyer and terminer, gaol delivery and assize had broken down'.⁴⁵

For those within the Pale the solution was to seek access to the courts centrally at Dublin. Beyond the Pale, justice was occasionally to be had from the special commissions that were appointed from time to time with wide powers to go into the regions and enquire into most aspects of local administration. To help them in this, the commissions empanelled grand juries in the counties.⁴⁶ The presentments made to some of these juries in many counties are extant, but unfortunately Kildare's is not among them.

⁴¹ See Virginia Crossman, 'Grand juries' in S.J. Connolly, *The Oxford companion to Irish History* (Oxford, 1998), p. 227.

⁴² For a discussion of the origin of the term 'grand jury' see P.J. Meghen, 'The administrative work of the grand jury' in *Administration* vol.6 no. 2 (Autumn 1958), p. 249 and Neal Garnham, *The courts, crime and the criminal law in Ireland, 1692-1760* (Dublin, 1996), p. 121.

⁴³ *Leinster Express*, 4 Aug. 1855 .

⁴⁴ *The Oxford English dictionary*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1933) p. 512, uses the plural form to mean a single 'sitting or session of a consultative body'.

⁴⁵ Steven G. Ellis, 'The administration of the lordship of Ireland under the early Tudors' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Queens University Belfast, 1978), p. 316.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 329-30.

As the sixteenth century progressed more of Ireland was shired and grand juries either at the re-established assizes or as part of special commissions became the chief non-military instrument of central government's assertion of its power in the counties. In 1543 Westmeath became a county in its own right, separate from Meath. In 1556 King's County and Queen's County were shired. In the 1570s Connaught was divided into the four counties of Galway, Mayo, Roscommon and Sligo. Ulster was the last area to be shired but by late in Elizabeth 1's reign the counties of Armagh, Tyrone, Monaghan, Fermanagh, Derry, Donegal, and Antrim and Down had emerged.⁴⁷

From the late 1560s a new system of provincial presidencies, in Connaught and Munster was proposed and implemented. In each case a council and a provincial chief justice assisted the lord president. The presidencies however did not replace county organisation but facilitated its establishment in Connaught, and its re-establishment in Munster. Palatine powers and lordships, which had for centuries kept English forms of administration out of these regions, were replaced, using a mixture of force and persuasion.⁴⁸

A similar policy was considered for Ulster when and if it came under central government control. When it eventually did, in 1603, the idea was briefly revived but never implemented. Instead the same effects were achieved in more direct fashion without the formal appointment of a lord president. G. A. Hayes McCoy illustrates the ferocity with which the crown forces imposed this process of establishing English forms of local authority in Ulster and the bitterness with which it was received by the native powers in his contribution to *A new history of Ireland vol. iii.* when he describes the

⁴⁷ Desmond Roche, *Local government in Ireland*, pp 28-9.

⁴⁸ See G.A. Hayes McCoy, 'Tudor conquest and counter-reformation, 1571-1603' in T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin and F.J. Byrne (eds). *A new history of Ireland iii: Early modern Ireland 1534-1691*(Oxford, 1976), pp 91-101; R.W. Edwards and Mary O'Dowd, *Sources for early modern Irish history, 1534-1641* (Cambridge, 1985), pp 43-5.

imposition of sheriffs on the McMahon lordship of Monaghan and the Maguire lordship of Fermanagh in the 1590s.⁴⁹

Thus by the beginning of the seventeenth century the basic shape of local government, on which later changes would be grafted (until the advent of the Poor Law Unions in the 1830s offered an alternative local body to which to assign new local powers) had been established throughout Ireland. It consisted of a high sheriff in each county and borough county, assisted by sergeants in the day-to-day execution of his writ serving and debt and tax collecting. Among the duties of the high sheriff was the empanelling of the county grand jury for the assizes circuit of the lords chief justices in their twice-yearly visit to each county. The grand jury panel was almost exclusively made up of the biggest landowners of the county, from whom the sheriff himself was chosen - thus a self-perpetuating oligarchy developed.⁵⁰

It was never explicitly stated what the qualification for membership of the grand jury should be. Crossman says only that they were 'selected from the leading property owners in the county'.⁵¹ Garnham notes that actual qualification for service as a juror was governed as much by precedent as by law, and goes on to say that the precedent 'required that grand jurors should be freeholders within the county, and excluded women and peers'.⁵² R.B. McDowell says that 'the high sheriffs when selecting grand jurors were limited in their choice by contemporary convention'.⁵³

The only explicit statute governing membership qualification was that of 1709 which formally excluded Catholics from grand jury service. This became a major source

⁴⁹ See G.A. Hayes McCoy 'Tudor conquest and counter-reformation, 1571-1603' in T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin and F.J. Byrne (eds), *A new history of Ireland vol. iii: Early modern Ireland 1534-1691* (Oxford, 1976) p. 116.

⁵⁰ Neal Garnham, 'Local elite creation in early Hanoverian Ireland: the case of the county grand jury' in *Historical Journal*, vol. 42, no. 3 (1999), p. 630-1.

⁵¹ Crossman, *Local government in nineteenth century Ireland*, p 27.

⁵² Garnham, 'Local elite creation in early Hanoverian Ireland: the case of the county grand jury', p. 630.

⁵³ R.B. McDowell, *The Irish Administration, 1801-1914* (London, 1964,), p. 164.

of grievance for the Catholic community in the later years of the century as their campaign for relief from the penal laws mounted. An interesting insight into how much grand jury service had become a part of the Protestant identity can be gleaned from an exchange recounted by R.B. McDowell in *A new history of Ireland* vol. iv. Opposing change to the restrictions in 1792, a group of advisors made the point that ‘in Ireland the grand jury was responsible for county government, that grand jury service therefore afforded ‘much consequence to the protestant gentry’ and that to ask them to share their privileges would imperil the whole policy of concessions’.⁵⁴ Such opposition failed to prevent the removal of the bar to Catholics from grand jury service in the Catholic relief Act of the next year. In reality of course it made little difference to the composition of the juries since Catholics were still not permitted to hold the office of sheriff. Likewise the act made no impact on the number of Catholics who were substantial landlords in the counties.

In 1635 grand juries were given the power to build and maintain gaols in their respective counties and to tax locally for the purpose. The power of the quarter sessions to levy the cess was removed in 1727 and given to the grand jury at assizes alone.⁵⁵ Thus began a series of extensions in the power and scope of grand juries to initiate local works for the benefit of the localities and to tax the occupiers of land for the purpose. By the time these powers were summarised in reforming legislation in 1836 they included, roads works, gaols, courthouses, piers, bridewells, sessions houses and also houses of industry, fever hospitals, county infirmaries, dispensaries and lunatic asylums.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ R.B.McDowell, ‘Reform and reaction, 1789-94’ in T.W. Moody and W.E. Vaughan (eds), *A new history of Ireland iv: Eighteenth century Ireland, 1691-1800* (Oxford, 1986), pp 309-10.

⁵⁵ See Crossman, *Local government in nineteenth century Ireland*, p. 2; Roche, *Local government in Ireland*, p. 30; Neal Garnham, ‘Local elite creation in early Hanoverian Ireland: the case of the county grand jury’, p. 626.

⁵⁶ P.J. Meghen, ‘The administrative work of the grand jury’, pp 247-264.

The Grand Jury (Ireland) Act 1836 brought together all the previous legislation and reforms and further opened the procedure to local scrutiny by removing the property qualification for magistrates at baronial road presentment sessions and to professional scrutiny by allowing the county surveyors to make presentations for work which they considered necessary but which magistrates anxious not to increase the cess charge might neglect to initiate.⁵⁷

In 1838 the poor law system was established in Ireland and the country was divided into poor law unions that took little account of barony or even county boundaries. Originally established to deal with poverty and provide a minimal level of support for the destitute, the poor law system fairly quickly began to develop into a parallel and alternative system of local administration. Crucially, the poor law system was seen as more representative than the grand juries as it was administered by boards of poor law guardians in each union that were elected by those who paid the new poor law rates which was levied to finance it. In fact half the members of unions were elected and half were local magistrates or justices of the peace sitting ex-officio.

Mary Daly has described the underlying principles of the system as, 'efficiency, centralisation and accountability'.⁵⁸ The efficiency was imposed by very close audit of the financial affairs of the boards and the centralisation by the very strong control over them by, first, the English poor law commissioners, and then, after 1847, the Irish poor law commissioners. The accountability was to be ensured by the representative nature of the boards themselves.

Spurred on by necessity during the famine, the poor law system developed quickly. In 1851 responsibility for the dispensary system was transferred to the boards

⁵⁷ See, Crossman, *Local government in Ireland* p. 38; Roche, *Local government in Ireland*, p 31; Meghen, 'The administrative work of the grand jury', p. 262.

⁵⁸ Mary E. Daly, *The buffer state: the historical roots of the department of the environment* (Dublin, 1997), p. 13.

of guardians. The emergency measures of the famine years were made permanent and each union was required to provide free medical care for the poor through the local dispensaries. Grand juries lost all input into this. The same year nuisance removal and disease prevention was added to the poor law boards' duties. In 1856 they took charge of burials in their areas and from 1865 they were made sewer authorities for those parts of counties not covered by town jurisdiction. Other duties that the boards acquired included registration of births and marriages, smallpox vaccination and control of cattle diseases. During the same period the only new duties given to grand juries were minor ones to do with weights and measures and dog control.⁵⁹

It would not be true to say that in the second half of the nineteenth century grand juries became irrelevant, but several factors combined to make their existence less controversial. Their role in local government diminished as that of the poor law boards increased. The perception of them as corrupt lessened as the reforms of the 1830s made most of their deliberations open at least to public scrutiny and their diminished role narrowed the opportunities for them to practice the jobbery they had frequently been accused of. The land act of 1870 had relieved very small tenants of all county cess liability and even larger tenant could deduct half of their liability for cess from their rents due to the landlord. After this, the grand juries could no longer even be accused of taxing the tenants while denying them representation. Nevertheless, the continued existence of a predominantly Protestant landlord-dominated institution had a powerful symbolic significance and when the land war focussed the antipathy of the largely Catholic nationalist population on landlordism in general, the grand jury came in for much odium from the nationalist side.

⁵⁹ See Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 17; Roche, *Local government in Ireland*, pp 41-2; Crossman, *Local government in Ireland*, pp 50-1.

It should be said of course that reform of local government was not a political demand of nationalists from the 1880s. The twin aims of land reform and home rule did not in fact include any specific ambition among nationalists to bring forward or support local government changes. An attempt in 1885 to tackle the home rule issue by means of significant reforms of local government foundered on the suspicion that local government reform would be used as a substitute for an Irish parliament.⁶⁰ As already mentioned above,⁶¹ the reform when it did come in the form of the Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898⁶² emerged out of liberal unionist and conservative policies, with little reference to nationalist opinion. Whatever the political origin and motivation for the act, one of its first consequences was to end the un-elected dominance of the landed gentry in Irish local government which it had enjoyed since the earliest days of the Norman invasion.

On Friday 17 March 1899 the Kildare county grand jury met in the courthouse in Naas for the spring assizes. The high-sheriff of the county, Major Robert St. Leger Moore, led in the twenty-three grand jurors he had empanelled from the leading landowners and notables of the county and administered the oath of office to them. The grand jurors were as follows: Thomas Cooke-Trench (foreman), Baron de Robeck, Ambrose More O’Ferrall, Thomas John de Burgh, George Mansfield, Major John A. Aylmer, Edmond Sweetman, Percy La Touche, Lord Frederick Fitzgerald, Hans Hendrick Aylmer, James E. Medlicott, Major William Blacker, Capt. Mark Maunsell, Matthew Minch M.P., Lord Walter Fitzgerald, Capt. A.A. Weldon, William Ireland Wheeler, W.T. Kirkpatrick, Fleetwood Rynd, M. C. Cramer-Roberts, Col. Charles Crichton, George Wolfe, John C. Murphy. They were to hear the criminal and civil law

⁶⁰ R.V. Comerford, ‘The Parnell era, 1883-91’ in W.E. Vaughan, (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, vi: *Ireland under the union, 11, 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996), pp 57-8.

⁶¹ See above p. 5.

⁶² 61 & 62 Vict., c. 37.

cases as grand juries had done since the middle ages, and to conduct county administrative business as they had done since the early seventeenth century.

The twice-yearly assizes, in spring and in summer, were great social occasions in Naas, as some of the wealthiest men in the county arrived for meetings that could last two or even three days. Money was spent, politics discussed, business contacts made and renewed, and a lively atmosphere prevailed.⁶³

Including the high-sheriff, most of those in attendance were major landowners in the county. Some of the families represented on the list had been involved in county local affairs since the earliest days of the Norman settlement of Ireland. Their names recur again and again in lists of the county high sheriffs dating back to 1246 and in grand jury list back to the 1770s.⁶⁴

The extent of land owned by the above grand jurors is set out below:

Table 1. Land owned by Kildare county grand jurors for March 1899.⁶⁵

Grand Juror	Land in Kildare	Land in other counties
Hans Hendrick Aylmer	3871 acres	
Major John A. Aylmer	15396 acres	
William Blacker	948 acres	
Thomas Cooke-Trench	666 acres	
M.C. Cramer Roberts	2135 acres	
Col. Charles Crichton	498 acres	

⁶³ *K.O.*, 25 Mar. 1899.

⁶⁴ J.R. Garstin, 'The high sheriffs of the county Kildare' in *J.K.A.S.*, vol. ii (1896-1899), p. 254; anon., 'G. Falkener's *Dublin Journal* for 9 Feb. 1773: gentlemen of the Co. Kildare Spring assizes, 1772' *J.K.A.S.*, vol. xii, (1935-1945) p.105 and pp. 128-30.

⁶⁵ This table was compiled using, *Return for 1870 of the number of landed proprietors...*(167) H.C. 1872 xlv11; *Summary of the return of owners of land in Ireland...*(422) H.C. 1876 lxxx, U.H. Hussey de Burgh, *The landowners of Ireland, an alphabetical list of the owners of estates of 500 acres and upwards or £500 valuation or upwards in Ireland* (Dublin, 1878); *Griffiths Valuation* (Dublin, 1851).

Thomas John de Burgh	1281 acres	
Baron de Robeck	1838 acres	
Lord F. Fitzgerald ⁶⁶	67227 acres ⁶⁷	
Lord Walter Fitzgerald	2,224 acres	
Fleetwood Rynd	1008 acres	
W.T. Kirkpatrick	630 acres	3641 acres
Percy La Touche	11282 acres	
George Mansfield	4542 acres	
Capt. Mark Maunsell	1308 acres	
James Medlicott	1490 acres	
Matthew Minch MP	Businessman	
Ambrose More O’Ferrall	3212 acres	8038 acres
John C. Murphy	5522 acres	
Edmund Sweetman	1994 acres	
Capt. A.A. Weldon	292 acres	
William Ireland Wheeler	242 acres	677 acres
George Wolfe	1397 acres	2762 acres

The extent to which the grand jury was in the hands of a small group of landed families can be seen clearly from the following lists of grand jurors for a selection of earlier years.

⁶⁶ Strictly speaking Lord Frederick Fitzgerald was trustee rather than owner of the Leinster estate at this time, during the minority of the then duke of Leinster.

⁶⁷ The acreage quoted here does not take account of the extensive portions of the estate sold under the 1885 and 1891 land acts: see Terence Dooley, *The decline of the big house in Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), p. 113.

In 1881 the grand jury was as follows, with acreage in the county in brackets: Richard Wilson Hartley (1057), William Cogan (2868), John La Touche (11282) Baron de Robeck (1838), Major H. L Barton (5044), Major R.H. Borrowes (6089), George Mansfield (4542), A. More O’Ferrall (3212), Patrick Sweetman (1994), John Maunsell (1308), Charles Colley Palmer (2342), James Medlicott (1490), F. Maxwell Carroll (569), Fleetwood Rynd (1008), Algernon Hervey (not known), Thomas Cooke-Trench (666), Henry Fitzgeorge Colley (4216), Robert Mackey Wilson ((5432), Francis Colgan (552), Hugh Henry (not known), Samuel G. Ireland (242), and Henry T. Finlay (not known).⁶⁸

In 1855 the grand jurors were, G.A. Aylmer (3871), W.H. F. Cogan (2868), The Marquis of Kildare (68271)⁶⁹, Viscount Naas (16609)⁷⁰, G.F. Colley (4216), Sir G. A. Aylmer (15369), John La Touche (11282), G. Mansfield (4542), Ponsonby Moore (423), J.H. Nangle (not known), E.J. Beaumann (not known), Richard Maunsell (1308), Harvey Lewis (not known), R.L. Moore (504), Robert Cassidy (not known), Sir J.W. Hort (1847), Baron de Robeck (1838), Charles Colthurst (not known), Hugh L. Barton (5044), Christopher Rynd (1008), and J. E. Medlicott (1490).⁷¹

From the lists for 1899, 1881 and 1855 the following family names also appear on the list of jurors from whom the county grand jury for 1808 was selected: Alymer⁷², Fitzgerald (Marquis of Kildare), La Touche, Borrowes, Moore (Marquis of Drogheda), de Burgh⁷³, Wolfe, More O’ Ferrall, Mansfield, Finlay, Cassidy, Medlicott, Nangle, and Henry.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ *K.O.*, 16 July 1881

⁶⁹ He was the eldest son of the duke of Leinster who owned the land.

⁷⁰ He was the eldest son of Lord Naas in whose name the land was held.

⁷¹ *L.E.*, 17 Mar. 1855.

⁷² See Hans Hendrick Aylmer ‘The Aylmer family’ in *J.K.A.S.*, vol. I (1891-1895), pp. 295-30; idem., ‘The Aylmers of Lyons, county Kildare’ in *J.K.A.S.*, vol. iv (1903-1905), pp. 179-183.

⁷³ See Thomas de Burgh, ‘The de Burgh’s of Oldtown’ in *J.K.A.S.*, vol. iv (1903-1905) pp. 467-472.

⁷⁴ For this list see anon., ‘Grand jury panel for Co. Kildare, 1808’ in *J.K.A.S.*, vol. xii, (1935-1945), pp. 128-30.

In the grand jury panel for 1772 the following family names occur: Fitzgerald (Kildare) Borrowes, Finlay, Hort, Henry⁷⁵, de Burgh, Aylmer, Wolfe⁷⁶, Palmer, and Moore.⁷⁷

In a list of the gentry of Kildare for 1600 the following family names of the above grand jurors appear: Aylmer, Colley⁷⁸, Fitzgerald, Nangle, O'More (More O'Ferrall)⁷⁹ and Wolfe.⁸⁰

An even better insight into the dominance of the same families in county government in Kildare is gained by an examination of the lists of sheriffs of Kildare since the middle-ages. Below are the names from the grand jury lists of 1899, 1881, 1855, and 1808, which also appear on the list of sheriffs of Kildare from the earliest times. The office of sheriff was for one year and the holder was chosen by the lieutenant of the county from a list of three names forwarded to the crown judge at the summer assizes. The list of three was furnished to the judge by the outgoing sheriff 'so that practically he usually appoints his successor'.⁸¹ The sheriff then proceeded to choose the grand jury from the panel. Meanwhile the next year's sheriff was almost invariably chosen from among the grand jury members and the whole self-perpetuating system continued almost without alteration for centuries.

⁷⁵ Anon., 'The Henry family in Kildare' in *J.K.A.S.*, vol. iii (1899-1902), pp. 386 – 88.

⁷⁶ See George Wolfe, 'The Wolfe family of county Kildare' in *J.K.A.S.*, vol. iii (1899-1902), pp. 361-367.

⁷⁷ Anon., 'G. Falkener's Dublin Journal for 9 Feb. 1773: gentlemen of the Co. Kildare Spring assizes, 1772' in *J.K.A.S.*, vol. xii, (1935-1945), p. 105.

⁷⁸ Martin J. Kelly, 'The last days of the Colleys on Carbury Hill' in *J.K.A.S.*, vol. xvii (1991), pp 96-98.

⁷⁹ For the story of the More O'Ferrall family see Lord Walter Fitzgerald (ed.), 'The O'More family of Ballyna in the county Kildare by James More of Ballyna, circa 1774' in *J.K.A.S.*, vol. ix (1918-1921), pp. 277-91; *ibid.*, pp 319-28.

⁸⁰ Lord Walter Fitzgerald, 'The principal gentry of the county Kildare in the year 1600' in *J.K.A.S.*, vol. iii (1899-1902), pp 118-22.

⁸¹ J.R. Garstin, 'The high sheriffs of the county Kildare' in *J.K.A.S.*, vol. ii (1896-1899), p. 254.

Table 2. Family names which occur in the lists of nineteenth century grand jurors and high sheriffs in Kildare. ⁸²

Name	Frequency of occurrence	Years office was held
Aylmer	15	1597, 1680, 1685, 1725, 1761, 1783, 1795, 1796, 1803, 1819, 1827, 1854, 1896
Fitzgerald (other branches of family)	13	1558, 1573, 1573 ⁸³ , 1574, 1578, 1581, 1586, 1593, 1596, 1598, 1605, 1606, 1634
Borrowes	9	1641, 1642, 1673, 1697, 1707, 1716, 1751, 1809, 1873
De Burgh	5	1712, 1733, 1733, 1766, 1860, 1883
Fitzgerald (Carton)	5	1772, 1832, 1842, 1845, 1881
Maunsell	4 times	1293, 1841, 1891

⁸² Ibid., pp 253-267; see also, anon., 'G. Falkener's *Dublin Journal* for 9 Feb. 1773: gentlemen of the Co. Kildare Spring assizes, 1772' in *J.K.A.S.*, vol. xii, (1935-1945), p. 105. and pp. 128-130; *L.E.*, 4 Aug. 1855; *K.O.*, 16 July 1881; *K.O.*, 25 Mar. 1899.

⁸³ There were two commissions in Kildare that year: see above p. 35.

Colley	4	1623, 1665, 1723, 1734
Wolfe	4	1755, 1770, 1779, 1805
Weldon	3	1642, 1638, 1668
More O’Ferrall	2	1856, 1879
Medlicott	2	1695, 1749
Henry	2	1771,1820
Nangle	2	1602, 1836
Mansfield	2	1851, 1874
Cramer-Roberts	2	1822, 1889
de Robeck	2	1834, 1859
Sweetman	2	1862, 1888
La Touche	2	1797, 1843
Crichton	1	1886
Rynd	1	1872
Wheeler	1	1892
Blacker	1	1887
Cooke-Trench	1	1882
John C. Murphy	1	1890
Barton	1	1840

Other prominent families held the office at other times. The Eustace family, until their decline in the seventeenth century, held the office eight times, in 1425, 1556, 1567, 1576, 1580, 1587, 1592, and 1607. The Wellesleys or ‘Wellingtons’ held it six times from 1312 to 1424.

In summary, it may be stated that local government in Kildare remained in the hands of a small group of prominent landowners for much of the time from the earliest days of the Norman settlement right down to the end of the nineteenth century. Those non-landowners, such as Matthew Minch, who made it to the grand jury were very much the exception that proved the rule.

Minch was from a Catholic middle-class background, coming from a prominent business family in Athy. His family's status had been rising throughout the nineteenth century until Matthew who was educated at Blackrock College, stood as an anti-Parnellite home rule party candidate in 1892 and was elected. He had made his initial mark in local politics in the two local bodies that were open to electoral contest, the Athy town commission and the Athy board of poor law guardians.⁸⁴

Ambrose More O'Ferrall was also a Catholic. His family, the O'Mores of Leix, had struggled hard to hold onto its land through the vicissitudes of late sixteenth and seventeenth century Irish history, and its fortunes had finally only been secured by an advantageous marriage to a wealthy Catholic businessman, Richard O'Ferrall.⁸⁵

Thus it was that this select group of highly privileged men, whose control of local administration had lasted for a very long time, met on St. Patrick's day in 1899 as the Kildare grand jury, to conduct the administration of county local government for the last time. The first item of business, after a vote of sympathy to the widow of one of their long-standing fellow grand jurors, Major Hugh Barton of Straffan house, was the issue of who should be nominated as the grand jury's three nominees as ex-officio members of the new county council which was due to meet in less than a month. The foreman of the jury, Thomas Cooke-Trench, pointed out that the elections for county

⁸⁴ Mary Connolly, 'The Minches of Athy: a Catholic middle-class family in the nineteenth century' (unpublished M.A. thesis in local history, NUIM 1996), p. 62.

⁸⁵ W. Fitzgerald (ed.), 'The O'More family of Balyna in the county Kildare, by James More of Balyna, circa 1774,' *J.K.A.S.*, vol. ix (1918-1921), p. 277; George Mansfield was also a Catholic.

councillors had already returned two candidates who were, or had been, grand jurors, namely Matthew Minch, and Sir Gerald Dease (they were standing unopposed in the forthcoming elections). He understood that the reason that the new act had made provision for the three grand jury nominees was ‘for the purpose of teaching the new body their business’.⁸⁶ He felt that the grand jury would be ‘acting with more dignity’ by not nominating any more members, as two elected members’ presence would ‘be carrying out the intention of the act’.⁸⁷

This view was shared by Ambrose More O’Ferrall, who thought it would ‘ill become the grand jury to exercise their right in this matter. They would be in a way swamping a representative body’.⁸⁸ John La Touche disagreed and felt it would be even more advantageous to the county council to have three further former grand jurors with their experience of county business. It was decided to set up a committee to appoint the three nominees. Matthew Minch, nationalist MP for south Kildare was pleased with the decision of the grand jury ‘to exercise their right in the matter, and he was quite sure it would meet the approval of the county, and particularly of the people of south Kildare’.⁸⁹

We may detect some traces of superciliousness in these exchanges but there is no evidence here of any great social or class antagonism in the changeover to the new form of local administration in these opinions. This relative lack of overt class conflict continued as a feature of the early years of the county council.

The second item on the agenda was one that would have an interesting sequel in the new body when it met, namely the issue of officers’ salaries. The county secretary, Mr Gilbert de L. Willis (who, like all the county secretaries in the country, would

⁸⁶ *K.O.*, 25 Mar. 1899.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*; in fact, taking Lord Frederick Fitzgerald into account, three former grand jurors were elected to the county council.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*.

continue in office under the new county councils) pointed out that the grand jury salaries bill for Kildare was £673 over the average of other counties and that the treasury wished to reduce this bill by that amount. Willis supposed that the grand jury could do nothing at this late stage to argue against the treasury's wishes in this, but he expressed the hope that when it would go before the county council 'that body might be trusted to make the best fight they could'. De Willis misjudged the mood and the focus of the new body if he really expected this to happen. They fought alright, but to reduce every officer's salary, most notably his own, and a real antagonism developed quickly between de Willis and the nationalist members of the county council which quickly led to his replacement as secretary by one of the most prominent nationalists in the county, John T. Heffernan.

The final item of county business was the settlement of a malicious injuries claim against the county for the burning of a rick of hay belonging to a Protestant clergyman, Rev. George Garrett. The claim was for £60 and the grand jury found that the burning was malicious and after hearing the evidence of value, granted £50 compensation. The Local Government (Ireland) Act removed the power of deciding such malicious injuries claims from both the grand jury and the new county council, and gave the final decision to the county court judges of assizes. Such claims were still paid out of the rates and the county council could defend itself against such claims in the assizes. The new county council did so with vigour and adopted a very strict line in opposing malicious injuries claims and fought all of them in the courts. There were two reasons for this, one, that the claims were costing the ratepayers money, and two, the perception that the system was being abused and that speculative claims were being made. It had often been a complaint against the grand juries that they were overly generous in paying claims to members of their own class. During the land war most

claims for compensation were by landlords whose property had been damaged in agrarian outrages and the whole issue of malicious injuries compensation was tainted with the bitterness of the land agitation.

Thus the final session of the Kildare grand jury in its local government role ended with no special ceremony or reference. On the following Monday morning the same grand jury met again in the same place for the criminal and civil court part of their business. The Lord Chief Justice of the assizes, Mr. Justice Andrews, was determined to make some remark at the change and he did, reminding everybody that the grand jury was not going anywhere and that the general public was under the illusion that grand juries had been abolished and he wished to set the record straight.

He said:

There seems to be a notion abroad that judges of assizes are to address the grand jurors on this occasion in a valedictory spirit. Nothing is further from my intention than to address you in such a spirit. It is true, gentlemen, that important fiscal business will no longer devolve upon you as a body, but what is more important, at least in the eye of the law, in the eye of history and in the eye of the constitution, still remains with you – your criminal jurisdiction.⁹⁰

He was right of course and the grand juries continued to meet at the spring and summer assizes to consider bills, civil and criminal, until 1921. At the height of the war of independence the republican courts replaced or ran parallel to the assizes, the latter having few or no cases to hear as most were now being dealt with in the former.

The very last Kildare grand jury of any type met for the summer assizes in July 1921 and the list of jurors shows that not much had changed in its composition in spite of over two decades of representative local government running parallel to it. The jurors were: Col. Thomas J. de Burgh, Col. St. Leger Moore, Col W. J. Honner, Mr Algernon Aylmer, Mr. B.H. Barton, Mr. George Wolfe, Baron de Robeck, Lord Walter

⁹⁰ *K.O.*, 5 Mar. 1899.

Fitzgerald, Mr. J.M. Sweetman, Col. H. Mansfield, Mr. K.J. C. Maunsell, Mr. E.J. de Burgh, Major Murray, Capt. T. Gisborne Gordon, Major W. G. Dease, Mr Wm. Hopkins, Mr J. G. Robinson, Maj. G. Johnstone, Mr. B. O’Kelly, Mr. G. Leycester-Penrhyn, Mr. G. C. Crombie.⁹¹

Grand juries were not formally abolished in the southern part of Ireland until the Criminal Justice Act of 1948 and they continued in Northern Ireland until 1969.⁹²

They continue as a feature of the legal system in the United States to this day.

In spite of the chief justice’s remarks there was a ‘farewell dinner’ given in the evening of that Monday 20 March 1899, in the town hall in Naas, for the current grand jury and many of the former jurors. As well as the lord chief justice, all the county officers, including Mr. Edward Glover, county surveyor, and Mr G. de L. Willis, county secretary attended. Both Glover and Willis would figure prominently in the story of the early years of the new county council. The toasts at the dinner give some indication of the political persuasion of the grand jury at its swansong. The high-sheriff, St. Leger Moore, proposed the first to the queen and the royal family. Mr. Cooke-Trench, the foreman of the final grand jury followed this with one to ‘her majesty’s judges of assize’.⁹³ This was followed by one to ‘our county officers’, proposed by Mr. Medlicott. Both Glover and Willis formally replied to this one. They were to find the new county council far less respectful of their positions.

It was in this formal and slightly sentimental manner that the local government functions of the Kildare county grand jury came to an end after so many centuries. It is worth noting how little real protest there was about its demise, even from within the ranks of those who had benefited most from its existence.

⁹¹ *K.O.*, 16 July 1921.

⁹² Virginia Crossman, ‘grand juries’ in S.J. Connolly (ed.) *The Oxford companion to Irish history* (Oxford, 1998), p. 227.

⁹³ *K.O.*, 25 Mar. 1899.

Chapter 2. The first Kildare County Council, 1899-1902

Kildare County Council met for the first time on 22 April 1899 under the Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898. The act stated 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’.¹

The bill got its first reading in parliament in February 1898. Under it the administrative powers and duties of the grand juries were handed over to elected county councils. Each urban sanitary district was to become an urban district council and each rural sanitary district was to be a rural district council. These new bodies were to have, in addition to their housing and sanitary work, the business of the baronial sessions of the grand juries and the baronial road and public works. The boards of poor law guardians were to continue but with only their poor relief and dispensary work left to them along with management of the workhouse. Membership of the rural district council automatically conferred membership of the local board of guardians. There would still have to be elections of guardians in wards of poor law unions which fell inside urban district councils.²

The county council was now to be the main rating authority. The old poor law rate and the county cess were amalgamated into one rate, levied by the council. From this fund and money from the central exchequer, the agricultural grant in lieu of half the annual rate on agricultural land,³ the council disbursed to the boards of guardians for the upkeep of the workhouses, the dispensaries and for outdoor relief; to the rural district councils for local road works, labourers’ housing and sanitary work, and to the committee of management of the local asylum for the upkeep of their hospital.

¹ 61 & 62 Vict. ch 37 part 1, sec. 1; John J. Clancy, *A handbook of local government in Ireland: containing an explanatory introduction to the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898* (Dublin, 1899), p. 102 (henceforth cited as *A handbook of local government*).

² 61 & 62 sec. 79, sub-sec. 2.

³ For a full description of the agricultural grant see appendix 2. below p. 414-5.

The councils' own duties included the repair and maintenance of the main roads, the county courthouse and other buildings, collection of rates and preparation of juror and voter lists, as well as some duties connected with food and drug sampling and in connection with diseases of animals.⁴

The act came about not through any grand design to reform or improve local administration, but purely as a political expedient designed to get around a particular parliamentary difficulty which the conservative government was having with its legislative programme in early 1898.⁵ The issue of reform of local government is a complex one that stretches back at least to the 1830s. Two attempts to introduce a reformed system, in 1885 by Gladstone and in 1892 by Arthur Balfour failed because they were so bound up with the tensions and suspicions surrounding home rule.⁶ Neither unionists nor nationalists were entirely happy with the idea of reform of local government at the time. Irish unionists thought it might be a step towards home rule (English liberal unionism adopted a very different attitude to it making it a key plank in their policy of 'constructive unionism')⁷ while nationalists thought it might be offered as a lesser alternative to home rule. This ambivalence towards the issue is evident in what the *Irish Times* said of the bill: 'The local government bill is a self-rule bill. But it is an anti-Home-Rule Bill. There must be no mistake about this'.⁸ If

⁴ For accounts of the local government system established under the 1898 act see R.B. McDowell 'Administration and the public services, 1870-1921' in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, vi: Ireland under the union II 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996), pp 592-3; Virginia Crossman, *Local government in nineteenth century Ireland* (Belfast, 1994), pp 92-4; Mary E. Daly, *The buffer state: the historical roots of the department of the environment* (Dublin, 1997), pp 25-27.

⁵ Catherine B. Shannon, *Arthur J. Balfour and Ireland 1874-1922* (Washington, 1988), pp 97-103; Andrew Gailey 'Unionist rhetoric and Irish local government reform,' in *I.H.S.*, xxiv, no. 93 (May 1984), pp 52-68.

⁶ R.V. Comerford, 'The Parnell era, 1883-91' in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, vi: Ireland under the union II 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 57-8, and R.B. McDowell 'Administration and the public services,' pp 591-2.

⁷ Pauric Travers, *Settlements and divisions: Ireland 1870-1922* (Dublin, 1988), p. 65; George D. Boyce, *Nineteenth century Ireland: the search for stability – new Gill history of Ireland no. 5* (Dublin, 1990), pp 213-5 and R.B. McDowell, *Crisis and decline: the fate of southern unionists*, (Dublin, 1997), pp 9-10.

⁸ *Irish Times*, 11 Jan. 1898.

ever a statement was likely to worry and even puzzle both unionists and nationalist, it was that one.

An early response of the unionist inclined *Kildare Observer* captures this uncertainty when it commented as follows:

There were fears in the hearts of a number of people that the proposed Local Government bill was only the thin edge of the wedge, and that eventually, by means of concession after concession, the separatists would obtain the aim of their desires – the dismemberment of the empire. The unionists of Ireland are prepared, not only to accept, but to support a measure of local government for their country, but there must be provision for proper protection of the rights of property and vested interests.⁹

A month later the nationalist *Leinster Leader* expressed the fear that the local government measure would be used to stifle what it called ‘the just calls for Home Rule by a waiting nation’ and that even as it stood the government ‘would try to retain some right of nomination of members to county councils, thus diluting the full democratic nature of the bill’.¹⁰ In the event, the bill as it was published and enacted did not contain such a right of nomination.

When Gerald Balfour suddenly proposed to introduce a wide-ranging reform of local government in early 1898 he did so in order to get around a joint unionist and nationalist blockage of the rest of the government’s legislative programme. He managed to get around the opposition of both camps by the simple expedient of offering to meet half the cost of rates on agricultural land. In effect, the landlords were relieved of having to pay any rates while the occupying tenant of farmland would only have to pay half the amount struck. The new amalgamated cess and poor law rate would now be paid by the occupier rather than by the owner of agricultural

⁹ *K.O.*, 15 Jan. 1898.

¹⁰ *L.L.*, 5 Feb. 1898.

land and half the assessment of the occupier's liability would be met by the agricultural grant.¹¹

Nationalist opposition to the bill was overcome by dropping the main restrictions on the system that had been objectionable in earlier attempts at reform, in 1891 and 1884, and by the halving of the rates to be paid by the occupiers of farms, not to mention the virtual certainty that under the bill as published, nationalists would have complete control of local government in a matter of months. It was just too good an offer for them to turn down.

The other big problem, that of the sheer scale of the legislation needed was overcome by simple expedient of adapting the English Reform Act of 1888 to Irish conditions and implementing its provisions by ministerial order in council. By this means most of the detailed drafting of bills for the administrative procedures of the new councils was avoided.¹²

The first reading of the bill in parliament came as a surprise to everyone in Ireland. It had not been mentioned in the speech opening the session four months earlier. Even the man who would be responsible for its implementation, Sir Henry Robinson, chairman of the local government board, only heard of its imminence days before it was publicly announced.¹³

In Kildare the announcement of Balfour's intentions was picked up on fairly quickly, with the *Kildare Observer*, a paper that tended to a unionist perspective, reporting, in January 1898, the Chief Secretary's speech in his Manchester constituency on the previous Monday. An editorial broadly welcomed the measure

¹¹ See note 3 above.

¹² Pauric Travers, 'A bloodless revolution: the democratisation of Irish local government 1898-9,' in Mary E. Daly, ed. *County and town: one hundred years of local government: lectures on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Local government (Ireland) Act, 1898* (Dublin, 2001), p. 14.

¹³ Andrew Gailey, *Ireland and the death of kindness: the experience of constructive unionism 1880-1905* (Cork, 1987), p. 46.

while expressing a slight reservation about the prospect of so many inexperienced people having control of local finances.¹⁴ The nationalist *Leinster Leader* was rather sceptical of the announcement and suspended judgement until the full details had emerged. It did however, object to the opinion Balfour had expressed to the effect that Ireland had no claim to the £700,000 a year grant from the exchequer, which the bill would involve. The *Leader* thought that the sum was only a small part of the overpayment that recent reports had indicated Ireland had made to the imperial coffers over the years. It also cautioned against allowing the home rule demand to be silenced by this ‘superficial advance in local affairs’.¹⁵

More considered local opinions emerged when the bill was read for the first time in parliament. Two main themes are evident in this commentary. The first is a deep sense of inadequacy, a sense of Ireland really not being up to the challenge of managing local affairs for itself. This lack of self-confidence is perhaps one of the worst legacies of Ireland’s experience of the nineteenth century (the poet Eavan Boland speaks of such legacies as ‘the toxins of a whole history’ in her powerful poem *Quarantine*). The *Leinster Leader* said that ‘if Ireland were seen to handle local government well, then it would prove that the country was fit to be trusted with national self government’.¹⁶ A year later a local candidate spoke of what he called the local government board (he meant the county council) as ‘an intermediate system of education for home rule’.¹⁷ Even at a national level, John Redmond spoke of the act as ‘the most important initiative in Irish politics in his generation, in that it helped

¹⁴ *K.O.*, 15 Jan. 1898.

¹⁵ *L.L.*, 26 Feb. 1898.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 12 Mar. 1898.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 28 Jan. 1898.

prepare nationalists for the responsibility of self-government, by giving them an opportunity of acquiring administrative experience'.¹⁸

The *Kildare Observer* mentions the same concerns but in the context of hoping that enough of the former grand jurors and 'men of the county'¹⁹ would get involved in the new council so as to ensure that things were done right. The doubt here was about the fiscal and administrative ability of the nationalists who would almost inevitably dominate the council. In spite of being an establishment paper, the *Kildare Observer* made no case for retaining the old grand jury system, even as it described that system as 'the most efficient under which the fiscal administration of Ireland was ever carried out'. It continued:

Taking first the constitution of the county councils, we find that the basis of election will be the parliamentary franchise, with extension as regards rights of voting to women and peers. This, of course, is as it should be. Whatever objections there may be to female suffrage, from a parliamentary point of view, there can be none in the present case. 'No taxation without representation' is a very proper motto in the present condition of affairs.²⁰

This sense, even among the spokesmen of the grand jury class, that their time in unelected local power was well and truly, and rightfully, up was expressed in another way by the views of Thomas Cooke-Trench and Ambrose More O'Ferrall, already referred in the introduction to this study, on the issue of whether the grand jury should nominate to the county council the three ex-officio members it was entitled to under the act, lest such nomination would dilute the democratic intentions of the legislation.²¹ Of course a cynical interpretation of both statements might be that both Cooke-Trench and More O'Ferrall were playing to the voters. The local elections were to take place one week later and both of them were in the contest.

¹⁸ Joseph Lee, *The modernization of Irish society 1848-1918* (Dublin, 1973), p. 127.

¹⁹ *K.O.*, 28 Feb. 1898.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ See above p. 58.

More O’Ferrall won a seat, Cooke-Trench didn’t. There is no mention in the local press of how the latter felt about the issue after the election. He wasn’t one of the three grand jury nominees either.

The other theme in the response to the bill was the recognition of it as ‘revolutionary’, a perception of it that has remained remarkably intact in the commentary on it ever since. The *Kildare Observer* said, ‘we find only one word to express the essentially radical changes which must follow the Local Government Act, and that word is “revolution!”’²² and a year later the *Leinster Leader* quoted the parish priest of Ballitore who called the reforms a ‘revolution’²³. This view of the act as revolutionary is taken up by, among others, F.S.L. Lyons when he said that ‘the effect of the Local Government Act was not short of revolutionary’.²⁴ The idea of the act being revolutionary continues in more recent times. A lecture by Pauric Travers in the Thomas Davis series to mark the centenary of the coming into force of the act is entitled, ‘A bloodless revolution: the democratisation of Irish local government 1898-9’.²⁵

It is also worth noting here that studies of the equivalent reforms of local government in England and Scotland in 1888 and 1894, on which the Irish system was modelled, make the point that in those two countries the expected revolution in representation did not take place. In general the voters used their new power of electing their local government, to vote back into power the very same gentry

²² *K.O.*, 26 Feb. 1898.

²³ *L.L.*, 28 Feb. 1899.

²⁴ F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland since the famine* (London, 1971), p. 107.

²⁵ Pauric Travers, ‘A bloodless revolution: the democratisation of Irish local government 1898-9’ in Mary E. Daly (ed.), *County and town: one hundred years of local government: lectures on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Local government (Ireland) Act, 1898* (Dublin, 2001).

members who had run the grand juries for centuries. As one writer puts it, ‘The revolution did not happen’²⁶ and he continues:

From that date on, the county councils have remained remarkably aristocratic bodies. The time taken to travel and to sit on committees, the habit of meeting in the day-time and the convention of the counties, all encouraged a tradition of the ‘county’ continuing to run the county.²⁷

Of course the relationship between the rural tenants and their landlords was very different in England and Scotland to what it was in Ireland, in 1899. The division between landlord and tenants in Ireland was part of the wider polarisation of opinion into nationalist and unionist camps. It may be noted that the same issues of travel involved and the time required to attend to council business also applied to the Kildare County Council but only became an issue after 1920 when workers were elected to it.²⁸

And so, the word ‘revolution,’ narrowly understood, may be applied to the extent to which, in Ireland, the landlord class was replaced by a new class of local government representative as a result of the coming into being of the county councils. A closer study of the social, political and economic background of the new county councillors may show that it was certainly not a ‘revolution’ if we expect the new councillors to be more radical or advanced in their social thinking and ideas, for in that way the new council proved to be no more and possibly less advanced than the grand jury it replaced.

Before going on to look at the political and social composition of the new council it is instructive to see some of the public expressions of the idea of what a nationalist or a unionist was that emerged during the election campaign. Recently in

²⁶ B.Keith-Lucas, *English local government in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (London, 1977), p. 23.

²⁷ Ibid: see also, K.B. Smellie, *A history of local government* (4th edition, London, 1968).

²⁸ See below pp 5. p. 321-2.

Ireland, at least since the Good Friday agreement, it has been possible to discern a quite clear evolution in the nature and meaning of the two great pillars of the political house on the island, i.e. nationalism and unionism. The sense of stagnation in these two concepts and ideologies in the years since the setting up of the two alternative states on the island in the early 1920s may have led people to believe that they were immutable concepts and systems born fully grown and set for all time. A study of the local government elections in 1899 shows that the meanings of unionism and of nationalism were in just as much flux then as they seem to be now and it is instructive to remember that the ways they ultimately developed were as unpredictable then as they are to us now. The county council elections provided an opportunity for people to articulate for themselves and for others their political beliefs and to test the meaning of their nationalism or unionism as they spoke of it.

In Carbury, Ambrose More O' Ferrall showed some fancy political footwork in dealing with the issue of whether he was a nationalist or a unionist, in the following ambiguous manner:

The county councils were not political organisations... and politics were foreign to their constitution. For that reason he did not think it necessary in his address to deal with that question (cheers). But, if elected, he would, when burning questions of the day came before them, know how to treat them and without telling the mode, he would do so in a manner that he did not think his unionist friends would be disgusted with (more cheers).²⁹

He was true to his rather convoluted word and when the ritual nationalist declaration was put to the first meeting of the council he was one of only three of the elected members who did not vote for it. The three grand jury nominees were also against it.

²⁹ *K.O.*, 18 Mar.1899.

In spite of his unionism More O' Ferrall was not above using his green ancestry to good electoral effect. He did not demur when one of those who spoke in his favour at his selection as candidate said of him: 'he was thoroughly conversant with county business, one who was in sympathy with the people, a descendant of Rory O'More and one whose forefathers stood up against Cromwell in defence of his country (cheers)'.³⁰

In contrast to this, George Wolfe, a Protestant landlord, owner of some 1300 acres in the east of the county near Ballymore Eustace and of 2764 adjoining acres in Wicklow, stood in his area as a declared nationalist. He advocated that the county councils should be used as the first step in a campaign for full home rule:

One hundred and seventeen years ago Grattan used his volunteers to force from the government of that time what is now known as Grattan's parliament. In this year, 1899, they should use this local government act to force home rule.³¹

His identification with Grattan's volunteers is noteworthy in the light of his own deep involvement in the national volunteers in Kildare in 1914. Wolfe later won a Dáil seat for Kildare as a pro-treaty and Cumann na nGaedheal candidate (1923 and 1927).³²

Not far away, in Celbridge, Sir Gerald Dease, a descendent of Grattan, was offering himself as a candidate while holding staunchly unionist opinions. The nationalist paper the *Leinster Leader* was full of praise for the 'commendable tolerance' shown by the Celbridge voters in selecting someone of Dease's class and political opinion.³³ Dease ran unopposed in the Celbridge electoral division.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ *K.O.*, 18 Mar. 1899.

³² Brian Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918-1992* (Dublin, 1992), p. 112 and p. 121.

³³ *L.L.*, 22 Apr. 1899.

Meanwhile Dease's brother Edmund, the former nationalist M.P. for Queen's County, who had found Parnell's more militant form of nationalism too much for him and had drifted out of national politics after 1880, was one of the grand jury nominees to the county council in his own home county.³⁴ The point here is that the political labels of 'unionism' or 'nationalism' were much more fluid than they later became.

The Naas solicitor Stephen J. Brown won a hotly contested seat against the local landlord Thomas de Burgh. The two had worked together for over twenty years on Naas town commission and on the board of poor law guardians. Brown had come to Naas as a young solicitor in the late 1870s. He had qualified too young to practice and had had to begin in Naas as an apprentice. He was obviously very brilliant and soon he was attracting business from quite diverse sides of the social and political divide. He became family solicitor to many of the landlords of the county, while at the same time acting as defence solicitor for land league officials who fell foul of the Coercion Act of 1881.³⁵ Indeed, in the summer of 1881 he was a committee member of the County Kildare Club, a sports club, along with leading local landlords. Among the members was Mr Gilbert de L. Willis, manager of the Naas branch of the Munster Bank. De Willis was shortly to be made county secretary, a position he still held in 1899 when the county council took over from the grand jury. They played tennis and cricket that summer and organised a series of summer social events for the gentry.³⁶ The list of members was almost interchangeable with the lists of grand jury members, except for Brown who never appeared on that body in spite of his brilliance and reputation. He was at that time regularly defending men charged with

³⁴ Alan O'Day, 'Dease, Edmund Gerald (1829-1904)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, 2004) [accessed 13 Nov 2004: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article.41275>].

³⁵ *L.L.*, 21 Apr. 1930.

³⁶ *K.O.*, 6 Aug. 1881.

agrarian offences, and when John T. Heffernan of Kildare town, the local prime mover in land league agitation was arrested in October 1881 and held for six months in Naas gaol, Brown defended him and used both his legal knowledge and his landlord contacts to secure his release.³⁷ Heffernan and de Willis were to come into conflict later in 1900 over the issue of the county secretaryship.

Brown was a founding member and a director of the new nationalist paper, the *Leinster Leader*, from 1880 and attended the first meeting of Naas G.A.A. club, (though there is no evidence of him having any further part in its activities). He took Parnell's side in the division in the home rule party.³⁸

By the early 1880s Brown was virtually running Naas town commission on his own with only De Burgh as serious opposition. De Burgh was owner of most of Naas town property and it was Brown's contention that de Burgh was using his position on the town commission, board of guardians and most importantly, the Kildare grand jury to improve his own property at the expense of the ratepayers. At this time Brown regularly appeared before the Kildare grand jury to represent the cesspayers to argue against some of the spending plans of that body. One such issue was the grand jury keeping open the Kildare Infirmary against the wishes of the cesspayers as expressed at the county at large presentment session. Brown's main point in all of these challenges was that the grand jury should not have been in a position to spend money 'in opposition to the wishes of those whose money is paying for it'.³⁹

Brown was nominated to run as a candidate for Naas in the county council election and, in a low-key acceptance speech, made the usual ritual remarks about home rule and how the county councils would 'show their fitness for self-government by prudently and wisely administering the business'. He spoke mostly

³⁷ Thomas Nelson, *The land war in county Kildare* (Maynooth historical series, no. 3, 1985,) p. 25.

³⁸ *Irish Independent*, 25 Feb. 1931; *The Times*, 11 July 1895; *L.L.*, *centenary supplement*, 1980

³⁹ *L.L.*, 17 Mar. 1883.

about how he envisaged the county finances being managed and how he hoped to cut the rates that they would all have to pay now that ‘the spendthrift grand jury was finished’.⁴⁰

Two week’s later when it was apparent that de Burgh was making a serious challenge, using all of the stored up influence a landlord could have, Brown suddenly found himself having to appeal to the nationalist vote and the ‘labouring man’s vote’ in far stronger terms than he may have liked. He began by painting de Burgh as ‘a unionist, and not merely unionist but one of the most extreme type’.⁴¹ He also attacked de Burgh’s failure to offer sites on his property for building labourers’ cottages and promised his listeners:

Now of course, the county council will have the expenditure of a vast sum of money, and it is not enough that they must house the labourers, they must also get employment for them (cheers). They must get them something to do. It is no use giving them good houses if they cannot earn enough to feed themselves and their families. I will aid in that to the best of my power – and without any foolish waste of money, to which I would be opposed.⁴²

Stephen J. Brown became the chairman of the first Kildare County Council and he held on to the position for the first twelve years of its existence. On neither the nationalist issue nor on the treatment of labourers was he ever so vociferous again. But then he never had to fight an election again, being returned unopposed until 1911, when he retired from the council.

A final comment on this may be left to the *Leinster Leader* editorial of 18 March 1899 which noted that: ‘many candidates’ speeches show a misguided idea of

⁴⁰ Ibid., 11 Mar. 1899.

⁴¹ Ibid., 25 Mar. 1899.

⁴² Ibid.

the powers of the new local bodies. Speeches delivered at various local meetings indicate serious misconceptions as to how far county councils can and cannot go'.⁴³

Stephen Brown knew more about the Local Government Act than almost anybody in Ireland, as his stewardship of the first decade of Kildare County Council's existence shows, but he also knew that in the heat of electioneering things had to be said which were not part of the real script and to which one need feel no great duty to adhere.

One revealing little vignette about the extent and nature of the new council's nationalism took place in 1902, when Brown opened the meeting of January 1903 by mentioning that he had received, in common with all chairmen of county councils, a medal from the king in commemoration of the coronation. 'He looked on the presentation as a compliment to the council and not to the chairman. The medal, which is handsomely clasped and bound, was handed round to the members, who expressed their admiration at its workmanship, and approved of the sentiments which prompted its presentation'.⁴⁴

A similar glimpse of just how moderate nationalist views in Kildare were at the time can be gleaned from the fact that in 1903, the nationalist M.P. and owner of the *Leinster Leader*, James L. Carew was offered and accepted the office of High Sheriff of the county, following the procedure described in the introduction above.⁴⁵ At least since the land war, and probably long before, that office was associated in nationalist minds with the ascendancy class, the very group which the Irish party had been fighting since land war days. His acceptance of the office caused only the most minor adverse comment at the time.⁴⁶

⁴³ Ibid., 18 Mar. 1899.

⁴⁴ *K.O.*, 10 Jan. 1903.

⁴⁵ See above, p. 36.

⁴⁶ Jim Robinson, 'The career of James L. Carew MP' (unpublished seminar paper given to the Naas local history group, 7 February 2005).

In one of the earliest public meetings of the 1899 election, held in the Kilcullen electoral division, an interesting exchange took place between the nationalist candidate, Edward Fenelon, and his unionist rival, Charles Cramer-Roberts. Fenelon was a farmer and had, in the 1880s, been a tenant of a large holding from the La Touche family, and Cramer-Roberts was a landlord owning over 2,000 acres. Fenelon tried to get Cramer-Roberts to resign his candidacy in favour of a home ruler, namely himself. Cramer-Roberts replied as follows:

As regards Mr Fenelon's proposition of resignation in favour of a home ruler - I fancy I am a home ruler a great deal more than you expect. I am for us having the management of our own affairs. We have no power to put forward public works such as railways, &c. Therefore I think it's monstrous we have to go over to England to spend Irish money getting these railways &c, through. I think you may call me a home ruler in that way. I am for our own business being managed here, and the dealing with our own financial arrangements. I am perfectly in favour of home rule without repeal of the Union or separation.⁴⁷

He did not elaborate on how such an arrangement would work. Fenelon replied that he looked forward to a time 'when the people of Ireland would have a parliament in College Green – a legislature assembly in College Green with Irishmen responsible for its management'.⁴⁸

Two priests who spoke at the same meeting were much more definite about how they saw the county councils being used to further the home rule cause. Canon Langan, who chaired the meeting, said of the Local Government (Ireland) Act that:

We take the act that we purpose (sic) working it to the best of our abilities. But we wont be satisfied until the time comes when please God we will have home rule (hear, hear, and applause) we will use the act for the purpose of sufficiently securing our legitimate rights and liberty – to make our own laws and administer them.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *K.O.*, 28 Jan. 1899.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

A Fr. P.J. Earley responding to the idea that some grand jury members should be supported for membership of the council said that, ‘ The grand jury tells us they will assist, and they say we should be of one mind. I say the grand juries and the ex-officio guardians might say that now, but they didn’t always say it. They ask the voice of the people to put them in and give them the power. But nothing less than home rule will satisfy us (hear, hear). They wont drag us down from home rule to the new measure, but we hope to lift them from the new measure to home rule’.⁵⁰

In a similar vein up and down the county throughout the first three months of 1899, potential candidates spoke at meetings and expressed their hopes for the new local government system and articulated what they understood their political beliefs to be. I have found no evidence of even moderate republican views being expressed by candidates who professed themselves to be nationalists. It is worth noting here that the United Irish League played no part in the contests for the local elections in Kildare. The UIL had no branches that I can find reference to until December 1899 when one was set up in Naas by John T. Heffernan, who was by then a county councillor by virtue of being chairman of the Naas Rural District Council.⁵¹ This is in contrast to county Mayo where the UIL played a very prominent role in the elections.⁵²

There were twenty-one electoral divisions in the Kildare County Council elections and there was a contest in fifteen of these⁵³. Some of the contests were between candidates claiming to be nationalists and those claiming to be unionists. Some contests were between candidates, both of whom claimed to be nationalists.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *L.L.*, 2 Dec. 1899.

⁵² Joe McDermott, *Public-spirited people: Mayo County Council 1899-1909* (Castlebar, 1999), p. 14.

⁵³ *Annual report of the Local Government Board (Ireland) 1900*, [Cd. 338] 1901 vol. xxxv, p. 226.

The following is a list of the electoral divisions and the candidates who contested them.

Table 1. Electoral Divisions in Kildare County Council election 1899⁵⁴.

Division	Candidates	Result
Athy	Matthew Minch MP	Returned unopposed
Ballytore	Owen Cogan - n Thomas Greene – u	Cogan elected by 330 votes to 30
Ballymore-Eustace	Baron de Robeck – u George Wolfe – n	Wolfe elected by 381 votes to 69
Carbury	Charles Burke – n A. More O’Ferrall - u Wm. Smith -n	More O’Ferrall won by 219 votes to 146 for Burke and 49 for Smith
Castledermot	Charles Engledow MP n Thomas Greene u (see Ballytore above) Ed. Hayden n	Engledow disqualified ⁵⁵ and Hayden won by 328 votes to 32
Celbridge	Sir Gerald Dease u	Returned unopposed
Churchtown	Stephen Hayden n	Returned unopposed
Clane	T. Cooke-Trench u Peter Crosbie n	Crosbie won by 230 votes to 127
Harristown	James Kelly n	Returned unopposed
Kilcock	John Field n James Cummins n	Field won by 286 votes to 80

⁵⁴ *K.O.*, 11 Mar. 1899; *ibid.*, 8 Apr. 1899: n - nationalist, u – unionist.

⁵⁵ He lived outside the county and, not being entitled to vote, he was not entitled to a seat on the council.

Kilcullen	Edward Fenelon n C. Cramer-Roberts u	Fenelon won by 334 votes to 101
Kildare	Charles Bergin n John Moore n	Bergin won by 243 votes to 182
Kilmeague	John Cribben n Ed. Delaney n	Cribben won by 247 votes to 41
Kilteel	Earl of Mayo u T. H. Campion u Laurence Malone n	Malone won by 222 votes to 183 for Campion and 19 for Lord Mayo
Maynooth	Lord Frederick Fitzgerald u Wm Rutherford n	Fitzgerald won by 235 votes to 163
Monasterevan	M. Dowling n Edward J. Cassidy n	Cassidy won by 247 votes to 208
Morristown-Biller	Gerald Hurley n William Pallin u James Kelly n	Kelly won by 210 votes to 173 for Hurley and 20 for Pallin
Naas	Thos. J. de Burgh u Stephen J. Brown	Brown won by 320 votes to 166
Newbridge	Joseph P. Dowling n	Returned unopposed
Rathangan	Stephen Murphy n	Returned unopposed
Timahoe	Francis Colgan JP n	Returned unopposed

The 30 members of the new council which met in April 1899 were a far more varied group than the almost homogenous landlord class of the grand jury, but they

were perhaps less different in make up than the term ‘revolutionary’ would lead us to expect. The composition of the council was as follows:

Table 2. Elected members of Kildare County Council showing their occupations⁵⁶

Electoral area	Member	Occupation
Athy	Matthew Minch M.P	Malt Merchant
Ballitore	Owen Cogan	Grocer and auctioneer
Ballymore-Eustace	George Wolfe J.P	Landlord
Carbury	Ambrose More O’Ferrall	Landlord
Castledermot	Edward Hayden	Farmer
Celbridge	Sir Gerald Dease	Landlord
Churchtown	Stephen Hayden	Farmer
Clane	Peter Crosbie	Farmer
Harristown	James Kelly	Farmer
Kilcock	John Field	Publican
Kilcullen	Edward Fenelon	Farmer
Kildare	Charles Bergin	Farmer
Kilmeague	John Cribben	Farmer
Kilteel	Laurence Malone	Farmer
Maynooth	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald	Landlord
Monasterevan	Edmund Cassidy	Brewer and distiller
Morrinstown-biller	James Kelly	Farmer
Naas	Stephen J. Brown	Solicitor
Newbridge	Joseph Dowling	Grocer and auctioneer
Rathangan	Stephen Murphy	Grocer and ironmonger
Timahoe	Francis Colgan J.P.	Farmer

Ex-officio members – Chairmen of Rural district councils:

Naas no. 1	John T. Heffernan	Grocer, publican, farmer
Baltinglass no. 3	John Kelly	Farmer
Edenderry no. 2	Joseph O’Loughlin	Farmer
Celbridge no. 1	Wm. Ronaldson	Farmer
Athy	Thomas Orford	Farmer

Ex-officio members – nominees of the grand jury

James Medlicott J.P.	Landlord
George Mansfield D.C.	Landlord
William T. Kirkpatrick J.P.	Landlord

⁵⁶ The information in this table was obtained from *Slater’s Directory, 1894* and from *K.O.*, 11 Mar. 1899; *ibid* 8 Apr. 1899.

Certainly from an initial glance at the above table it can be concluded that local government in Kildare had been entrusted to the care of a new class of men, both socially and politically. The grand jury had only two members (Minch and Wolfe) who would have described themselves as nationalist in political outlook while the county council (elected members) consisted of only three members who would have described themselves as unionist in outlook, Lord Frederick Fitzgerald, Ambrose More O’Ferrall and Sir Gerald Dease.⁵⁷

A closer look at the backgrounds of the members and at some of the election contests will give a greater insight into the finer points of their political and social origins and ambitions and a more rounded view of the composition of the new county council. The stories of two in particular, Matthew Minch and John T. Heffernan, are worth going into in some detail as they illustrate many of the themes of the period.

Matthew Minch, who was returned unopposed for the Athy electoral division had been M.P. for south Kildare since 1892 when he ran as an anti-parnellite nationalist candidate against the sitting nationalist James Leahy. He was then re-elected unopposed in 1895.⁵⁸ He was a member of a wealthy business family from Athy described as ‘malt and corn merchants’.⁵⁹ His family had been active in local politics and administration since 1828 when his grandfather, although a Catholic, was a member of the special vestry of Timolin parish.⁶⁰ His father had been elected to the

⁵⁷ Sir Gerald Dease, though related to him, should not be confused with Gerald Edmund Dease, former Irish Party MP and grand jury nominee to the county council of Queen’s county; both were descendants of Henry Grattan and the former lived on the Grattan lands at Simmonstown in Celbridge; see Alan O’Day, ‘Dease, Edmund Gerald (1829-1904),’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University Press, 2004), [accessed 13 Nov. 2004 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/41275>].

⁵⁸ Mary Connolly, ‘The Minches of Athy: a catholic middle-class family in the nineteenth century’, (unpublished M.A. thesis in local history, NUIM 1996), p. 62.

⁵⁹ *Slater’s Directory* 1894.

⁶⁰ Mary Connolly, ‘The Minches of Athy’, p. 11; special vestries had a role in early attempts at poor relief and were based on the Church of Ireland parish system.

Athy town commission in 1863.⁶¹ He himself had become active in local affairs in the early 1880s, being one of the Athy delegates at a major land league rally in Kildare town in 1881.⁶² By the mid 1880s Minch was on both of the elected local bodies, the town commission and the board of poor law guardians. Having been elected to Westminster in 1892 he was subsequently chosen as grand juror in which position he was when that body met for the last time in 1899. His story illustrates that for wealthy Catholics a way could be made through the maze of local politics to the very top. His comment above about being glad that the grand jury had nominated to the county council the three members they were entitled to showed that while his politics may have been nationalist he was in no way antagonistic to the class who dominated the county for so long.⁶³ Other new councillors with less prior access to the positions of influence in the county were less conciliatory in tone when the opportunity arose.

A study of Laurence Ginnell's career in local politics in Co. Westmeath at this time described the 'intense localism' of the issues and perspectives of the time⁶⁴. Something similar is evident in the story of Minch and the land league and indeed later the county council. One of the earliest reports of electioneering for the council finds Minch trying to settle in advance the chairmanship of the new body. The *Leinster Leader* in an editorial comment criticises this move and asks what he is up to.⁶⁵ The paper was owned at the time by pro-parnellite M.P. James L. Carew. As it happened, Minch did put forward a proposal for the chairmanship but his nominee was defeated by Stephen J. Brown.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 42.

⁶² Thomas Nelson, 'The Irish national land league in county Kildare' (B.A. mini-thesis, NUI Maynooth, 1979), p.41.

⁶³ See above p. 58.

⁶⁴ Mike Wheatley, 'The politics of the Irish Party and Sinn Fein: Laurence Ginnell in Westmeath' (unpublished research paper, 2003).

⁶⁵ *L.L.*, 28 Jan. 1899.

At a selection meeting in Carbury, this localism was expressed by one of those who supported Ambrose More O’Ferrall, when he said that ‘it was of vital importance that good men be sent into the new councils, but in this division it was of peculiar importance. They were remote from the county town, every farthing of taxes which were collected would be sent to Naas, and if thoroughly capable men were not returned as county councillors, what chance would the electors of the other divisions have against “the boys of Naas”’.⁶⁶ As the first few years of the council suggest, the answer to this was, not much chance at all. Just as an aside at this point it is worth mentioning that the M.P. for the Kildare North constituency, Charles Engledow, was also hopeful of a council seat, but since he lived in Carlow and was thus not on the register of electors for the local government act he was disqualified from the contest.

John T. Heffernan who was a member of the council by virtue of being chairman of Naas No. 1 Rural District Council, had been the prime mover behind the land league in the county and had been imprisoned without trial for six months under the Coercion Act of 1881⁶⁷. He was born just after the famine to a tenant farmer, Thomas Heffernan, who was renting 56 acre in two lots from the Duke of Leinster and the Marquis of Drogheda. Thomas Heffernan was also the owner of ten cottages in Kildare town which he let out to tenants. When Thomas died in 1872 his wife inherited the tenancy of the larger farm, his eldest son Charles got the cottages (now numbering 21) and John T. became the tenant of the 15 acre farm. He began to get involved in politics in the Amnesty Association of the 1870s, in the wake of the imprisonment of Fenian activists after the 1867 rebellion. Many of his friends and relations emigrated to America and there is a good series of letters from them to

⁶⁶ *K.O.*, 18 Mar. 1899.

⁶⁷ This account of Heffernan’s career is based on Thomas Nelson, ‘The Irish national land league in county Kildare’ (B.A. mini-thesis, NUI Maynooth, 1979), and Thomas Nelson, *The land war in county Kildare* (Maynooth historical series no. 3. 1985).

Heffernan and his family during this period. They show clearly the sense of anger and resentment which they directed at the political and economic circumstances which forced them to leave. Quite simply they blamed landlordism for their poverty and inability to make a living at home. One letter says in praise of America that, 'the man who sweeps the street is as good and as independent as any of the swells who are worth millions, there's no two classes here'.⁶⁸ Heffernan himself considered emigrating as late as 1875, but the following year he took a lease on a premises in Clargate St. in Kildare town and began trading as a publican and shopkeeper. He later added auctioneering to his business interests. It is in this spirit of desire for self improvement, and resentment at the social and class barriers holding him back that Heffernan became involved in the Amnesty Association and later the land league. After his release from a six months detention in Naas jail he reformed the organisation into the Kildare town branch of the Irish National League. In 1882 he became a poor law guardian for Naas union. At the 1885 general election he was election agent for James Leahy. He bought out his own 15 acre farm under the Ashbourne Land Act of 1885 and began to get involved in auctioneering through assisting other tenants to avail of the land purchase schemes.

He continued to act as secretary of the local National League and was still forwarding subscriptions to the central executive as late as 1892. In 1888 he was charged with unlawful assembly and was again defended by Stephen J. Brown.⁶⁹ He took the parnellite side in the division of the Irish party. In 1898 he was vice-president for Leinster of the Wolfe Tone memorial committee. By 1889 he was breeding horses for sale and a newspaper article describes his stud farm as one of the

⁶⁸ Thomas Nelson, *The land war in county Kildare* (Maynooth historical series no. 3. 1985), p. 19.

⁶⁹ *L.L.*, 15 Dec. 1888

most prosperous and efficiently run in the country. He was breeding top class hunters and race horses and was a member of the Irish Horse Breeding Association.⁷⁰

Strangely, when the Local Government Act of 1898 finally offered to take landlord control of local affairs out of the hands of the class he had once said he was trying to wipe away, he did not stand for election for either the county council or the rural district council of Naas in which area he lived. He didn't have to. When the Naas No. 1 Rural District Council, met for the first time on 15 April he was one of three members co-opted. Immediately after co-optation he was selected as chairman. As the report puts it, 'By virtue of his office he now becomes a county councillor and a justice of the peace'.⁷¹

And thus it was that he was in Naas the following Saturday to take his place as one of the ex-officio county council members. His selection was warmly welcomed by all sections of the local press and the unionist *Kildare Observer* paid him the following compliment:

So far as nationalist boards go, however, those in county Kildare can claim some capable men. For the most part the choice of chairmen by the boards have been judicious. In Mr. John T. Heffernan the No. 1 District Council have a most capable chairman. Though differing from him politically, we readily concede that amongst the nationalist who compose the whole council no better selection could have been made.⁷²

Heffernan made an immediate impact on the council, getting selected for all the important committees. He was also the council's first delegate to the general council of county councils, which met in August 1899 and he was appointed county secretary to succeed Gilbert de L. Willis in 1900.

⁷⁰ Nelson, *The land war in county Kildare* p. 25.

⁷¹ *K.O.*, 22 Apr. 1899

⁷² *Ibid.*

The following is a briefer account of the background of the remaining new councillors. Owen Cogan, the grocer and auctioneer had been honorary secretary of the Ballitore branch of the land league.⁷³

George Wolfe was a protestant landlord and a nationalist. He was not a land league supporter. He was later, as already mentioned, one of the main organisers of the national volunteers in 1914 and later a Cumann na nGaedheal TD for Kildare in the 1920s.⁷⁴

Ambrose More' O'Ferrall was a Catholic landlord and a unionist. He had served on the Kildare county grand jury.⁷⁵

Edward Hayden was a tenant farmer whose name appears in several reports of land league meetings in 1881-2, but he is not mentioned as having held any office.⁷⁶

Sir Gerald Dease was a Catholic landlord and unionist. He had for many years held the office of chamberlain to various Lords Lieutenant at Dublin Castle. His duties in this role included making the arrangements for the various royal visits to Ireland, in the 1890s and early years of the twentieth century. Some of this was described when he died in 1903 as follows:

He was a governor of the Bank of Ireland and a director of the Great Southern and Western Railway Company, and in that latter capacity he accompanied several royal parties to the south of Ireland, and as chamberlain he officiated at all the functions which took place at Dublin Castle in connection with the visits of the late queen, the present king and queen, and the prince and princess of Wales.⁷⁷

⁷³ Ibid., 1 Jan. 1880; *ibid.*, 11 Mar. 1899.

⁷⁴ Brian M. Walker (ed.), *Parliamentary election results in Ireland 1918-92* (Dublin, 1992), p. 112 & p. 121; see above p. 71.

⁷⁵ *Return for counties of Ireland of grand jury panel for Spring and Summer assizes, 1882-83*, H.C. 1885 (220) lxiv. 411, p. 44.

⁷⁶ Roll of membership, Kildare National Land League, 1882 (N.L.I., MS 9282)

⁷⁷ *K.O.*, 24 Oct. 1903.

Stephen Hayden was a tenant farmer who was a member of the land league branch in Athy,⁷⁸ while Peter Crosbie was an officer in the Clane land league branch.⁷⁹ James Kelly of Harristown was a substantial farmer.⁸⁰

John Field had attended some land league meetings at the time but was known to favour moderation. Apart from being a publican he was also a producer of mineral water and he had a farm of over thirty acres in Kilcock.⁸¹

Edward Fenelon had been tenant of a large holding from the La Touche family. His experience of the land war illustrates how the events radicalised tenants at the time. He had engaged in an exchange of letters to the press with his landlord during 1880 about the requirements for a settlement of the agitation then in full swing. He was moderate in his demands. At one stage he suggests that tenants should at least get compensation for improvements for which they had sought the landlord's permission.⁸² By that stage most land league activists were moving well beyond such tame demands and the right to tenant purchase of the farm was already being mentioned, even in Kildare. Fenelon was a poor law guardian for Naas union and by the following spring he put forward a motion to that body which demanded a tenant purchase scheme.⁸³ In June 1881 he set up the Kilcullen branch of the land league and was made its president.⁸⁴ Fenelon was proposed for chairmanship of the council by Matthew Minch in 1899, but was defeated.

Charles Bergin was an officer of the Kildare town branch of the land league, the branch which effectively lead the land war in the county under the secretaryship

⁷⁸ *L. E.*, 9 Apr. 1881.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *K.O.*, 22 Apr. 1899.

⁸¹ *L.E.*, 11 Dec. 1880; *Return of owners of land of one acre and upwards in counties, counties of cities and counties of towns in Ireland* [C.1492], H.C. 1876, lxxx.61, p. 29 (henceforth cited as *Return of owners of land of one acre and upwards, 1876*).

⁸² *L.E.*, 25 Sept. 1880.

⁸³ *K.O.*, 26 Feb. 1881.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 25 June 1881.

of John T. Heffernan. Bergin's nomination paper for the council election was signed by Heffernan.⁸⁵ John Cribben had been an officer of the Allen and Miltown land league branch,⁸⁶ and Laurence Malone had been treasurer of the branch in Kill and was one of ten people prosecuted in 1881 for his involvement in public disorder.⁸⁷

Lord Frederick Fitzgerald, Marquis of Kildare, uncle of the Duke of Leinster and trustee of the Leinster estates while the duke was still a minor, was the biggest landlord in the county, with over 60,000 acres. He was a unionist. He had aroused the ire of the land league by his issuing the infamous 'Leinster lease' in the 1870s, which effectively required tenants to sign away their rights to compensation for improvements under the land act of 1870. Among those affected by the terms of the Leinster lease were Maynooth College and John T. Heffernan.⁸⁸

Edmund Cassidy had no connection with the land league that I am aware of while James Kelly of Morristownbiller was a tenant evicted during the land war and whose case was taken up by the land league. He was reinstated and was a prominent member of the league.⁸⁹

Joseph Dowling was a member of the Newbridge branch of the land league,⁹⁰ while Stephen J. Brown, as mentioned above, had defended local land league activists when they fell foul of the law.⁹¹ By 1900 Brown also owned a substantial farm outside Naas and had become a prominent member of the North Kildare Farming Society.⁹²

⁸⁵ *L.E.*, 11 Mar. 1899.

⁸⁶ *L.L.*, 9 Apr. 1881.

⁸⁷ *K.O.*, 29 Jan. 1881.

⁸⁸ Thomas Nelson, 'The Irish national land league in county Kildare' (B.A. mini-thesis, NUI Maynooth, 1979), p. 27.

⁸⁹ *K.O.*, 18 Feb. 1899.

⁹⁰ *L. E.*, 11 Dec. 1880.

⁹¹ See above, pp 72-3.

⁹² See below p. 243; *K.O.*, 17 Mar. 1917.

Stephen Murphy was secretary of the Rathangan branch of the league⁹³ and Francis Colgan JP was the owner of over 500 acres on the Kildare-Meath border at Enfield. He was unopposed in his electoral area.⁹⁴

John Kelly was involved in the land league in Wicklow.⁹⁵ I have no information on Joseph O' Loughlin except to say that he remained as chairman of Edenderry No. 2 RDC continuously through the period of this study (until the RDCs were abolished in 1925), emerging in the 1920s as a supporter of Sinn Fein but opposed to any concessions to the labour agenda in the council chamber.⁹⁶ Edenderry was in King's County but the parts of the Edenderry Poor Law Union which were in Kildare formed the No. 2 RDC.

William Ronaldson had attended league meetings in 1881 but is not mentioned as one of the officers. He had been defeated in the election by Lord Frederick Fitzgerald.⁹⁷ Thomas Orford was a friend of Matthew Minch and had been on the Athy league branch committee with him.⁹⁸

Fourteen of those actually elected or nominated and unopposed for election to the council had been involved in land league politics nearly twenty years previously. The actual land league was rarely mentioned at the hustings but the land issue in general was. The nationalist candidates frequently referred to their opponents as landlords and more or less equated landlordism with unionism. John Field speaking at Straffan said the following:

The government should come forward and help the
tenants to buy out their farms from the landlords. Three

⁹³ *L.L.*, 24 Sept. 1881.

⁹⁴ *Return of owners of land of one acre and upwards, 1876*, p. 28.

⁹⁵ *L.E.*, 24 Sept. 1881.

⁹⁶ See below p. 386.

⁹⁷ *K.O.*, 24 Sept. 1881.

⁹⁸ Roll of membership, Kildare National Land League (N.L.I., MS 9282)

millions of Church Fund money lying idle and what better could be done than to use that or part of it in settling the land question.⁹⁹

Despite this it is hard not to feel that for many of the first Kildare county councillors the edge had gone off the land question, seeing that so many of them, including Fenelon, Bergin, Malone and Heffernan had bought out their holdings already.¹⁰⁰

An equally important political experience that many of these first councillors had was the time they served already in elected local government as poor law guardians or as town commissioners. Some, had served as town commissioners: Minch, Fenelon, and Brown, while the following had served as poor Law Guardians in Celbridge, Naas or Athy: Minch, Cogan, Edward Hayden, John Field, Fenelon, Bergin, Malone, Cassidy, Dowling, Murphy, Brown and Heffernan.¹⁰¹ Whatever else this group may have been they were not new to local administration and the fears that inexperience would cause them to mismanage the county were without cause and not based on a true understanding of their long involvement in public affairs in the county.

The first meeting of Kildare County Council was held in the courthouse in Naas on Saturday 22 April 1899. The county secretary Mr. Gilbert de L. Willis (the act provided that current county secretaries could continue in office but now serving the councils rather than the grand juries) read out the names of the councillors who then read the prescribed declaration into the record, as required by the schedule of the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898.¹⁰² The declaration, which was one of the

⁹⁹ *K.O.*, 11 Mar. 1899.

¹⁰⁰ *K.O.*, 22 Apr. 1899.

¹⁰¹ This information is taken from *Thom's Directory* for various years from 1880 to 1900.

¹⁰² This account of the meeting is taken from *K.C.C. mins.* 22 Apr. 1899; *L. L.* 27 Apr. 1899; *K.O.*, 27 Apr. 1899.

many provisions brought over to the Irish situation from the English local government acts, read as follows:

I, A. B. having been chosen chairman, {or vice-chairman, or councillor} for the _____ of _____, hereby declare that I take the said office upon myself, and will duly and faithfully fulfil the duties thereof according to the best of my judgement and ability.¹⁰³

On the proposal of Matthew Minch, seconded by Mr. Laurence Malone, John T. Heffernan was elected chairman of the meeting. His glory on this occasion was short lived and after the co-option of two members, his next function was to seek nominations for chairman of the council. Matthew Minch proposed Edward Fenelon, while John Field proposed Stephen J. Brown. Minch might have hoped that his nomination of Heffernan earlier would have earned a vote for his man. But it was not to be. The votes break down almost exactly according to geographical location of the council member. All those to the north of a line just below Kildare town went for Brown, while all those south of it went for Fenelon. This division within the county was to continue throughout the period of this study. Matthew Minch was unanimously selected as vice-chairman.

With Brown in the chair the meeting proceeded to select the committees which would in effect be the executive of the council. One of these, the proposal committee, was a statutory committee required under the Local Government (Ireland) Act of 1898. This replaced the old county at large presentment session. The members of the first proposal committee were, the chairman and vice chairman, Sir Gerald Dease, Stephen Murphy, John. T. Heffernan, George Wolfe, and J.P. Dowling. The purpose of the committee was to initiate works on projects that had a county at large

¹⁰³ 61 & 62 Vict. Ch. 37, schedule, sec. 9 part 5.

dimension, such as the courthouse, jail, main roads and structures which were once dealt with at county at large presentment sessions.¹⁰⁴

The other committees were non-statutory and of these the finance committee was the most important. It considered all aspects of expenditure, such as salaries of officials and printing contracts and supplies for the offices and staff and every other issue to do with the spending of the council's funds. The finance committee selected consisted of the chairman and vice-chairman, Sir Gerald Dease, Edward Fenelon, George Wolfe, Stephen Murphy, J.T. Heffernan, J.P. Dowling, and Wm. Ronaldson. Any three members would constitute a quorum.¹⁰⁵

Another committee was established to draft a scheme for the collection of the poor rate which would include appointing rate collectors and setting the conditions under which they would submit returns to the council. The members selected for this were, the chairman and vice-chairman, William Ronaldson, Joseph O'Loughlin, J.T. Heffernan, Thomas Orford, John Kelly, George Mansfield, James Medicott, , Lord Frederick Fitzgerald, John Field, and Ambrose More O'Ferrall. Heffernan was also selected for a committee for staff appointments and conditions.

After this the council proceeded with a 'nationalist declaration' proposed by George Wolfe and seconded by Owen Cogan, which read:

That we affirm the right of the Irish nation to a full measure of self-government. We accept the Local Government Act as the first installment of the same and call on the imperial parliament to proceed with the further restitution of our rights.¹⁰⁶

Further additions were made to this motion, covering the need for an Irish board of agriculture and industries, a Catholic university and for a commission to enquire into the excessive rates charged by the Irish railway companies, and the

¹⁰⁴ John J. Clancy, *A handbook of local government*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁵ K.C.C. mins, 22 Apr. 1899.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

composite motion was passed with only George Mansfield voting against, while Sir Gerald Dease, Lord Frederick Fitzgerald, James Medlicott, William Kirkpatrick and Ambrose More O’Ferrall abstained. The rest of the councillors voted for the motion.¹⁰⁷

It was then explained by the secretary, de Willis, that the council’s finances stood at £7870 in credit, this being one half year’s payment from the exchequer, through the local government board (LGB). There were before the meeting over £5000 worth of applications from the poor law unions and the district councils for funds to meet their first half-yearly expenses. It was proposed and accepted that the council apply to their treasurer, the Hibernian bank, for a general overdraft facility of £1500 and also, for £10,000 or possibly more, ‘pending collection of the poor rate’.¹⁰⁸

The county surveyor, Edmind Glover, explained the LGB’s plans to have main roads ‘declared’ in each county and such roads to be jointly financed by the council and the district councils through which they passed. The cost implications of this plan for district councils was explained and a provisional declaration of main roads in the county was proposed and accepted.

The next meeting of the council, held a week later on 29 April, was a similar mix of practical administrative detail, such as the setting of the county coroner’s salary (in which the stinginess of the new council in regard to the remuneration of its staff makes its first, but not last appearance), local issues, such as the inconvenience to Naas of having the train from Dublin stop three miles away in Sallins rather than closer to the county town, and wider aspirational nationalist motions, this time one in support of the revival of the Irish language. There was also the nomination of the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

council's representative to the proposed general council of county councils. There were three contenders, George Wolfe, John Field and John T. Heffernan. Heffernan was elected.¹⁰⁹

The important issue of rate collectors was dealt with at the meeting of 26 May 1899 after a committee charged with the task reported back to the main council. Both cess collectors and poor law rate collectors under the old system were given the option under the act to either continue in service to the new council as rate collectors or to retire and receive a gratuity. Of twelve cess collectors, nine retired, and of fourteen poor rate collectors, six retired¹¹⁰. The remuneration of the rate collectors was set at a uniform eight pence in the £ on the amount collected by them. This later turned out to be contentious since collectors whose area was small or had low rateable valuations claimed it not worth their while to continue to serve in the office. In fact the council reduced the poundage rate for new appointees to the role of rate collector from early 1901.¹¹¹

The twelve collectors had their areas assigned. In effect they were appointed to the areas of the existing poor law unions as follows: Athy No. 1 RDC had Patrick Boland, Peter Murphy and Patrick Finn. Finn was also the only collector for the small part of Kildare that was in Baltinglass No. 3 area. Celbridge No.1 had Edward Coonan from Rathcoffey, along with Joseph Mooney from Maynooth. Edenderry No. 2 had Edward Conlon, Bernard Cullen and Joseph Wyer. Edward Coonan also collected in the Naas No. 1 RDC area along with Thomas Cullen, Patrick Downey, T. Holbrook and George Myler. The average valuation of the areas assigned to each collector was £27,900, with collector Holbrook having an area worth nearly £60,000, while that of George Myler was just over £12,000.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 29 Apr. 1899.

¹¹⁰ K.C.C. mins. 26 May 1899.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 19 Jan. 1901.

At this meeting of 26 May 1899, Kildare County Council acceded to a request put to it by Edward Coonan that the new LGB regulation requiring the rate collectors to present their collection books for inspection to the county clerk every fortnight be relaxed and instead that they would be inspected every three months to coincide with the council's own quarterly meetings. The main reason for this was for the collectors to avoid the inconvenience of frequent trips to Naas or the nearest RDC offices.¹¹²

Later in the summer the council was forced to reverse its decision on this issue as the LGB wrote demanding that its original requirement of fortnightly checks of the collectors' books be adhered to. This was one of several conflicts between the council and the LGB during the early years. The council did not always back down but in this case it felt that the LGB had some merit in its argument.¹¹³

The collectors were required to enter into a bond to secure the council against any failure on their part to forward the sums due to the council. The amount of this bond was set at between three and six percent of the rateable valuation of their respective areas. In August 1899 the finance committee of the council arranged for an insurance policy to be taken out by all the collectors with the Patriotic Assurance Company at a unified rate of 5% and they recommended that the premium be paid annually by the council 'and the proper proportion be deducted from time to time from the fees payable to each poor law collector'.¹¹⁴

One of the most contentious issues before the council was that of the salaries of officials such as the county secretary and the county surveyor whom the council had inherited from the grand juries. The LGB which oversaw the whole changeover from grand juries to county councils had written to all county secretaries reminding

¹¹² Ibid., 26 May 1899

¹¹³ K.C.C. mins. 28 Aug. 1899.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 26 May 1899.

them that councils could make adjustments to salaries of such officers, ‘in proportion to the increase or decrease of their duties’.¹¹⁵ It considered that this would most likely mean an increase for county secretaries as it outlined the extra work that had arisen because of the change over from grand juries to county councils. It mentioned the workload occasioned by increased numbers of council meetings – way more than the spring and summer assizes of the grand jury days, and the increased work in connection with finance since the council now had the handling of the new poor rate which was an amalgam of the county cess and the old poor rate. Kildare’s county secretary, Gilbert de L. Willis, it will be recalled,¹¹⁶ was already anxious about the salaries issue and at the final grand jury meeting he had raised the matter stating that the treasury had informed him that the county was at that point paying £673 over the average county salary bill and that they were anxious to knock this amount off the total. He supposed, ‘that the grand jury could really do nothing. It would go before the county council, and no doubt that body might be trusted to make the best fight they could’.¹¹⁷

He was wrong. The council turned out to be anything but friendly towards de Willis and his salary. Much of the inflated salary bill was on account of de Willis’s own annual salary of £700 (to include the cost of two clerical assistants) which was about £200 more than that of most other county secretaries at the time. Just by way of comparison the job of courthouse caretaker attracted a salary of £20 per annum. De Willis did not even do the job full-time. He had a thriving practice as a barrister in Dublin.

¹¹⁵ *Local Government Board (Ireland) annual report 1900* [Cd 338] vol. xxxv. 1, p. 335, circular no. 317/m 1899.

¹¹⁶ See above, pp 58-9.

¹¹⁷ *K.O.*, 25 Mar. 1899.

Within a few months of the new council getting off the ground questions were being asked by the finance committee about de Willis's salary and working habits. John T. Heffernan complained that he had called into the offices in Naas to find the clerical staff with nothing to do. The rate collection books and accounts were not there and he wondered why. De Willis explained that he worked on them in his Leeson St. office.¹¹⁸

Over the next few weeks the finance committee worked on a contract which can only be described as an offer he couldn't accept. It stipulated that he must 'reside within the county, within easy reach of his office, and that he should do so within one year...and that he should attend at his office on at least five days in each week from at least 10 to 4 o'clock'.¹¹⁹

At the first meeting of the council in January 1900 de Willis offered his resignation, with effect from 31 March of that year. This was also the last meeting of the council at which John T. Heffernan attended as a council member. He very quietly resigned from the chairmanship of the Naas Rural District Council and hence from the county council.¹²⁰

Meanwhile, the finance committee of the council, without Heffernan, met on 26 February and considered the coming vacancy for county secretary. It set the conditions and salary of the office at considerably less than de Willis had been offered, at £300 and the residency condition was tightened to 'shall reside within the township of Naas'.¹²¹ The main council later modified the latter requirement and reduced further the salary on offer for the post to £270 per annum.¹²²

¹¹⁸ K.C.C. fnce. cmte. 27 Nov. 1899.

¹¹⁹ Ibid 3 Jan. 1900; *K.O.*, 6 Jan. 1900.

¹²⁰ *L.L.*, 6 Jan. 1900.

¹²¹ K.C.C. fnce. cmte. 26 Feb. 1900.

¹²² K.C.C. mins. 26 Feb. 1900.

Behind the scenes Heffernan was busy drumming up support for his application to succeed de Willis. He had an informer, in the person of the Naas town clerk, Michael Gogarty, who kept him up to date by frequent letters about what those in the know were saying about the secretaryship. On 25 January he told Heffernan that the finance committee were being pressured to cut the salary down to zero and to offer a commission, based presumably, on a percentage of the rates collected. One other serious candidate for the job, Henry Farrell, told Heffernan's informant that his (Farrell's) only hope of appointment was to force an early election, while Heffernan was still disqualified by reason of having been an elected member of the council during the previous six months.¹²³ Gogarty advised Heffernan, in the same letter, not to push for the appointment of his nephew, Thomas Fitzpatrick, as a rate collector while his own candidacy was still up in the air. As his correspondent put it, 'perhaps you will be able to do something better for him in the near future'. He is also advised that 'Charles Bergin (whose election nomination papers Heffernan had signed) is added to the finance committee. You must post all your friends that are on that to work the proceedings to suit'.¹²⁴

Gogarty need not have worried on that score. Heffernan was already making sure his friends were onside, if the following reply from Edmund Cassidy, the councillor from Monasterevan is anything to go by:

24 Jan. 1900

Dear John,

It is more than kind of you to send over the yearling, but I don't really want her and must send her back. About your business. It would be a great thing if you would attend the office as often as you could and get as much information as you can about the accounts and if in six months time you could get de Willis to say you were all right, there would be no trouble about the job....

¹²³ Heffernan papers, mainly re. appointment of John T. Heffernan as secretary of Kildare Co. Council (N.L.I. MS. 21.219 - M.Gogarty to Heffernan).

¹²⁴ Ibid.

I am in earnest about the filly, I have no place for her and no need for her. I will give her food in plenty till you tell me where I am to send her. Take my tip and put in some strong work at the office.

Yours

Edmund Cassidy¹²⁵

Cassidy it seems, was concerned that Heffernan should familiarise himself with the financial and administrative aspects of running the county council. He obviously wanted whoever got the job to be able to undertake the demanding administrative work involved in running the council's affairs. It is hardly stretching the evidence to interpret the gift of the yearling to Cassidy as at least a way of putting the recipient at some obligation to the giver in the matter covered in the letter.

In the north of the county he had the rate collector Edward Coonan working on his behalf. It is worth quoting the full text of this letter to give a flavour of the behind-the-scenes machinations that were involved.

80, 81, 82 Green St.
Dublin
1 Feb. 1900.

Dear John,

Since writing you on Sunday I ascertained that the original crankiness of J.Healy and P.Crosbie is resolved and you can reckon on them as supporters. I saw both during the week but (illegible name) tells me that Messrs. Wolfe, Mansfield, O.Cogan and J.Kelly are in favour of Farrell . However O.Cogan can be got not to vote. H.F. [Farrell] also relies on John Cribben but I have made him all right for you but at no time was he intended to do much else. He is a little in their books but will not be long so.

You may rely on 25 of the Co.Council so that you have nothing to fear. I hear that there will be an attempt to get the LGB to order an immediate election but it matters not as you would only have to be elected twice if such event occurs.

With best regards

E.Coonan¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Heffernan papers, mainly re. appointment of John T. Heffernan as secretary of Kildare Co. Council (N.L.I. MS. 21.219 – E.Cassidy to Heffernan).

This is the type of background networking that was involved in local appointments. It would be interesting to know exactly in what sense John Cribben is ‘in their books’. The following sequence of undated letters to Heffernan from a Thomas Flanagan of Kilinaugh House, Moyvalley, shows how this network operated and what the stakes were for those involved. The first asks Heffernan’s opinion if it would be ‘advisable’ for a Mr. O’Hara to go for the secretaryship of the council or whether he would be eligible, ‘That is, if you have no friend of your own in view’.¹²⁷

The next in the sequence says:

we were delighted to learn you were going for the secretaryship. Good lord wont the county be in a poor state. You will be able to get the Young Fellow a job with the crown or uncle Frederick [Fitzgerald, Marquis of Kildare].... I hope to be congratulating you after a short while.¹²⁸

The final letter goes to work on Heffernan’s behalf, advising when the local notable, Ambrose More O’Ferrall would be about for Hefferan to meet.¹²⁹ In fact someone else, Edmund Cassidy, contacted More O’Ferrall on Heffernan’s behalf. Heffernan, for all his anti-landlord committments during the land war, was not above invoking the assistance of one of the gentry for his ambitions if the reply from More O’Ferrall to Cassidy is anything to go on. More O’Ferrall was obviously asked to speak to any contacts he may have had on the LGB and he replied that:

I would be sorry if any direction of the LGB prevented him from running his chances with other candidates....I have not much influence with the board as it is at present constituted but it would be a pity if they insisted on his resigning previous to the election of a secretary, as were he not elected, we should

¹²⁶ Heffernan papers, mainly re. appointment of John T. Heffernan as secretary of Kildare Co. Council (N.L.I. MS. 21.219 – E.Coonan to Heffernan).

¹²⁷ Heffernan papers, mainly re. appointment of John T. Heffernan as secretary of Kildare Co. Council (N.L.I. MS. 21.219 – T. Flanagan to Heffernan).

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

lose his services, at least for some time, as a member of our council.¹³⁰

Presumably Cassidy sent on this letter to Heffernan as some type of proof that he was acting on his behalf.

While this was going on in the background the council finance committee met specifically to consider the salary and conditions of service of the person to replace de Willis as secretary. A motion on the issue was brought to the main council meeting in early March. The first part of the motion specified that ‘the salary of the secretary to be appointed in succession to our present secretary is to cover and include all clerical assistance, if any, which may be required beyond the permanent staff provided and paid by the council’. The salary was set at £50 for duties under the Diseases of Animals Acts and £250 for all other duties (exclusive of allowances under the Franchise and Jurors Acts – which varied but were assumed to come to an average total of £100).¹³¹

The stipulation about the new secretary having to pay for any extra clerical assistance above the ordinary was to cause friction with the LGB which readily agreed with the salary amount but balked at giving their approval to this requirement, on the grounds that it left them and the secretary not actually knowing ‘the precise amount of the salary which will be secured to the secretary for his personal services’.¹³² In effect it was impossible to tell how much he would really earn. The council stood its ground on this issue and the LGB made no further comment. As some councillors and the LGB had predicted, it later became an issue between the

¹³⁰ Heffernan papers, mainly re. appointment of John T. Heffernan as secretary of Kildare Co. Council (N.L.I. MS. 21.219 – More O’Ferrall to E. Cassidy).

¹³¹ K.C.C. mins .26 Feb. 1900.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 12 Mar. 1900.

future secretary and the council who found that there were exceptionally busy times of the year when the work could not be done with just the permanent council staff.¹³³

Some councillors thought the salary offered was too generous. Stephen Hayden said the 'committee had acted 'very liberally' and that he believed they could get an excellent man for £150 a year. John Field agreed with this. George Medlicott, one of the grand jury nominees, took the opposite view. He said, 'I think this is the most important office in the county, and we must have a good man for such important clerical work that is to be done and I think the recommendations of the finance committee providing a total salary of £400 is little enough, and I think it should be adopted'.¹³⁴ Eventually, after much discussion, the meeting agreed on £50 for Animal Diseases Act and £245 for other duties, exclusive of those connected to the franchise and jurors.¹³⁵ The conclusion is clear - the new council was anxious to save the ratepayers any unnecessary expences and to show that they were not as extravagant as the grand jury had been and as they had been expected to be by those critical of the reforms of local government.

This same meeting tried to persuade de Willis to remain in office until July in order to allow Heffernan to qualify for the job by reason of not having been a council member in the previous six months. It did this by offering him a backdated salary totalling £550 per annum pro rata. It was not enough to tempt him. He was probably fully aware of what was up and he had no wish to make anything easy for Heffernan who had led the attack on his position from the start. One of the letters from Heffernan's mole in the county office said, 'if de Willis wants any extraordinary pay

¹³³ Ibid., 27 Mar. 1901.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 26 Feb. 1900.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

for the next 3 months after March, the next best thing would be to appoint a temporary secretary because you never know what such a lad is working for'.¹³⁶

Failing de Willis's agreement to stay on for an extra three months the council decided at the meeting of 17 March 1900 to go ahead with the election of a secretary. Stephen J. Brown, the chairman, said in moving the motion that:

It is unnecessary for us to emphasize the importance of the secretary's position. The whole work of the council depends upon him, and we should put forward every effort to procure a capable man. We have decided upon a salary that should be sufficient to attract a capable man and make it worth his while to give his whole time to the duties of the office.¹³⁷

In response to a question the chairman said that the strict requirement that the secretary should reside in Naas would have to be relaxed and Matthew Minch proposed that it be enough that he should 'live within a reasonable distance of Naas'.¹³⁸ It was then decided that advertisements for the post would be placed in the Dublin and local papers and that the election would take place at the next meeting of the council on Monday 26 March. When it was realised that this date clashed with several fairs in the county it was moved to the following day instead, which gives an interesting reminder of the dominance of farmers and farming in the life of the county and in the council chamber at the time.

It is clear from the exchanges at the meeting of 27 March that the councillors were fully aware of the major impediment to the appointment of John T. Heffernan but that they had decided to proceed anyway and play for time in dealing with any objections that the LGB might make. It is worth reporting the meeting in detail for what it tells us of the way the friends and supporters of Heffernan managed any

¹³⁶ Heffernan papers, mainly re. appointment of John T. Heffernan as secretary of Kildare Co. Council (N.L.I. MS. 21.219 - M.Gogarty to Heffernan, 24 Jan. 1900)

¹³⁷ K.C.C. mins. 12 Mar. 1900.

¹³⁸ *K.O.*, 17 Mar. 1900.

opposition offered to him. The council minutes for the meeting give a brief and clinical account of what happened but a much fuller sense of the tone and atmosphere of the meeting is conveyed in the reports of the local papers.¹³⁹

The outgoing secretary began by reading out the list of applications for the post. There were twelve in all, namely, Captain Gooding, inspector of army schools Dublin, Robert Little B.A. Dublin, W. C. McDermott, Strabane, J.R. Dagg, clerk of union, Baltinglass, C.B. Hill, Shipley, Yorkshire, Thomas J. Dempsey, Blakefield, Rathangan, Patrick J. Murphy, Athy, Peter Kennedy, Rathglas, Sligo, John T. Heffernan, Kildare, Anthony O'Brien, Waterford, Henry J. Farrell, town commissioner, Naas and J.H. Hunt, Upper Sackville St. Dublin.

The terms of the advertisement stated that candidates for the position had to be present for the election and that left Hunt, Little, Heffernan, Farrell and Dagg in the contest. When de Willis said that Mr Hill from Yorkshire was not present the chairman interjected with – ‘Oh it does not matter, we have his photograph,’ which aroused much laughter in the chamber. This skittish tone continued throughout the proceedings with much quite openly mocking derision being directed at some of the candidates in their presence. A sense of this can be gleaned from the way Little’s candidacy was treated in the following description:

The secretary read the testimonials of the candidates. Mr Little impressed on the council, in the one read from him, that besides of the Royal University he had also passed the examination in jurisprudence and Roman law (laughter). In the printed recommendation from one of his former tutors it was stated that he was capable of dealing with agricultural work and could take care of a farm (renewed laughter).¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ The following account is based on , K.C.C. mins 27 Mar. 1900; *L.L.*, 31 Mar. 1900; *K. O.*, 31 Mar. 1900.

¹⁴⁰ *K.O.*, 31 Mar. 1900.

The atmosphere turned more serious when those opposed to Heffernan began to refer obliquely to his being technically disqualified from running for the job.

George Wolfe was first to bring it up in the following terms:

It would be advisable to know if the candidates were eligible, that is if they were capable of satisfying the conditions imposed by the local government board. It would be better to know these things, because there was no use in electing a man if the board would not afterwards approve of his nomination.¹⁴¹

Matthew Minch proposed that the election should go ahead and that questions of eligibility should be dealt with if they arose at that stage. J.P. Dowling said that ‘the proper course of action would be to read out to the meeting sub-section 3 of section 12 of the enactments order and then let the council please themselves in the matter’.¹⁴² Peter Crosbie jumped in to support Minch before anyone could second Dowling. John Field agreed. The chairman tried to get Dowling to be more specific in his objection; ‘the council must know exactly what the proposer draws attention to’. There must have been a strong sense of intimidation in the meeting to have prevented such people as Wolfe and Dowling from saying out straight what everyone in the room knew to be the case – that electing Heffernan was illegal, for such is the reality. Brown brought the thing to its conclusion by agreeing with Minch that the election should proceed and that any objections be taken then.

John Field proposed Heffernan and Matthew Minch MP seconded him.

Lord Frederick Fitzgerald asked Heffernan if he was prepared, if elected, to take up office from the 1st April and the latter said yes. Sir Gerald Dease proposed Henry Farrell and this was seconded by John Cribben. There were no other nominations. At

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² 61 & 62 Vict. ch. 37, seventh schedule of enactment, section 12, sub-section 3., states that ‘it is not lawful to appoint any member of any county or district council or board of guardians or town commissioners or the partner in business of any such member, to any office or place of profit under the council, board or commissioners, and the disqualification shall apply to any person and his partner in business during six months next after such person has ceased to be such member’.

this point George Wolfe tried to intervene again by stating that he was ‘going to ask the opinion of the chairman as to the eligibility of one of the candidates, but perhaps it was better to leave the matter to the local government board (hear, hear)’.¹⁴³

The chairman then called for a show of hands which Heffernan won by twenty one votes to five. Dease, Cribben, Kirkpatrick, Fenelon and Wolfe voted for Farrell, while Edward Hayden, J.P. Dowling and the chairman Stephen J. Brown abstained. The victory was greeted with ‘loud cheering’ by Heffernan’s supporters.

The meeting then continued in the normal way and included a detailed examination of the work and procedures of the outgoing secretary Gilbert de L. Willis. This investigation was initiated months before by the man just then appointed to replace him.

That all might not be well with the appointment was signalled in a little notice in the *Kildare Observer* of 7 April under the heading ‘Gossip’ which stated: ‘We learn that the question of the secretaryship will come on again for consideration, as the local government board have intimated that they cannot sanction the appointment of Mr John T. Heffernan’.¹⁴⁴

The finance committee must have expected a protracted delay because at its meeting of 31 March they had engaged a Mr. Richard Murray to act as temporary secretary, both to deal with the mess the county records were in following de Willis’s departure and to provide cover while the Heffernan saga rolled on.¹⁴⁵

The next council meeting on 9 April was presented with two letters from the LGB, the first to the effect that the council had acted illegally in electing Heffernan and the second, ‘addressed to the presiding chairman, impressing upon the council

¹⁴³ *L.L.*, 31 Mar.1900.

¹⁴⁴ *K.O.*, 7 Apr. 1900.

¹⁴⁵ *K.C.C. fnce. cmte.* 31 Mar. 1900.

the necessity for proceeding at once to the election of a properly qualified person to the office in question as no proper reason exists for postponing this important appointment'.¹⁴⁶

The chairman, Stephen J. Brown, stung perhaps by the explicit use of the word 'illegal' and the letter addressed specifically to him as chairman, was anxious to do as the LGB asked and when Heffernan asked for a deferral of a decision while he contacted the LGB himself 'with a view to having the disqualification referred to removed', the former said quite sharply to him that the 'LGB had no power to remove this disqualification, which was one imposed by statute and that there would not be, in his opinion, any grounds for adjournment'.¹⁴⁷

The meeting seemed to be going away from Heffernan until the letter from the LGB was read out and it was clear to the council members that the information about Heffernan's ineligibility had been communicated to them by de Willis. Even those who had voted against Heffernan were annoyed. De Willis's letter to the LGB had obviously mentioned George Wolfe's earlier attempts to raise objections to Heffernan's candidacy and Wolfe now reacted by saying, 'With regard to what is called my objection, I was only asking for information and was not not making an objection'.¹⁴⁸ Other members were indignant at the interference of the LGB in what they considered to be purely a local matter. Peter Crosbie said he thought the LGB were treating 'the representatives of the people in an arbitrary manner, and the council should not let it go by default'.¹⁴⁹ One of the constant themes of the early days of the councils in general was this resentment of the LGB's interference in what were considered purely local affairs.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ K.C.C. mins. 9 Apr. 1900.

¹⁴⁷ *K.O.*, 14 Apr. 1900.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Heffernan himself argued at this meeting, and subsequently in letters to the LGB, that the fact that he had not sought election to either the rural district council or the county council but had been co-opted ‘without his consent’ to both, meant that the disqualification from office did not apply to him.¹⁵¹ It was a weak case and neither the council chairman, Brown, nor the LGB, were persuaded, but it bought Heffernan time with the rest of the council who agreed to re-advertise the secretaryship under the same terms, and that the election would take place at the council’s meeting on 16 July. By then six months would have elapsed since Heffernan had been a member of the council and no issue of his ineligibility would arise.

At last, on the 17 July (the meeting was postponed by one day to allow for a race meeting at Naas) Heffernan was elected to the job of county secretary. This time there was no other nominee. He was to take up the position from 1 September.¹⁵²

There was one final twist to the tale in the form of a letter from the LGB to the effect that they had arranged for the examination of Heffernan ‘as to his qualification for the office of secretary and that they have directed Mr Saunders to attend at the offices of the council on a date to be fixed by him to give Mr Heffernan an opportunity of answering questions drawn up to test his knowledge of English composition, orthography, arithmetic, accounts, Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898 and the orders made thereunder’.¹⁵³ This examination was less of a formality than it might have appeared. A similar dispute between the LGB and Tipperary South Riding County Council over the appointment of a secretary there, had resulted in a report following just such an examination on the council’s appointee which stated that the candidate, Mr. Nicholas K. Shee, ‘does not possess the required qualifications for the

¹⁵⁰ Mary E. Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 27.

¹⁵¹ K.C.C. mins. 28 June 1900.

¹⁵² K.C. C. mins. 17 July 1900.

¹⁵³ K.C.C. mins. 31 July, 1900.

position. His writing and spelling alone are too faulty as to qualify him for this important office, and his knowledge of arithmetic seems confined altogether to the most elementary rules'.¹⁵⁴ In the Tipperary case the LGB eventually had to issue a court order to force the election of someone other than Shee. In Kildare that was not necessary. Heffernan passed his examination and the LGB formally sanctioned his appointment in a letter referred to at the last council meeting in August, stating that they 'have inquired into the qualifications of Mr. Heffernan for the office of secretary to the council and they desire to express their concurrence in his appointment'.¹⁵⁵ At last, on 1 September 1900, John T. Heffernan took up his duties as county secretary and continued in office until his death on 18 September, 1907.¹⁵⁶

While all this was happening the county council proceeded with its normal business which typically was a mixture of purely administrative matters pertaining to collecting the rates and disbursing the funds to the rural districts councils and the poor law unions, and more politically charged issues of either a local or national or even an international dimension. In terms of the former, there is no evidence in the minutes of Kildare County Council in the early years, of much disagreement between the council and the district councils about the allocation of funds. This may be because the chairmen of the rural district councils were prominent on the committees that made the real decisions about such issues.

It may be appropriate here to describe the actual procedures of the county council as set out by the Local Government (Ireland) Act of 1898 and the various enactment orders under which it was implemented. The council was obliged to hold an annual meeting at which the chairman and vice-chairman were selected and at which

¹⁵⁴ Brendan Long, *Tipperary S.R. County Council 1899-1999: a century of local democracy* (Clonmel, 1999), p. 25.

¹⁵⁵ K.C.C. mins. 27 Aug. 1900.

¹⁵⁶ *K.O.*, 21 Sept. 1907.

any of the permitted co-opted members were chosen. The first annual meeting was to be held on the twelfth day after the election of the first council.¹⁵⁷ This was to be followed by four quarterly meetings to be held between then and the following 1 June. Subsequent annual meetings would then occur as soon after 1 June as possible. Other meetings, where necessary, could be called at the request of the chairman or of five members of the council. In fact, such was the volume of work to be conducted that Kildare County Council rarely went a month without meeting during the first three years of its existence, and if committee meetings are taken into account, then weekly meetings were not infrequent occurrences.

Applications for county at large public works were made or 'initiated' at the proposal committee of the council. The proposal committee could either reject the applications or adopt them in whole or in part, in which case they were sent to the council as formal proposals. A similar procedure was working in parallel for local district or baronial public works, which were initiated at the rural district councils which could either reject them or adopt them in whole or in part. Works adopted by the rural district council were sent as a list of proposals to the county council meeting as well. In the case of proposals from their own proposal committee the council could amend such a proposal and pass it as amended. In the case of proposals from the rural district councils the county council was limited to either approving or rejecting them. If approving them, the council would pass a motion to the effect of the proposal. If rejecting them, the council could either do so outright or it could refer them back to the rural district council with a statement of the modifications required for them to secure

¹⁵⁷ The Local Government (Application of Enactments) Order, 1898, sections 35 and 36; John Clancy, *A handbook of local government in Ireland*, pp. 25-7.

approval. The rural district council would then have to resubmit the modified proposal at the next quarterly meeting.¹⁵⁸

The carrying out of these proposed works was under the general supervision of the county surveyor, Mr Edward Glover. In each of the poor law union areas, now rural district councils, there was an assistant surveyor. The work was contracted out to private individuals after the submission of tenders. The local newspapers frequently carried advertisements seeking tenders for specific public works. These were mainly, but not exclusively, road repairs and maintenance.¹⁵⁹ The tenders were sought for work on specific stretches of road or pathway. Those who tendered for the work were usually engaged in other work, such as farming, and undertook the road maintenance on a seasonal, part-time basis. The tenders received were considered by the proposal committee and the rural district councils, and if no tenders were received the county council was to give the work into the hands of the county surveyor to do by direct labour.¹⁶⁰

The work of the contractors was not always satisfactory, and in 1900 the Kildare county surveyor was authorised by the council to prosecute road contractors for neglect of duty. The resolution of the council meeting of 27 August 1900 ran as follows:

That the contractors for the following roads, who are at present guilty of neglect in performance of their duty be prosecuted before the county court judge at next quarter sessions, unless between this date and 1st October next the duties have been performed to the county surveyor's satisfaction:

- (1) 350 perches of road between Athy railway bridge and the barony bounds at Bray.
- (2) 820 perches of road between Bolton Hill crossroads and Mr.Devoy's entrance gate, etc.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ *The Local Government (Procedure of Councils) Order, 1899*, sections 19 and 20.

¹⁵⁹ *L.L.*, 10 Nov. 1900.

¹⁶⁰ Clancy, *A handbook of local government*, p. 26.

¹⁶¹ *K.C.C. mins.* 27 Aug. 1900.

The issue of the unsatisfactory work of contractors was obviously not confined to Kildare, as in January 1901 the LGB invited all county councils in the country to consider using direct labour as the means of having the public works completed. Kildare County Council discussed the issue at its meeting of 25 February and the advice of the county surveyor was that it was found that direct labour was far more expensive. It would cost perhaps 50 to 100 per cent more than the contract. He said that he had been 'working by direct labour for the past few weeks around Kildare, and he found that he could not do it as economically as by contract'.¹⁶² This seemed to be the crucial consideration for most of the council. The chairman, Stephen J. Brown said that 'the question hinged on this, which would be the most effective and the cheapest system'.¹⁶³ He felt that the present system should continue but that the council should retain the right to use direct labour in certain circumstances.

Only one member was of the opinion that direct labour should be tried.

William Ronaldson spoke on behalf of those who actually did the work when he said:

It would be well if the council had the option of employing direct labour. They all knew that the largest amount of the work on roads was done in winter when labourers were disemployed, and it would be a great shame to shut them off from the benefits of direct labour. They were ratepayers and had a right to be considered – or at all events get a chance. Most of the contractors at present were farmers – some of them large farmers, who had many ways of making a living, but the poor labourer had often not even a single way to earn a livelihood.¹⁶⁴

There were very few voices such as this representing the interests of labourers in the first few years of Kildare County Council. At the next meeting the county surveyor presented a report on the issue which argued strongly against direct labour, on the grounds of expense and efficiency, and the mood of the council swung even further against even allowing what little use of direct labour was then permissible. A motion

¹⁶² Ibid., 25 Feb. 1901; *K.O.*, 2 Mar. 1901.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ *K.O.*, 2 Mar. 1901.

to the effect that ‘in the opinion of this council the system of repairing roads and executing public works by contract is most suitable and so far as we see there is no necessity for an alteration of the law,’ was carried while an amendment, proposed by Matthew Minch, that the council and district councils should have the option of using direct labour in certain circumstances, was defeated.¹⁶⁵

The first two years of the new council proved more expensive than many ratepayers had expected. The concern among the county councillors over this issue culminated in a motion from Edward Fenelon directing the new secretary, John T. Heffernan, to make a return to the council showing the amount raised in the standard years, for poor rates and county cess (year ending 29 September 1897 and year ending 30 June 1897, respectively)¹⁶⁶, and rates made by the council for years 1899 to 1900 and 1900 to 1901 for purposes of comparison.¹⁶⁷

This return was duly made to a finance committee meeting in the spring of 1901 and its findings showed in fact only a small increase in the actual amount paid by rate payers since the coming of the county council.¹⁶⁸ The council meeting of 30 March at which the estimates for the next year were agreed had good news for the ratepayers of most of the county. In all but the Athy No. 1 area the amount of rates for the coming year would be less than the previous two years¹⁶⁹. An editorial in the *Kildare Observer* commented on the matter thus:

From our report of the figures, and the explicit remarks of the chairman on the budget, which we publish elsewhere, it will be seen that in comparison with the two previous years’ rates, that for the ensuing year is very favourable indeed. It will be remarked that in the different union districts in the county, there is a decrease in the amount to be raised, with the exception of Athy No. 1. This is

¹⁶⁵ K.C.C. mins. 27 Mar. 1901.

¹⁶⁶ *Local government (Ireland) Act, 1898*, sec. 48, sub sec. 1..

¹⁶⁷ K.C. mins. 26 Nov. 1900; a full treatment of the rates paid in each year in Kildare is to be found in appendix 1.

¹⁶⁸ K.C.C. fnce cmte. 25 Feb. 1901.

¹⁶⁹ K.C.C. mins 27 Mar. 1901.

very satisfactory in face of the fact that there were several sources of drain on the county funds since the Local Government Act came into force which did not exist previously, such as providing for compensation for loss of office, retiring allowances, &c., and the creation of new offices. ...It must also be borne in mind, when a comparison is being drawn between the amount raised by the county council and that raised by the grand jury system, the increase is not alone due to the reasons given above, but also to the cost of transition of county government, for it must be remembered that the initiation of the Local Government Act and its working, especially during the first year, was extremely expensive. Needless to point out, such a complete revolution as that effected by the Local Government Act was naturally to be attended by enormous cost to the ratepayer. But it is satisfactory to note, judging by the figures given in the rate estimate as compared with those of other counties, that owing to capable management and the effective work accomplished by the county council, the expenditure has been kept down to the lowest limit possible, and at the same time the best results have been obtained for the benefit of the county.¹⁷⁰

This healthy state of the county finances continued until 1907, when unexpectedly high liabilities under the recent land purchase acts led to what was described in the local press as a 'financial crisis' in the council.¹⁷¹ This issue will be considered in detail in the next chapter.

Among the other issues that occupied Kildare County Council during its first three years was the campaign to reopen the Kildare town infirmary. This hospital which had been in continuous service since 1767 had originally been privately endowed but when its sources of income began to disappear it had turned to local government sources for help. It been closed since 1886. The cesspayers and the grand jury in that year refused to continue to support it financially despite a long campaign at that time to keep it open. Among those making a last ditch appeal to the county at large presentment session of the grand jury and cesspayers was John T. Heffernan accompanied by the parish priest of Kildare town, Dr. Kavanagh.¹⁷² Among the cesspayers firmly opposed to keeping it open was Henry Farrell, who would later run

¹⁷⁰ *K.O.*, 30 Mar. 1901.

¹⁷¹ *L.L.*, 13 Apr. 1907.

¹⁷² *K.O.*, 22 May 1886.

for the office of county secretary against Heffernan in 1900. Stephen J. Brown was also opposed to keeping it open¹⁷³ and he was against re-opening it later as chairman of the county council. The decision was taken not to grant the required funds to keep it open and it closed.¹⁷⁴ For the next fourteen years the building was left to fall into some disrepair but a small group of locals in the Kildare town area continued to hope that it might be put back into service. A committee of subscribers led by a priest, Fr. John Delaney, campaigned during 1900 and 1901 for its reopening.

The county council's support was sought and it proved a very divisive issue. Most councillors were of the opinion that there were enough hospitals in the county, with Naas and Celbridge workhouses in the north and Athy workhouse in the south. It was felt that there was no need for the expense of another infirmary in Kildare town.¹⁷⁵ A committee of councillors was established to confer with the committee of subscribers and to report back to the council on the expense of reopening the establishment. It was also decided to ask the county surveyor and the county surgeon Dr. Smyth to report on exactly what work was needed to render the building fit for use as a hospital again. This report was ready for the meeting of 2 December 1900 and it concluded that the total cost would be £1300. The subscribers own estimate had been £300.¹⁷⁶ This effectively turned the council away from any consideration of the issue, at least temporarily.

The issue did not go away. The *Kildare Observer* in an editorial looking back on the successes of the previous year's council business picked out this as the one negative subject to comment on. It is worth quoting the editorial at length as it captures the flavour of the debate very well:

¹⁷³ Ibid; *L.L.*, 17 Mar. 1883.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 22 May 1886.

¹⁷⁵ K.C. C. mins, 13 June 1900; *K.O.*, 16 June 1900.

¹⁷⁶ K.C. C. mins. 2 Nov. 1900.

The proposed reopening of the County Infirmary at Kildare is a question that has proved a very contentious one and has well nigh created dissension in the council. Our readers are familiar with the details of the project. The southern portion of the county desire to have the old infirmary reopened, while the northern portion strenuously object. Much has been said in favour of and against the proposal, but the great barrier to the project seems to be that owing to the vast improvements made in the local workhouses in Naas, Athy, Celbridge, Baltinglas and Edenderry – which unions are or partly situate in Kildare county – and with the addition of the very useful and philanthropic hospital at Curragh Edge – there is no necessity for a further institution that must be supported out of the rates at great cost. Though the Co. Council at a recent meeting threw out the proposal the matter does not rest there but is being vigorously pursued by the promoters in Kildare and will probably come on again at the next meeting on the 14th inst. The county seems to be evenly divided on the subject if we take the votes of the county councillors as a criterion, and in that case the scheme will not be allowed to drop without a struggle to the very utmost end.¹⁷⁷

The editor was correct and at the next council meeting a resolution was passed by 15 votes to 12 to accept the recommendation of a joint committee of councillors and subscribers to reopen the infirmary. It was further decided to ascertain from the the LGB the exact composition of the new joint committee of management which would control the newly opened hospital.¹⁷⁸ The infirmary finally did reopen in 1903 with a small annual contribution from the county council. The rest of its finances came from the subscribers' committee and from charitable donations. It was eventually taken fully under the council's charge in 1933.¹⁷⁹

The episode is both strikingly modern and also very much of its own time. It is modern in the way the issue of a local hospital galvanised a small sectional interest within a community and how wider political agendas and a rational provision of health services had to take second place to a well run campaign to keep 'their' hospital open. Late twentieth century Ireland has seen this phenomenon reach the point where candidates have been elected to the Dáil on the strength of such campaigns.

¹⁷⁷ *K.O.*, 5 Jan. 1901.

¹⁷⁸ *K.C.C. mins* 14 Jan. 1901.

¹⁷⁹ *L.L.*, 18 June 1960.

It is of its time in the way that those involved, particularly on the opposition side, viewed the way local taxes should be spent. In 1883, one of the cesspayers who objected to its receiving any further aid from the grand jury, Col. Lawless, said that he ‘did not care to pay for an infirmary which conferred no benefit upon him, although it was a very excellent one.’¹⁸⁰ Another, Mr. Robertson, said he ‘objected to the institution generally and he did so upon principle...that institution was supported entirely by the cesspayers – if it had been supported by the poor rate, he, for one, would have no objection to it. It seemed to him a very bad case of taxation without representation’.¹⁸¹ Fifteen years later those on the council opposed to helping to finance the re-opening of the infirmary voiced similar opinions. One such was Francis Colgan, who asked why ‘should not the cost be put on the district and not on the whole county?’¹⁸² The modern idea of taxation being for the general good and not for specific local and identifiable needs had obviously not yet taken hold.

During these early years Kildare County Council also met its obligations under the Agricultural and Technical (Ireland) Act, 1899.¹⁸³ A campaign led by Horace Plunkett in the mid-eighteen nineties had led to a report by a committee comprised of nationalists and unionists that suggested the creation of a department of agriculture to improve the level of productive activity in rural Ireland. The conservative government of the time followed up Gerald Balfour’s success in getting the reform of local government through parliament with a bill setting up a department of agriculture and technical instruction.¹⁸⁴

Under section 14 (1) part 2 of the new act, county councils were required to appoint an agricultural and technical instruction committee and to allot a

¹⁸⁰ *L.E.*, 22 May 1886.

¹⁸¹ *L.E.*, 22 May 1886.

¹⁸² *K.O.*, 19 Jan. 1901.

¹⁸³ 62 & 63 Vict. c. 50.

¹⁸⁴ R.B. McDowell, ‘Administration and the public services, 1870-1921’, p. 589.

small portion of the rates to its financing. In June of 1900 Kildare County Council appointed the following members to this committee: The chairman, Stephen J. Brown, the vice-chairman, Matthew Minch MP, William Ronaldson, Stephen Hayden, Ambrose More O’Ferrall, Lord Frederick Fitzgerald, Laurence Malone, Edward Hayden, Edmund Cassidy, Owen Cogan Cogan and Sir Gerald Dease from the council as well as the following non-councillors who were considered to have appropriate knowledge of the issues: Joseph O’Connor, Thomas Anderson, Thomas Cooke-Trench, Edward J. Plewman, Rev. Monsignor Tynan, PP of Newbridge and Very Rev. M. Devitt, Rector of Clongowes.

Later in the year all the rural district councils drew up their own local agricultural and technical committees and began submitting to the main one their ideas for improving local agriculture and industries. Among the proposals put forward were the following:

1. That it is desirable to extend further in the Co. Kildare the system of registered sires as at present practised by the Royal Dublin Society.
2. That a local show for cattle, sheep, pigs, poultry and implements be held early in the county.
3. That it is desirable to establish classes for the instruction of farmers in dairy work, rearing of calves, preserving fruit, and all household industries.¹⁸⁵

Among the resolutions passed at this meeting of the committee were that the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act be put into force, especially at fairs, that demonstrations in dairying and butter-making be given, and that lectures should be given on agricultural seeds, plants and animal diseases.¹⁸⁶

At this same meeting the salary and job description of the new post of organising secretary of the county agriculture and technical committee were decided. He was to have £300 per annum and was to live in Naas or elsewhere in the county

¹⁸⁵ *K.O.*, 10 Nov. 1900.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

sanctioned by the committee. Apart from the administration of the committee and its finances he was to 'at all times be prepared to lecture upon subjects connected with agriculture when requisite, according to the wishes of the committee,' and he was to 'organise the formation and giving of all classes, meetings, and lectures to be organised by, or under the direction of the committee'.¹⁸⁷

During the debate on the qualifications likely to be needed to do the job well it emerged that most felt that no one in Ireland would have the necessary know-how and that only someone with experience of working in a similar role in England would suffice. Wounded local pride was assuaged somewhat by the chairman, Stephen J. Brown's remark that 'he may not be an Englishman; he may be an Irishman who has gained his experience in England'.¹⁸⁸ Again, the sense of inferiority is evident among those trying to work the new local government system in Ireland.

That is exactly what occurred when the committee appointed, or 'elected' as it was always put at the time, Mr. George Ryce to the post in February of the following year. He was an Irishman with relations in Kildare and he had held the post of agricultural organiser in Devon for some years previously.¹⁸⁹

The system of agriculture and technical committees thus established has been criticised for being top-heavy with local representative bodies all talking about change but achieving little of practical value.¹⁹⁰ In fairness, in Kildare, signs of its effectiveness were evident from early on. In early 1901, even before George Ryce was appointed and while John T. Heffernan was acting secretary to the committee, advertisements appeared in the local press offering prizes to farmers on behalf of the

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ *L.L.*, 23 Feb. 1901.

¹⁹⁰ F.S.L. Lyons, 'The aftermath of Parnell, 1891-1903' in W.E. Vaughan ed. *A new history of Ireland vi: Ireland under the union, II, 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996), p. 90.

committee, of nominations of mares to pedigree stallions and of cows to pedigree bulls, and also offering premiums to farmers who owned bulls of the approved breeds.¹⁹¹ During the autumn of 1901 lectures were held in Naas town hall on agricultural topics but the report which notes the big turnout for one such, regrets that there were few of the working classes, who could most have benefitted from the enlightenment, in the audience.¹⁹²

As in the issue of the Kildare infirmary one can see evidence of a modernising Ireland and of a nineteenth century mind set at work together in Kildare's deliberations over the agricultural and technical committee. The modern impetus is in the genuine drive to improve standards of agricultural production and the older mind set is seen in the automatic assumption that any Irish expertise in the area was bound to be inferior.

National politics intruded very little on the work of Kildare County Council. The United Irish League was slow to organise in Kildare and the nationalist candidates for the general election of 1900 were chosen by meetings of the politically active groups as they had always been, with little evidence of strong United Irish League influence. A branch was established in Athy in June of 1900 and it was largely the local supporters of the sitting MP Matthew Minch who were its members.¹⁹³

A hint of the role of the county council in choosing candidates can be gleaned from the following comment about the process in the *Leinster Leader*:

In North Kildare the situation [choice of candidates] has not developed, owing to the fact that there has not yet been any formal expression of opinion. The views of the members of the county council, who are looked to as authoritative spokesmen for the electoral divisions which they represent, will no doubt, largely govern the candidatures. The council meets today, and will, no doubt, when its administrative

¹⁹¹ *L.L.*, 2 Mar. 1901.

¹⁹² *K.O.*, 18 Nov. 1901.

¹⁹³ *L.L.*, 16 June 1900

business concludes, probably proceed to a deliberation of the matter.¹⁹⁴

In the event, two nationalist candidates contested the seat and Edmund Leamy won it from the sitting M.P. C.J. Engledow who ran as an independent nationalist supporter of T.M. Healy. In South Kildare Matthew Minch was unopposed again for the seat there.¹⁹⁵

Two other issues which give a hint of the changing, perhaps even modernising, Ireland in which the new county council functioned are that of the speed of motor cars and an early instance of a planning application. The council received a letter from a resident magistrate in early 1901 drawing its attention to the number of accidents caused by speeding motorists. The chairman pointed out to the meeting that while the council had powers in limiting the speed of particular kinds of engines, they had no power in respect of motor cars but they could suggest the matter to the LGB to deal with.¹⁹⁶ Two years later the council played host to the first ever international motor race held in Ireland, for the Gordon Bennett cup.¹⁹⁷

The hint of planning issues to come came in the county surveyor's report to the quarterly meeting of the council in November 1900. In it he reminds the council that:

According to 14 & 15 Vict. chapter 92 section 9 (2) any person who shall build any house or part of a house within 30 feet of the centre of any road (except in corporate or market towns or where a house now stands) shall be liable to a fine not exceeding ten pounds, and to a further sum of ten shillings a week until the same be removed. As far as I know the county council has no power to interfere with the above provision. But very often sticking to the hard and fast rule of 30 feet would be a hardship. Applications were lately made to me (thinking it was in my power) to authorise additions to existing houses. I see no objection in either case, and I don't think the council need object.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 29 Sept 1900.

¹⁹⁵ Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978), pp 355-6.

¹⁹⁶ K.C.C. mins. 14 Jan. 1901.

¹⁹⁷ See below pp 134-9.

¹⁹⁸ K.C. C. mins. 26 Nov.1900.

The council duly took its professional's advice in this first of many planning applications it would receive over the course of its history. It didn't always.

In this manner Kildare County Council completed the first three years of its existence, giving time to the mundanities of sheep scab and road maintenance, the purchase of steamrollers for the surveyors and new fangled typewriters for the county secretary, and to national cultural issues such as the place of Irish on the national school curriculum and the demand for a Catholic University and even occasionally, to international matters such as the Boer War.¹⁹⁹

The council members faced re-election in April 1902. The new council met in June and its story will be the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁹⁹ K.C.C. mins. 1899-1902 passim.

Chapter 3. Consolidation and development, 1902-1911

The term of office of all county councillors was three years, ‘at the end of which period all must retire together, and new councils must be elected’.¹ The electorate for the local government elections, county council, rural district council or urban district council, was declared, by the Local Government (Ireland) Act, to be, ‘as respects any county, borough, district, electoral division, ward, or other area in Ireland, the register of parliamentary electors, or the portion of that register which relates to such county, etc.’,² together with, crucially, a supplementary list of women and peers, ‘who would, but for being women or peers, be entitled to be parliamentary electors’.³

The history of the parliamentary franchise in the nineteenth century is complex, but is summarised by Brian Walker in his introduction to his, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801-1922*.⁴ He explains that from 1884 on there was ‘uniform householder and lodger franchise for the whole of the United Kingdom. It extended the right to vote in Ireland to all householders in both counties and boroughs, and to lodgers in the counties’.⁵ It was not enough however to simply qualify to vote, one actually had to be on the register.⁶

In order to stand for election one had to be a local government elector; ‘A person shall not be qualified to be elected or to be a councillor for a county, unless he is a local government elector for such county’.⁷ A candidate did not have to stand for election in the electoral division in which they were registered; ‘a person

¹ 61 & 62 Vict., sec. 2, sub-sec. 2; Clancy, *A handbook of local government*, p. 2.

² 61 & 62 Vict., sec. 98, sub-sec. 10.

³ Clancy, *A handbook of local government*, p. 4.

⁴ Brian Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978) pp xi-xiv.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. xiii.

⁶ Clancy, *A handbook of local government*, p. 5.

⁷ 61 & 62 Vict., sec. 2, sub-sec. 5.

registered in one county electoral division may be elected for that or any other division'.⁸ There were some important disqualifications from being elected or being a county councillor. The following could be local government electors, but were not allowed to be county councillors: women, clergymen, anyone who had received union relief since his election or within twelve months before, anyone who, within five years before his election, or since his election, had been convicted of any crime, and anyone who held any paid office or place of profit under the council.⁹

As the elections for the second Kildare County Council neared, two political interest groups began to make their opinions felt in the county and to try to influence the outcome of the contests. A 'Ratepayers' Protection Society' had already contested the earlier municipal elections in Athy and Naas, held in January 1902. They did not succeed in getting any nominees elected, but did at least manage to ensure a few electoral contests when the received wisdom was that it would be cheaper to allow the seats to be filled by uncontested nominations.¹⁰ The ratepayers' point of view was undermined by a hostile local press, which pointed out an inherent contradiction in their position, whereby they claimed to wish to save ratepayers expense while forcing electoral contests that were widely perceived to be an extra burden on the rates.¹¹

The predominant voice of nationalist opinion in the county, the *Leinster Leader*, owned at the time by the M.P. James L. Carew, took the view that merely saving money at the expense of good living conditions for ordinary people was not necessarily the wisest course to follow.¹² The voice of unionists in the county, the *Kildare Observer*, expressed itself satisfied with the performance of the outgoing

⁸ Clancy, *A handbook of local government*, p. 9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10

¹⁰ *L.L.*, 11 Jan. 1902.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 25 Jan. 1902.

¹² *Ibid.*, 18 Jan. 1902.

council and indeed the rural district councils in controlling the rates and felt that they could be counted on to do the very thing the ‘Ratepayers’ Protection Society’ was advocating, i.e. keeping the rates as low as possible.¹³ In the end the ratepayers’ group had no discernible impact on the outcome of any of the electoral contests.

Later in the summer of 1902, when the new council and district councils were up and running, there was a special meeting of Kildare County Council held to enquire into the actual expenditure on the elections. The county secretary, John T. Heffernan, in his capacity as returning officer for the county, submitted a report to the effect that the expenses of an election were almost identical whether there was a contest or not. He explained this by saying that ‘nearly every public notice issued in the case of contests had to be issued in the case of non-contests – the same preliminaries had to be gone through. You must appoint a returning officer and a deputy returning officer in all the county electoral divisions’.¹⁴

The other, and potentially more formidable, challenge to the return of the members of the first council to office in the new session was the growth of the United Irish League in the county. The threat was noted by the *Leinster Leader* which was opposed to the suggestion that membership of the UIL should be a requirement of anyone nominated for a seat on the council from the nationalist side¹⁵.

Some of the most prominent members of the county council such as the chairman, Stephen J. Brown, and George Wolfe, remained aloof from the U.I.L. and were returned unopposed without any difficulty. Others such as Matthew Minch and John Field were instrumental in setting up U.I.L. branches and obviously felt it

¹³ *K.O.*, 1 Mar. 1902.

¹⁴ *K.C.C. mins.* special meeting, 7 July 1902.

¹⁵ *L.,L.* 26 April 1902.

would enhance their standing with the electorate¹⁶. Their election meetings were subsequently held under the auspices of the U.I.L.¹⁷ The evidence seems to suggest that those who felt confident of being returned without a contest stayed clear of the U.I.L. while those who felt that a challenge might be made for their seats used the organisation to boost their chances.

To stand for election candidates who qualified had to be formally nominated by two registered electors, a proposer and a seconder. The nomination papers had to be lodged with the returning officer for the county (usually the county secretary) not less than two weeks before the date of polling.¹⁸

As it was, when nominations for the county council elections closed at 5.p.m. on 28 April, there were to be contests in only four of the twenty-one electoral divisions, namely, Castledermot, where the outgoing member, Edward Hayden, was opposed by another nationalist, Richard Lawler; in Kilcock, where the outgoing John Field was opposed by William Hanway, also a nationalist; in Kilmeague, where the sitting member John Cribben was opposed by fellow nationalist John Quinn, and in Monasterevan, where the sitting member, Edward Cassidy having retired, two nationalists, Peter Timmons and Luke Finlay contested the seat. In the Harristown electoral division, the sitting member, James Kelly, withdrew his nomination when James Sunderland also got a nomination.

The lack of political debate and contest this time compared to the 1899 elections was commented upon in the press. The *Leinster Leader* said:

Three years ago our newly constituted county and district divisions echoed to the “sounds of strife”. Candidates for county and rural councillorships struggled for supremacy and an excited and divided electorate fiercely disputed about their merits.

What a contrast to this keen interest and animation is the quiet and humdrum

¹⁶ *L.L.*, 4 Jan. 1902; *ibid.* 11 Jan. 1902.

¹⁷ *K.O.*, 18 Apr. 1902; *ibid.*, 26 Apr. 1902.

¹⁸ Clancy, *A handbook of local government*, p. 6.

proceedings of 1902! Contests are the rare exception; and in many places the electors have not even taken the trouble to nominate a candidate.¹⁹

The writer is ambivalent about this lack of popular interest in the elections, calling it a ‘mixed blessing’.²⁰ On the one hand it ‘simply indicates that the ratepayers are well satisfied with the way in which their work has been done’, while in a few cases ‘the apathy is far from creditable’. The writer means by this that there are some councillors, who only use their positions to do a ‘good turn for candidates for office,’ and who should be opposed and defeated at the ballot.²¹

The *Kildare Observer* was more positive about the lack of a contest for the new council. It noted that ‘Kildare was one of the counties where the least number of contested elections took place. This is a testimony to the manner in which the bodies appointed first under the act performed the duties allotted to them....and the result is that the ratepayers will have the business of the county administered with due regard to economy and to the best interests of all classes’.²² The writer concludes, ‘The county electors have shown wisdom in their choice of representatives’.²³

Unlike the previous elections there were no contests between unionists and nationalist, though the three sitting unionist members, Ambrose More O’ Ferrall, Lord Frederick Fitzgerald and Sir William Dease were all returned unopposed in their respective electoral divisions, Carbury, Maynooth and Celbridge. Obviously the nationalist versus unionist division in Ireland was not a factor in the 1902 election to Kildare County Council. The defeat of unionist candidates at the previous

¹⁹ *L.L.*, 3 May 1902.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*; he is referring to candidates for jobs with the council.

²² *K.O.*, 31 May 1902.

²³ *Ibid.*

election had evidently caused most unionists to abandon any hope of ever having a say again in local politics and administration.

Thus the new, second Kildare County Council that met on 9 June 1902 consisted of the following members who were nominated and returned unopposed: S.J. Brown, Naas; M.J. Minch MP, Athy; Owen Cogan, Ballitore; George Wolfe, Ballymore Eustace; Ambrose More O’Ferrall, Carbury; Stephen Heyden, Churchtown; Peter Crosbie, Clane; James Sunderland, Harristown; John Darby, Kilcullen (he was co-opted to the council in February 1901 to replace Edward Fenelon who resigned);²⁴ C. J. Bergin, Kildare; Laurence Malone, Rathmore; Lord Frederick Fitzgerald, Maynooth,; James Kelly, Morrinstownbiller, and Francis Colgan, Timahoe.

The elections held in the four contested divisions on 27 May, 1902 resulted in the following members being returned to the new council: John Field, Kilcock; Richard Lawler, Castledermot; John Quinn, Kilmeague; and Peter Timmons, Monaterewan. In Castledermot and Kilmeague, the outgoing members, Edward Hayden and John Cribben respectively, were defeated. In Hayden’s case the upset was put right when he was one of the two members co-opted to the council at its first meeting.²⁵

The other co-option was John Healy, who had originally become a member of the council when he succeeded John T. Heffernan as chairman of Naas no. 1 Rural District Council in January 1900, when the latter had resigned as he considered applying for the vacant county secretaryship.²⁶ This time Healy was defeated in the contest for the RDC chairmanship and was thus not eligible to sit on

²⁴ K.C.C. mins. 25 Feb. 1901.

²⁵ Ibid., 9 June, 1902.

²⁶ Ibid., 26 Feb. 1900; see above p. 97.

the council.²⁷ Both Healy's and Hayden's nominations were unanimous though the chairman made a point of order noting that each co-opted member should be elected by the entire county, unlike the previous occasion (April, 1899) when they decided to elect the members from the northern and southern portions of the county separately.²⁸

The remaining members of the new council were the chairmen of the Rural District Councils, namely, Thomas Orford, Athy No. 1; Joseph O'Loughlin, Edenderry No. 2; Richard KcKenna, Celbridge, No.1; John Kelly, Baltinglass No.3, and John Shiel O'Grady, Naas No.1.

Unlike the first county council in 1899, there were no nominees of the old grand jury on the second council. The provision of the Local Government (Ireland) Act was quite specific on this point.²⁹ Of the three grand jury nominees on the first Kildare County Council, only one, James Medlicott, had attended with any regularity. The others, George Mansfield and William Kirkpatrick rarely appear in the lists of councillors in attendance. The absence of such nominees on the latest council went without comment even in the local paper that best reflected the old grand jury political viewpoint, the *Kildare Observer*, which expressed itself satisfied that so many of the original council were returned to their positions and that their handling of the county business thus far had given no cause for concern about the way the administration of local affairs in Kildare was being conducted.³⁰

Immediately after the co-options the council proceeded to elect as chairman and vice-chairman respectively, Stephen J. Brown and Matthew Minch. In his acceptance speech, Brown echoed what the local press was saying when he

²⁷ *K.O.*, 7 June 1902.

²⁸ *L.L.*, 14 June 1902.

²⁹ 61 & 62 Vict., part viii, sec.37, , sub-sec. 113 (1).

³⁰ *K.O.*, 14 June, 1902

remarked that ‘It is very gratifying to find, after three years, the council returned practically unchanged...and I may take it that we have given satisfaction to the ratepayers of the county’.³¹

This satisfaction seems to have endured. The county council elections of 1905 involved a contest in only three of the electoral divisions, Celbridge, where Edward Farrell replaced William Ronaldson (who had been co-opted in October 1903 to replace Sir Gerald Dease who died that month);³² Kilcock, where John Field easily defeated his opponent, and Kilcullen where the outgoing member Thomas Keatley (co-opted in February 1904 to replace John Darby who was disqualified for non-attendance³³) was returned.³⁴ There were even fewer contests in 1908, when only Matthew Minch was challenged to a contest which he won easily.³⁵ For full details of all the elections to Kildare County Council see appendix 3 below. The point to be made here is just how little challenge there was to the county council members, which may reflect the perception that they were doing a good job and that no one would have been in a better position to manage the council’s business than they. For a discussion of the healthy state of the council’s rate making at this time , see appendix 1 below.

The new county council which met in June, 1902 found itself engaged in a process of trying to modernise the county. This caused some dissension among the councillors, some of whom saw any major schemes of public works as simply a threat to the rates. Led by Brown, though, the council could usually be persuaded to invest in progressive schemes. During the summer of 1902 the chairman had given

³¹ K.C.C. mins 9 June 1902.

³² K.C.C. 21 Oct. 1903; *K.O.*, 26 Oct. 1903

³³ K.C.C. 26 Feb. 1903.

³⁴ *L.L.*, 3 June 1905.

³⁵ *L.L.*, 30 May 1908.

the council's provisional permission to the General Post Office to begin erecting telegraph poles near Straffan and the full council endorsed his decision in August.³⁶

The pace of the spread of the telegraph and telephone system quickened and in November 1902 the county surveyor, Edward Glover mentioned in his report to the council that the National Telephone Company was planning to spread the service by the erection of telegraph poles between Naas, the Curragh and Newbridge, and 'by post office trunk wires to Dublin'.³⁷ The council granted the required permission.³⁸

Public lighting schemes were begun in many of the towns. Typical of these was that being considered for Kildare town during the summer of 1902. It was a proposal of the Naas No.1 Rural District Council in whose jurisdiction the town lay. The RDC had applied to the Local Government Board for a loan of £3,000 to complete the scheme and, and as was the procedure, the LGB sent an inspector to carry out an inquiry into the scheme and its financing.³⁹ The county council was represented at the inquiry by Charles Bergin, who represented the Kildare town electoral division. The engineer responsible for the scheme was his son, Francis Bergin who was the assistant surveyor for the county council in the Naas no.1 RDC. Stephen J. Brown attended the inquiry, not in his capacity as county council chairman, but as the solicitor acting for the RDC.⁴⁰

The inspector was informed that the project for lighting the town originated in 1899, and that at that time the intention was to use gas, but that it was found on investigation that electricity would be a cheaper method. It was proposed that a small power station would be built to provide the required electricity and this would

³⁶ K.C.C. mins. 4 Aug. 1902.

³⁷ Ibid., 16 Nov. 1902.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ K.O., 19 Aug. 1902

⁴⁰ L.L., 30 Aug. 1902.

be a coal-burning unit. Stephen Brown was concerned that the estimates had concluded that it would be cheaper to get coal from Wales than to bring it in Kilkenny. The engineers confirmed that this was the case and one of them commented that 'I am afraid we are not going to regenerate Ireland by means of anthracite coal'.⁴¹

Brown was of the opinion that the nearby Kildare town military barracks could be encouraged to link into the scheme and the military authorities could be charged for the supply of light and electricity. A military engineer represented the barracks at the meeting but he could give no firmer commitment than to state that, 'it is at all events probable that they would take it (the light supply).'⁴² Since the barracks had only just reached 1500 of its intended 3000 soldiers, the local county council member, Charles Bergin, felt that the extra investment should be made in a larger scheme in expectation of a growing demand from the military. As he summed up the situation, 'The colonel of the engineers was here and he said that when the light was provided they would see. The only thing that we can do is to make our house big enough'.⁴³

It is worth commenting that the nationalists of Kildare, such as Bergin, and Brown in 1902 had no difficulty in planning for a future that involved the imperial army as an important part of everyday life. Indeed it was a presumption that such a presence would play a vital part in the development of the region, and with an expected influx of 3,000 soldiers to the area, this is understandable.

The question of who would pay for the development of the lighting scheme was dealt with at the Naas no.1 UDC level and at the county council level. The reopening of the Kildare infirmary had nearly foundered on the objections of those

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

who felt it should be financed by a charge on the district and not on the whole county⁴⁴. In the case of the lighting of Kildare town the area of charge was confined to the town of Kildare and certain adjacent townlands. Even limiting the area of charge to this extent did not guarantee that there would be no objectors. With work about to begin there were still locals unhappy. At the LGB inquiry that sanctioned the beginning of work on the scheme there were four objectors who felt they should not have to be pay increased rates on account of the lighting ‘as their holdings were over a mile from the town of Kildare’.⁴⁵ Nevertheless the LGB inspector approved of the scheme and work commenced.

Less than a year later the lights were switched on with much fanfare and expressions of justifiable pride. We can see in the statements of those present at the switching-on ceremony the tensions at work between the modernizing impulse and older ways of thinking. John. T. Heffernan, the county secretary, chaired the ceremony.⁴⁶ Many of the speakers attributed to Heffernan the credit for getting the lighting scheme up and running. They mentioned the hard work and drive with which he had worked in the ‘material interest of the people’.⁴⁷ His role in promoting an earlier water scheme and a sewerage system was also referred to. All this improvement in the physical environment was much welcomed, but one of the clerical speakers referred also to the moral benefit the lighting would bring to the town. He said: ‘But there was another kind of interest, the moral interest that suffered very much for want of what they were supplying that night – for want of light’.⁴⁸ He was a bit delicate about saying explicitly what he meant, but he continued: ‘That was a subject that he would not like to touch on here, but he merely

⁴⁴ See above pp 114-6.

⁴⁵ *L.L.*, 30 Jan. 1904.

⁴⁶ *L.L.*, 5 Nov. 1904; *K.O.*, 5 Nov. 1904.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

wished to state that it was not nice to walk that town at night, and that darkness produced a state of things that was now removed, and all who had taken a part in that scheme had naturally served the moral interest of all who passed through the town'.⁴⁹ It could be argued, of course that this desire for propriety and respectability on the streets was part of the modernising impulse.

Stephen J. Brown represented the county council at the ceremony and was anxious as usual to urge that the lighting would be only the latest, 'but I trust, not the last step, in the development and progress of the town of Kildare'.⁵⁰ He recalled visiting the town years before, 'in the dark days, not only before the electric lighting, but before the provision of the water supply'.⁵¹

This development and progress in Kildare town reflects the prosperity of the whole country that was evident in the period from the mid-1890s, and according to one writer, 'continued at a high level up to 1914'.⁵² It is clear that Kildare County Council played its part in this prosperity. For Stephen J. Brown the main aim of the county council was to promote this modernization. He did this primarily through the county Agricultural and Technical committees, but also through the council chamber directly. A pattern emerges over the next few years within council politics, of Brown, and those who thought as he did about economic development, finding their way blocked by those who felt that keeping the rates low was a sufficient aim for local representatives.

A unique chance to embrace modernization and progress presented itself to the county council in 1903 with the holding of the Gordon Bennett Race in Kildare and Carlow. Gordon Bennett was the millionaire owner of the *New York Herald* and

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² F.S. L. Lyons, 'The aftermath of Parnell, 1891-1903', in W.E. Vaughan, ed. *A new history of Ireland, vi: Ireland under the Union, 11 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996), p. 99.

since 1899 he had sponsored the first ever annual international motor race. The 1902 race was won by a British car and thus by the rules of the race the following year's event would be held in the United Kingdom. It fell to the Automobile Club of Great Britain and Ireland (A.C.G.B.I.) to organise the race and their first decision was to circumvent the then strong anti-motoring lobby in England by moving the race to Ireland. This involved getting a bill through parliament to temporarily lift the speed limit then imposed on motor traffic on Irish roads. There was almost universal support for the bill and it passed without difficulty.⁵³

For a variety of reasons, including its convenience to Dublin port through which the cars would be shipped in, and the relatively flat nature of the terrain, a course was chosen in south Kildare and north Carlow. Stephen J. Brown gave his council's approval for the race in advance of its February meeting, so anxious was he not to allow the event to go elsewhere. He said in reply to the A.C.G.B.I circular: 'I can safely promise, on behalf of my council, that your committee may count upon their support for the proposed bill to enable the automobile race to be held in Ireland and that they will do everything in their power to have the roads in good order for the occasion'.⁵⁴

Kildare County Council met on 9 February and the chairman of the A.C.B.G.I. Mr C. Johnson, attended and addressed the concerns brought up by members. Brown assured him that the council would be unanimous in welcoming the project. He also was aware that the 'holding of the race would have the effect of bringing a very considerable amount of money into the county'.⁵⁵

⁵³ 3 Edw. 7, Light Locomotives (Ireland) Act, 1903: Bob Montgomery, *The Irish Gordon Bennett Race, 1903* (Meath, 1999), pp. 4-5.

⁵⁴ *L.L.*, 31 Jan. 1903.

⁵⁵ K.C. C. mins. 9 Feb; *K.O.*, 14 Feb. 1903.

There were two main concerns among the county councillors. One was the question of who would have to pay for the improvements, which might be needed, to the roads along the route of the race, and a second was the issue of safety. The first concern was settled by the promise of the A.C.G.B.I. to fund any road works needed and the second by a strong regulation of the race that no competitor could do a practice run over the course in a racing car. In the event the A.C.G.B.I. spent in the region of £2000 improving the road surface of the course. The work was carried out under the supervision of the county surveyors of Kildare and Carlow and the race committee.⁵⁶

Over the next couple of months the national and local press gave extensive coverage to the coming race that was scheduled for 2 July 1903. The coverage ranged from quite serious analysis of the new industry that motoring was becoming in European countries, to lighter pieces about the number of goats, donkeys, pigs etc., that were to be found grazing the banks along the route of the race, with one suggesting that ‘the danger they posed to the speedy motorist can be more readily imagined than described’.⁵⁷

That the race was already bringing a financial reward to the area is proven by the reports of the many people who visited the county and drove the route of the race in the months leading up to the event. Athy and Carlow ‘have been literally besieged with motor cars’ said one report.⁵⁸ Among those who made a tour of inspection of the course was the winner of the previous year’s race, Selwyn Francis Edge, who was accompanied by the head of the LGB, Sir Henry Robinson. The former was

⁵⁶ Bob Montgomery, *The Irish Gordon Bennett Race, 1903* (Meath, 1999), p. 8.

⁵⁷ *F.J.*, 18 Apr. 1903.

⁵⁸ *L.L.*, 18 Apr. 1903.

pleased with the course and the latter with the roadworks that had been undertaken by the local authorities.⁵⁹

These many visitors had to be accommodated and it was noted that all this extra tourism was bringing business opportunities to the region; ‘already offers have been made for houses in the town (Athy), and householders are likely to reap a profitable harvest by the incursion of visitors’.⁶⁰ This entrepreneurial spirit was not confined to any one class of Kildare society, for a Count Zborowski took a ‘lease on Oldtown, close to Naas, the property of Mr. De Burgh, and one of the finest residences in Kildare, for the Irish week, where he intended to entertain a large party of his friends’.⁶¹

The chairman and secretary of the A.C.G.B.I. visited Naas on 13 April and were shown around by Stephen J. Brown on behalf of Kildare County Council. The cars were to weigh in at the start and the end of the race on the official weighbridge that already existed on Main Street in Naas. The covered courtyard at the back of the town hall was to be used to store the cars overnight on the eve of the race, and the town hall itself was leased to the committee for the purposes of providing refreshments. The old Naas gaol was to be used as temporary accommodation for the many backup staff that each racing team would bring.⁶²

Among the more successful business ventures to cash in on the race was the building of viewing grandstands. One, at Russlestown near Athy, promised an uninterrupted view of three miles of the road, which the cars would pass seven times during the race.⁶³ Another, at Thomastown hill, near Kilcullen, offered, for five shillings, a good view of the finish of the race and a fully licensed refreshment

⁵⁹ *K.O.*, 18 Apr. 1903.

⁶⁰ *L.L.*, 11 Apr. 1903.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, 18 Apr. 1903

⁶³ *L.L.*, 9 May 1903.

buffet by Messrs. Findlater and Company.⁶⁴ The A.C.G.B.I. applied to Kildare County Council for permission to build a viewing grandstand across the road along the racetrack at Balyshannon outside Athy. With the approval of Mr. Edward Glover, the county surveyor, and subject to safety precautions, permission was granted.⁶⁵

When the motoring fraternity and others who were arriving for the race complained about the high prices they were being charged for food and accommodation, the local press vigorously defended the local entrepreneurs. The monthly *Motor News* was the official voice of the A.C.G.B.I and its criticism of overcharging were not well received by the locals. The *Leinster Leader* commented that, 'if the influx of visitors be as enormous as expected, it is natural that prices should be somewhat high, but we are confident that, taking all the circumstances into account, there will be no room for the accusation that the cost of rooms in this district will be exorbitant'.⁶⁶

After such a sustained build up of expectation about the race throughout the country it is no surprise that it was seen as something of an anti-climax when it finally came to pass. A Belgian, Camille Jenatzy, driving for the German car firm Mercedes, won it. Within a few days the travelling caravan of support staff and mechanics had left Kildare and life returned to its normal pace. There was some ambivalence about the extent of the benefit to the locality. An editorial writer put it as follows:

There has not been the mass of sight-seeing humanity expected – the material harvests looked forward to have not been quite reaped. Nevertheless the Irish people have reason to congratulate themselves on what has been a splendid demonstration to the world at large of a

⁶⁴ Bob Montgomery, *The Irish Gordon Bennett Race, 1903* (Meath, 1999), p. 17.

⁶⁵ K.C.C. mins. 6 May 1903.

⁶⁶ *L L.*, 6 June, 1903.

discipline, a courtesy and a hospitality that stands unrivalled.⁶⁷

The Gordon Bennett race did bring into sharp focus for Kildare County Council the issue of the condition of the roads and how best and most economically to maintain them. In two main areas connected with this issues the council failed to take what was considered at the time to be the most progressive approach, namely the steamrolling of the roads and the use of direct labour for maintenance. It has already been seen in this study that the council firmly set its face against the trend towards direct labour,⁶⁸ and in spite of the urging of the county surveyor, with the support of the chairman Stephen J. Brown, the council also resisted the move towards the purchase and use of steamrollers for road work.

The council had agreed to the county surveyor's request to hire a steamroller in 1903 to prepare the roads for the Gordon Bennett race and this hire arrangement had remained in place for quite some time.⁶⁹ In September Matthew Minch MP remarked to the county surveyor, Edward Glover that: 'I see you are experimenting on the roads with the steamroller, and I would like you to show down in Athy what you can do with them. I would be glad if you could do it, because certainly I am a strong advocate of it'.⁷⁰ He was not so strong a supporter of steamrolling that he felt able to support the surveyor's and the chairman's wish to purchase three of the machines for hire to the district councils for road maintenance.

The issue came up regularly at the quarterly meetings of the council and each time the decision was made to continue to hire them, even after the evidence pointed to the savings that could be made by buying rather than hiring.⁷¹ Glover was also

⁶⁷ Ibid., 4 July 1903.

⁶⁸ See above pp 111-13.

⁶⁹ K.C.C. mins. 11 May 1903.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 22 May 1905; *ibid.*, 19 Jan. 1906.

concerned that the lack of the machines was making the roads in Kildare inferior in quality to those of its neighbours in Dublin and Meath. His reports to the council get progressively more urgent as he sees the situation deteriorating. In June 1906 he stated the case again:

It is fit to remember how circumstances about macadam roads have changed lately; and probably we may believe that we are only in the beginning of change. We have now enormous road locomotives and speedy rubber tyred motor cars using one and the same road, which road, a dozen years ago carried only horse-drawn vehicles, the bicycle, and occasionally a light traction engine probably not exceeding six tons....The most effectual way of reasonably meeting up-to-date requirements as regards macadam road is by steamrolling. We should therefore, I think, so far as legal limits of expenditure permit, be prepared to expend as much as can be spared every year on such work.⁷²

The issue was still unresolved in 1909 when a proposal to purchase two steamrollers was finally put to the council at its meeting of 17 May that year. The debate gave rise to divisions beyond the mere question in hand. Those councillors who opposed the purchase gave as their reason the fact that of the five rural district councils in the county, three had voted against the purchase. As such they were now reluctant to 'go against the opinion of the ratepayers as expressed through the district councils'.⁷³ Brown and others thought this was an unfortunate way of thinking as it appeared to put the county council in an inferior position to the district councils. As he said:

This is really a matter for the consideration of this council, and I think it is pity that we asked the district councils to express an opinion on it until we had considered the question. It places us in a very awkward position because it is entirely a question for the county council.⁷⁴

⁷² Ibid., 28 May 1906.

⁷³ Ibid., 17 May 1909.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Others, such as Ambrose More O’Ferral, thought differently and felt that ‘it would be unwise’ of the council to go against the wishes of the district councils who were thought to be the voice of the ratepayers.⁷⁵

This was the first, but not the last, time in the council’s history that the elected councillors made a decision based, not on the arguments but on their perception of the ratepayers’ opinions as expressed through the district councils. It was an issue that Stephen J. Brown felt so strongly about a year later, when it arose in connection with the proposed building of a sanatorium for TB patients in the county, that it was a major factor in his decision to retire from local politics after eleven years as county chairman.

The vote on the issue of purchasing the steamrollers was very close. George Wolfe proposed an amendment postponing a decision on the matter for six months. Brown was against this and noted that, ‘We have been postponing the question for seven years’.⁷⁶ The amendment was defeated and the original motion put. The votes being even, Brown said he had no hesitation in giving his casting vote in favour, particularly as some of the members who voted against the amendment also voted against the proposal. ‘I believe’, added the chairman, ‘I am representing the real feelings of those people, though they don’t represent them themselves’. When the votes were counted someone had obviously changed his mind again and the motion was lost by ten votes to eleven.⁷⁷ There would be no steamrollers purchased for the county surveyor. It is not recorded what Brown thought of this turn around but this type of voting which put savings on the rates before necessary expenditure for improving the county, would eventually lead to his retirement from local politics.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ K.C.C. mins. 17 May 1909; *K.O.*, 22 May 1909.

⁷⁷ *L.L.*, 22 May 1909.

The other mechanism that Brown employed to try to stimulate economic growth in the county was his chairmanship of the County Agricultural and Technical Committee.⁷⁸ For agriculture the committee's initiatives included the following; itinerant instructors who visited farmers to teach new and more efficient methods; classes in agricultural subjects held in various towns in the county; poultry schemes organised to try to improve the breeds of hens and thus increase egg yields. A series of classes on butter making was held in 12 centres around the county, including most of the main towns and a few rural areas such as Donadea and Suncroft.⁷⁹ Brown's own pet project was an afforestation scheme whereby the committee directly managed a series of woods acquired as gifts from landlords, including one from the Duke of Leinster.⁸⁰

Under the technical side of its remit the Agricultural and Technical Committee managed to establish permanent schools in the urban district council areas of Naas and Athy, that would later become the nucleus of the county's vocational education scheme. There were also some forty centres where occasional instruction was offered in crafts and domestic economy. Because it involved the UDCs, which were not represented on the county council, this aspect of the committee's work was overseen by a Joint Technical Instruction Committee, composed of members of the council and the two UDCs. A report to the council in 1909 describes the system as follows:

Its broad features, so far as the rural districts are concerned, are the affording of an opportunity to boys and young men of acquiring some skills in the use of hand and eye, and habits of correct measuring, and of observing with intelligence the things around them, and to girls and young women a system of instruction which is calculated to inculcate methods of cleanly, healthy living and enable them to obtain the maximum of value out of the funds at their disposal for housekeeping purposes....In

⁷⁸ See above pp 117-8.

⁷⁹ K.C.C. mins. 17 Feb. 1908.

⁸⁰ *L.L.*, 1 June 1907.

urban districts it has been possible to go a step further by the establishment of permanent technical schools, in which in addition to manual instruction and domestic economy, courses of instruction are offered to those actually engaged, or about to engage, in industrial and commercial pursuits. These courses include art subjects, building construction, bookkeeping, shorthand and business methods, etc.⁸¹

Yet for all this effort to promote development, in farming and in other areas, the county Agricultural and Technical Committees was seen as a failure by many of the councillors themselves. The discontent came to a head in 1909 when Mr. John Healy, who was council member by virtue of being chairman of Naas No.1 RDC, made a direct attack on the technical instruction schemes in the county by a proposal that the county council cut its grant to the Agricultural and Technical Committee and the Joint Technical Instruction Committee, on the grounds of poor attendance at the courses of instruction and mal-administration of some of them.⁸²

Stephen J. Brown stoutly defended the whole system and asked for the committees to be given an opportunity to reply to the charges. This was granted at the meeting of the county council in August. Some of the arguments made on both sides have a clearly modern ring to them and they give an interesting insight into some of the attitudinal factors holding back economic and social development in Ireland at the time.

To John Healy's motion calling for the withdrawal of county council funding to the education schemes of the Joint Technical Instruction Committee because of the poor value for money he considered them to be, Stephen J. Brown replied as follows:

We cannot expect to show immediate results for technical education. It is almost impossible to show monetary results of education in the schools. Of course the administration of the technical scheme

⁸¹ K.C.C. mins, 9 Aug. 1909.

⁸² K.C.C. mins. 7 June 1909.

differs essentially from the agricultural side, because agricultural instruction is partly education and partly followed directly by monetary results, for instance, the livestock schemes which are admittedly among the most popular of our schemes.⁸³

Brown then went on to express views on education that were very much in advance of his time. He said that,

He did not think the value of technical education was to be judged by whether the person taught got a position or not. Manual instruction was not designed to make carpenters. He had often regretted himself that he had not the benefit of manual instruction when at school. He thought everyone who passed through school should have the benefit of manual instruction.⁸⁴

Brown's sophistication was often lost on his council colleagues. He went on to give details of the cost of the entire technical instruction programme to the county. The total cost was £1200 of which £600 was a direct grant from the Department of Agriculture. The £600 raised by the rates on the county paid for the two technical schools, in Naas and Athy, which had seventy seven and 108 students respectively in the 1908-9 year, as well as the courses in the 40 'itinerant centres' as they were called. Brown considered this to be good value for money and essential for the development of the county.⁸⁵

The report to the council identified two key obstacles to this development. One was the simple lack of any traditional industrial base to build on. As the report puts it:

In Kildare, as in many other Irish counties, there are practically no existing industries to which technical instruction can be directly applied. It has been said that the object of technical instruction is to 'take those who are in the industrial field already and improve their capacity for work'. This may be true as regards locations in which industries already exist and

⁸³ Ibid., 9 Aug. 1909.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid..

in such locations to devise schemes of technical instruction is comparatively an easy task. The problem is a far more difficult one in the case of a county like this, in which there are no existing industries, save that of agriculture and the industries connected to it. With these it is the province of the county Committee of Agriculture to deal.⁸⁶

The other obstacle was the poor standard of basic education of those who attend the technical schools and the other classes. The report says the following:

The work of the committee has been greatly hampered by the fact that the pupils leaving national schools are quite unprepared for technical education and it has been found necessary here as elsewhere in Ireland, to provide preparatory or introductory courses in elementary English, arithmetic, mathematics, etc., at which the pupils have to spend a year before they enter upon the specialised courses of instruction.⁸⁷

One of Brown's final points in arguing against the motion to withdraw funding from the scheme was the very practical one of what would become of the teachers, or 'instructors' as they were called, who would then be without a livelihood. By a narrow majority John Healy's motion was defeated.⁸⁸

Apart from the mindset that opposed any expenditure, no matter how worthy the cause, there is another way of thinking that prevailed generally in Ireland at the time in relation to this issue, and which can be seen in the remarks of the bishop of Galway, Most Rev. Dr. O'Dea, to a congress of Technical Instruction committees of all the counties held earlier in the summer of 1909 in his diocese. He opened the congress with the remarks that,

While he recognised the advantages of technical instruction, he also gave it as his opinion that under certain conditions the knowledge might be a "curse" to the pupils. The difficulty he saw was, that there were no such industries as gave the pupils of technical classes an opportunity of applying this knowledge except they left their country⁸⁹.

⁸⁶ Ibid; *K.O.*, 14 Aug. 1909.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ *L.L.*, 17 July, 1909.

It seems reasonable to assume that the bishop was worried about the moral danger into which such young emigrants would fall in foreign lands. Neither his reservations nor Stephen J. Brown's efforts through the Kildare County Council, seemed able to suggest any way of stimulating the country out of what one economic historian calls the "industrial lethargy" which characterised its economy at the time.⁹⁰

For much of 1907 and 1908 Kildare County Council had more immediate worries than the endemic economic paralysis in the area. The very existence of the council was threatened at this time by a crisis brought on by the extent to which the tenant farmers and the landlords of Kildare had availed of the land purchase clauses of the various land acts since the 'Balfour Act' of 1891. The threat came unexpectedly. In February 1907 the secretary, John T. Heffernan reported a very healthy financial position to the quarterly meeting of the council. He suggested that they would need to raise for the following year some £10,845 12s 11d which was £544 11s 6d less than the previous. The councillors congratulated themselves on again reducing the rates and confounding the critics of the new local government system who assumed it would be unable to control spending.⁹¹

The chairman outlined where savings had been made. Public works cost £59 15s 6d less than estimated, rate collectors' poundage was £54 16s less than expected due to the previous year's low rate, printing and advertising costs were £262 17s less than previous years, etc. etc. What it amounted to was a rate of about a halfpenny in the £ less than the previous years' already lowered rate.⁹² The

⁹⁰ H.D.Gibbon, 'Economic and social history, 1850-1921' in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, vi: Ireland under the union, II, 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996), p. 310.

⁹¹ K.C.C. mins 18 Feb. 1907; *L.L.*, 23 Feb. 1907.

⁹² *Ibid.*

councillors had every right to feel confident as they dealt with the routine items on that meetings agenda.

That something was amiss was first intimated to the public in an editorial in the *Kildare Observer* of 6 April headed “A sensational outlook”. Put simply, Kildare County Council had been informed by the Local Government Board that over £8,000 of its grants would be withheld in the coming year, forcing an increase of over 8d in the £ in the rates. There was much uncertainty as to why this was so, but the piece by the *Kildare Observer*, even at this early stage proved to be substantially correct, and is worth quoting at length here for that reason. The editorial says:

A few days ago the members of the Kildare County Council were thrown into a considerable state of agitation, having all their financial arrangements for the half-yearly estimate completely upset by a letter from the Local Government Board which informed them that grants amounting to £8,000 in connection with the probate and death grants and the agricultural grant, could not be paid that year owing to the fact that the money had to be retained to recoup the Guarantee Fund formed in connection with the Land Acts of 1891 and 1903. At the time of the passage of the Wyndham Act there was £5,000,000 worth of land stock issued. [This was used to fund the cash paid to the vendors under the 1903. The vendors under the 1891 act were paid in land bonds] The value of the stock fell considerably below par and the depression in the market is at the present moment so great that it is issued as low as 85 ½ and 86. The annuities paid by the tenants farmers who have purchased is not at all sufficient to meet the payments of dividends on the stock issued. Under the act it is clearly laid down that where any stock is issued at a discount, and “the sums payable in any financial year by the Land Commission, in respect of advances to them of money raised by means of stock, are insufficient to pay the dividends on the total amount of the stock outstanding.... the amount of the deficiency shall be made good out of the guarantee fund.”⁹³

An emergency meeting of Kildare County Council was held on 8 April 1907 to consider the issue. Stephen J. Brown opened the meeting by saying that he was ‘sorry to have to call them there so soon after the last meeting but when they heard the correspondence which the secretary had to read to them they would see that the

⁹³ *K.O.*, 6 Apr. 1907.

occasion was one of the utmost gravity. It was the most serious occasion that this council had met since the passing of the Local Government Act'.⁹⁴

John T. Heffernan proceeded to read out the letters that had been exchanged on the issues. They are worth quoting in detail for the picture they give of the issue involved but also the tone and tenor of the relationship that existed between the council and the LGB. He began with the original letter from the LGB.

LGB Dublin
26 March 1907

Sir, - I am directed by the Local Government Board for Ireland to forward to you the enclosed negotiable receipt for £2, 363 0 s 6d, being the portion of the agricultural grant payable to the council of the county of Kildare in the half-year ending 31st inst. In reference to this sum I am to state that in the case of this county there has been withdrawn from the guarantee fund formed under the Land Acts of 1891 and 1903, in respect of the two financial years 1906 and 1907, a net sum of £8, 464 12 s 9d which accrued due to the Irish Land Commission and the commissioners of national debt in respect of land purchase in the county. In view of the provisions of section 40 (1) of the Act of 1903 this liability must be deducted from the death duty grant in the first place, and when that is insufficient to discharge the liability, from the agricultural grant in the second place, and as the share of Kildare county in the instalment of the first named grant (now distributable) amounts to only £2, 957 8s 3d, it has become necessary to deduct the remaining portion of the liability from the half-yearly amount of the agricultural grant now payable to the county (£7, 870 5s 0d, leaving the balance as entered in the receipt. I am, your obedient servant,

A.R. Barlas, Secretary.⁹⁵

Heffernan immediately understood the implications of this withdrawal of such a large portion of the funding that Kildare County Council had been expecting. He wrote back to the LGB explaining these difficulties.

Kildare Co. Council
Secretary's Office Naas

⁹⁴ K.C.C. mins 8 Apr. 1907; *F.J.*, 9 Apr. 1907; *L.L.*, 13 Apr. 1907; *K.O.*, 13 Apr. 1907.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

27 March, 1907.

Sir, - I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter of 26th inst. This is the first intimation that my council has received that the probate duty grant for this year is to be altogether withheld, and a deduction of £5, 507 4s 6d made from the agricultural grant, making a total of £8, 464 12s 9d additional to be raised in the rate this year. This creates a very difficult situation, as the annual budget, assuming our share of the probate duty grant and the agricultural grant, as usual, has been prepared and approved, and a rate made on the basis of same for the current year.

....I would be glad to have some further detailed information as to how the sum of £8,464, proposed to be withdrawn from the county, is made up, why the entire of the sum falls upon this particular year, and whether we are to understand that like sums calculated on the same basis are being withdrawn from other counties in Ireland? I ask the latter question because the wording of your letter leads me to suppose that there is something exceptional in the case of this county. I would further ask to what extent it may be anticipated that like sums will be withheld in future years.

John T. Heffernan, Secretary.⁹⁶

The LGB's reply to this letter enclosed copies of the certificates from the land commission and the commissioners for national debt showing Kildare's liabilities under the Land Purchase Act, 1903. It stated that other counties were liable also, 'but of course the deductions vary considerably in accordance with the liabilities in each case'.⁹⁷ The LGB was not able to state whether there would be any deductions in future years.

Heffernan obviously decided that the deductions were legal and that it would be best to just get on with the administration of the budget without the withheld funds. He replied to the LGB asking if it would be in order for him continue with the rates estimate and budget as decided by the council at its meeting of 4 March and to make up the deficit 'in the form of a temporary loan' while the council would in 'next year's estimate provide for this and any other deductions which might occur'. He pointed out that he had taken on an extra eight temporary staff who had been

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

used to copy out the rate books, prior to the meeting of 8 March and who, since that meeting, 'have applopped all the ratings in the several rural districts of the county'.⁹⁸

The LGB's response was no real help. Yes, the council could if it so wished adopt the line Heffernan suggested, but that 'no statutory authority exists under which the council could be enabled to pay interest on any loan or overdraft to meet any deficit which might occur towards the end of the financial year'.⁹⁹ It hinted that if further deductions 'now under consideration', were made the following year then it might result in 'a very heavy rate having to be levied in 1908'.¹⁰⁰

Meanwhile Stephen Brown explained to the council what he understood to be the legal basis of the deductions and he admitted that he did not fully understand how the county came to be liable for so much of a withdrawal of funds. He said that the deduction in the grants to Kildare was greater than to those of any other county in Ireland. He explained that this did not mean that Kildare purchasers of farms were not paying their annuities, but that the liability of the county was calculated on the basis of how many tenants in a county had purchased farms and the amount of money advanced to them for such purchases. The fall in the value of the land stock that was issued to raise the cash to fund the loans to purchasing tenants, had to be made good from the guarantee fund in proportion to how much capital was loaned in each county. Kildare tenants had been the most eager purchasers of their farms under the Wyndham Land Act of 1903 and this fact exposed the county council to the financial penalty it was now suffering.¹⁰¹

The other councillors were quick to realise the wider implications of the move to deduct the grants. Richard McKenna suggested that the local M.P.s raise the

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

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¹⁰¹ K.C.C. mins. 8 Apr. 1907

matter in the House of Commons. This was done on 22 April.¹⁰² John Healy noted that if a similar deduction was made in the following year it would mean a rate increase of 1s 6d in the £. James Shiels O'Grady (on the county council as chairman of Naas No. 1 RDC since 1902), bluntly said that, 'If that rate is levied I do not know how it will be collected. People won't be able to pay it'.¹⁰³

The council eventually adopted two proposals, one to seek further information and clarification from the LGB of the exact legal basis of the deduction and the other to write to Mr John Redmond and the county M.P.s to request them to raise the issue in parliament. It was decided not to change the rates as fixed in February until further information was forthcoming.¹⁰⁴

Even the answers given to the parliamentary questions failed to fully illuminate the reasons for the deductions. Mr Augustine Birrell, the Chief Secretary explained that:

The reason why Kildare has to bear this large sum is that under the act they have to bear in proportion to the amount of land purchased and transferred, and the Duke of Leinster's property being in the county is the reason why it has to bear so much. It is done in proportion to the amount of transactions in the respective counties. If a county had no land purchase it would not be called upon in this way.¹⁰⁵

John Redmond was not satisfied with this explanation and insisted that the full deduction of £73, 000 over the whole country did not arise from non-payment of the annuities by the tenant purchasers. He suggested that land stock had been deliberately floated on the market thus lowering its value and causing the current drop in its price. He went on to add that he felt that the provisions of the Land

¹⁰² *K.O.*, 27 Apr. 1907.

¹⁰³ *L.L.*, 27 Apr. 1907.

¹⁰⁴ *K.C.C. mins.* 8 Apr. 1907.

¹⁰⁵ *F.J.*, 16 Apr. 1907.

Purchase Act of 1903 had been ‘as a matter of fact, overridden by some regulation of the Treasury’.¹⁰⁶

The Chief Secretary went on to admit that he did not know the precise reason for the deductions from the grants to the Irish county councils but that he would find out. A week later the Treasury Secretary Mr. Runciman gave the following explanation to the House of Commons. It was reported as follows in the *Leinster*

Leader:

The explanation of the British Treasury as to what led to the breakdown of the Land Purchase Act was forthcoming this week through that mysterious institution’s mouthpiece in the House of Commons, Mr, Runciman. As might be expected, the explanation is a pretty complicated one. The causes were as many as five and we append them as they were bracketed by the Secretary of the Treasury for the benefit of the taxpayers –

(1) Arrears of payment of the purchase annuities; (2) the system of issuing stock entitled to a half-year’s dividend on the first following dividend day, although the subscribers to the stock are allowed to pay up their subscriptions by instalments which may extend up to or even beyond that day. It is clear that when the National Debt Commissioners have to pay a half-year’s dividend on a certain day, and have not had the use of the money for a full six months before that day, a deficiency must result; (3) the gale day on which the annuities are payable is in each case one month earlier than the dividend day. The interval is necessary to enable the annuities to be collected and paid over to the National debt Commissioners before the dividend day. But the result is that the payments received from a tenant on his first gale day include interest for one month less than the period in respect of which dividend is payable on the stock; (4) the capital of the Land Purchase Fund, so far as not required for advances is temporarily invested by the National Debt Commissioners in securities. The interest in these securities is received on various dates and at the date when the balance of the income accrued must be struck there is always a temporary deficiency, due to the fact that a certain amount of interest which has accrued has not yet been received into the account; (5) on large transactions such as the Land Purchase Fund, it is impossible to have the whole of the capital monies invested and earning interest on every day of the year. There must always be a loss of income from unproductive balances.¹⁰⁷

As John Redmond said in response to this explanation, ‘The answer given is of so complicated a character that it will be necessary to see it in print before we can

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ *L.L.*, 27 Apr. 1907.

thoroughly grasp its significance'.¹⁰⁸ A very concise table was given to the members of the house to show how much of the total deduction was attributable to each of the five causes given above. It sets out the issues more clearly.

(1) Arrears of annuities	£9,119
(2) Unearned dividend on issue of stock	£23,750
(3) Advanced dividend	£13,650
(4) Interest due, but not received	£15,500
(5) Unproductive balances	<u>£8,977</u>
	£70,996 ¹⁰⁹

The deduction from Kildare was by far the highest in the country, at £8,654. Wicklow's was next at £3,063, while Queen's County was £1,468 and King's County £1,398. The figures given in the answer to the parliamentary questions also show that the amount of the deduction in Kildare's grant attributable to arrears of annuities due by the tenant purchasers was a mere £944, 'and possibly not so much since a great deal of the arrears have been collected since these figures were compiled'.¹¹⁰

To understand fully why Kildare was so much more vulnerable to this sudden financial crisis it is necessary to go back a few years to the Wyndham Land Act of 1903.¹¹¹ It was seen at the time, and since as an effort to finally deal with the Irish land question. The tenants were encouraged to buy by a system of repayments spread over sixty-eight and a half years at less than their rent repayments at the time of the sale. The landlords were encouraged to sell by generous prices up to twenty

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ *F.J.*, 23 Apr. 1907; *K.O.*, 27 Apr. 1907.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ *The Irish Land Act*, 1903 (3 Edw. V11, c. 37).

seven and two-thirds purchase and by a bonus of 12 per cent of the purchase price.¹¹²

The trustees of the Duke of Leinster (then a minor) and the tenants on his vast estates in Kildare were first to take advantage of the new act and huge tracts of the Leinster estate passed into the ownership of the tenants. Over a very short number of weeks a deal was worked out between the two parties that resulted in over 44,000 acres being sold to the tenants under the following terms: (1) twenty five year's purchase. (2) All arrears up to March 1903 to be added to the purchase money. (3) The gale due in September and November 1903 to be forgiven. (4) Payment of interest on the purchase money to begin on 29 September 1903. (5) sporting rights to be reserved to the duke.¹¹³ The total amount of the purchase money, including the bonus of 12 per cent was £1,380,000. This amounted to over one fifth of the total sum that was available for land purchase under the act in its first year.¹¹⁴

The editorial in *The Irish Times* on the same day pinpointed one of the major problems with the speed with which the vast Leinster estate had been sold:

The men on the big estates do not really require the stimulating influences of Mr. Wyndham's act to improve their methods; the men on the small estates do. The small estates, with moderate valuation, constitute the Irish agrarian difficulty, and despite such big and satisfactory transactions as that arranged in Dublin yesterday, the act will be a comparative failure unless it affects the small farmers and the poor agriculturalists. We should much prefer to find the estates commissioners dispensing the bonus at their disposal at a more modest rate than £150,000 a purchase. Businesslike and agreeable as is such an agreement as the Leinster tenants have made, we should prefer to see the smaller landlords and poorer tenants coming in for the first fruits of this piece of beneficent legislation. If the big landlords follow the example of

¹¹² F.S.L. Lyons, 'The aftermath of Parnell, 1891-1903' in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland vi: Ireland under the union, 11, 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 96-9; Lynch, *Land Purchase in Ireland: a retrospect and a forecast* (Dublin, 1912), pp. 4-10.

¹¹³ *I. T.*, 25 Sept. 1903.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

the Duke of Leinster, the five millions which the estates commissioners can advance in the first year will be very quickly eaten up, so that it behoves those for whom the act was especially intended – namely, the less well-to-do, whether landlords or tenants – to see that they are not indefinitely shut out from its benefits.¹¹⁵

Four members of Kildare County Council attended the meetings between the tenants and the trustees of the Leinster estate, which thrashed out the purchase agreement described above. Matthew Minch and Edward Hayden were among those representing the tenants on the Athy manor,¹¹⁶ while Richard McKenna was part of the group acting on behalf of the Maynooth tenants.¹¹⁷ Richard Lalor was one of those who accepted the terms of the purchase scheme on behalf of the tenants at Castledermot.¹¹⁸ The council would have been aware from early on of the extent to which the county had taken advantage of the land purchase scheme under the 1903 act. There was a major controversy at the time of the purchase of the Leinster estate, both in Ireland and abroad. Some felt that the terms were too generous to the landlord and ‘would make it almost impossible for tenants to get better terms’ on other estates.¹¹⁹ Others, looking from outside felt the terms were too generous to the tenant. The *Daily Mail* contrasted the situation in Ireland under the act with that prevailing in the rest of the United Kingdom, as follows:

Would not a Scotch farmer, unable, as is often the case, to obtain a greater interest in his farm than a lease of twenty years, or thereabouts, think the millennium within reasonable distance, if he were told he might pay a very much-reduced rent, and after sixty-eight years obtain his holding in fee, free of rent forever afterwards? What a boon that would be to the agriculturalist of Norfolk or Essex! And yet that is exactly what Mr Wyndham’s act offers to the Irish tenants. Surely there is much reason for holding that the ‘distressful country’ is becoming the spoiled child of the empire.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ *I.T.*, 25 Sept. 1903.

¹¹⁶ *The Times* 19 Sept. 1903; *ibid.*, 25 Sept. 1903; *F.J.*, 19 Sept. 1903

¹¹⁷ *K.O.*, 12 Sept. 1903.

¹¹⁸ *K.O.*, 3 Oct. 1903.

¹¹⁹ *I.T.*, 30 Sept. 1903.

¹²⁰ *Daily Mail*, 31 Oct. 1903.

In spite of this criticism the tenants of Kildare clamoured to take advantage of the purchase scheme and most of the Duke of Leinster's agricultural tenants purchased their holdings. Little did they or the county councillors who helped negotiate the deal realise that it would come back to haunt them in a few years.

In 1907 there was a sense of chickens coming home to roost. The council decided to fight the treasury and the LGB on the issue. In the first instance they decided to proceed with the rate as originally struck and to try to make up the shortfall caused by the withheld grant from their own reserves and by a series of economy measures.¹²¹

It was also decided to take legal action against the withdrawal. Stephen J. Brown expressed both his legal opinion and his feelings on the issue quite succinctly when he said that he thought 'the stoppage of the grants alluded to was utterly illegal and if proper steps were taken they would be able to get rid of it. Here they had been for eight years working with the greatest economy and with one sweep the whole fruits of their efforts were taken away'.¹²²

The legal opinion from a Mr Samuels K.C., was that the agricultural grant could not be touched until the whole of the death duty grant for Ireland had been exhausted. It was felt that the correct action was to initiate a petition of right against the Treasury to have the deduction of the agricultural grant reversed. The county council unanimously backed the taking of this case, urged on, it must be said, by the chairman Stephen J. Brown.¹²³ The sense that this was some kind of a one-man crusade on Brown's part is evident in the way he speaks of it and its merits. He said:

¹²¹ K.C.C. mins, 27 May 1907.

¹²² *L.L.*, 1 July, 1907.

¹²³ K.C.C. mins. 19 Aug. 1907.

They had authorised their finance committee to take such steps as were considered necessary on the subject. They held their hand for some time in consequence of the proceedings in parliament, thinking some redress might come from that source, but he regretted to say he read the account of the proceedings there with the greatest disappointment. There was no reference at all, as far as he could see to the real question as to the legality of the stoppage of the grants.¹²⁴

Some councillors wondered if other county councils could be asked to join Kildare in the petition of right. Brown had tried this through the General Council of County Councils but had got no positive response. As he said, 'It is hard to get them to join. We have a special grievance, which doesn't apply to others'.¹²⁵ What Brown was getting at is more clearly appreciated from the following table of deductions which was given to the House of Commons in answer to a question put to the chief Secretary by the Irish party:

¹²⁴ *L.L.*, 24 Aug. 1907

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

Table 1. The amount of deduction from each county from each of the two treasury grants due on 31 March 1907.¹²⁶

County	Death Duty Grant	Agricultural Grant	Total
	£	£	£
Antrim	950	0	950
Armagh	1356	0	1356
Carlow	1518	0	1518
Cavan	421	0	421
Clare	870	0	870
Cork	5031	0	5031
Donegal	738	0	738
Down	2230	0	2230
Dublin	1574	0	1574
Fermanagh	1425	0	1425
Galway	3622	0	3622
Kerry	838	0	838
Kildare	2957	5507	8464
Kilkenny	4693	392	5085
King's County	1582	0	1582
Leitrim	522	0	522
Limerick	4384	0	4384
L'Derry	1378	0	1378
Longford	1428	36	1465
Louth	398	0	398
Mayo	1292	0	1292
Meath	3929	0	3929
Monaghan	530	0	530
Queen's County	1535	0	1535
Roscommon	3421	1384	4805
Sligo	1506	0	1506
Tipp. (N.R.)	1198	0	1198
Tipp. (S.R.)	2961	0	2961
Waterford	1002	0	1002
Westmeath	2393	0	2393
Wexford	2773	0	2773
Wicklow	2896	270	3117
Total	65677	7541	73000

¹²⁶ *F.J.*, 22 Apr. 1907

Kildare lost a total of £8,464, of which £2, 957 was from the death duty grant and £5, 507 from the agricultural grant. The next highest deduction from any county was from Kilkenny which lost £5,085 in total, of which £4,693 was from the death duty grant and only £392 from the agricultural grant. Cork County Council was deducted £5, 031 all of which was from the death duty grant. In all, seven counties lost more from their death duty grants than did Kildare. These seven lost very little or nothing from the agricultural grant. It was the massive extra deduction of over £5,000 from the latter grant that rankled with Brown and which he and the council's legal advisors considered to be illegal. None of the other counties suffered a major loss from the agricultural grant and it was the deductions from this that were considered to be illegal, not those from the death duties.¹²⁷

The treasury's own rules seemed to give some backing to Kildare's point of view. According to its own rules published in 1905, 'any deficiency in respect of the issue of stock at a discount shall be deducted first from the Ireland development grant; secondly from the death duty grant; thirdly, from the agricultural grant; and fourthly, from the exchequer contribution', and any deficiency on any other grounds should be 'deducted, first, from the death duty grant; secondly, from the agricultural grant; thirdly, from the Ireland development grant; and fourthly from the exchequer contribution'.¹²⁸

And so Kildare County Council embarked on a protracted legal battle with the treasury. The chairman Stephen J. Brown had staked his reputation on his legal opinion and had more than a professional interest in its outcome.

¹²⁷ For a full description of the various treasury grants to Irish local government see, *Final report on local taxation*, ch. 11, pp 9-12.

¹²⁸ *Treasury rules and regulations dated 14 April 1905 under the Irish Land Act, 1903*, LXV (151) p. 565.

Meanwhile the ordinary business of the council carried on as usual, but with some, but not much constraint on spending, since a substantial surplus fund had been built up over the eight years of its existence.¹²⁹ The government was already taking steps to amend the land purchase acts and the rules governing their implementation. As Brown suggested in one comment, part of this was to make legal retrospectively its deductions from the agricultural grant.¹³⁰

In spite of comments to the contrary by the council the legal case or 'petition of right' as it was called, proceeded relatively quickly through the court system and was heard before the king's bench in May 1908. The case was lost, as the judges held that the treasury had acted within their own rules at all times. The action had cost the county council over £123 in legal fees and most councillors were not inclined to appeal the decision. Stephen Brown made a half-hearted attempt to get his colleagues to back an appeal, but to no avail.¹³¹ Brown knew enough about legal fees to have them taxed and ultimately reduced to £60.¹³²

The deductions from the grants continued to affect the council's finances for the next two years, though to a lesser extent than in 1907. The council continued to deal with the loss of revenue with only a marginal increase in the rates in 1909-10 when the overdraft taken out to meet the loss of the agricultural grant had to be repaid and by reducing expenditure and dipping into its diminishing reserves.¹³³ From 1908 the LGB told the council, if a deduction were to be made or not, in the January prior to the striking of a rate in March and by 1910 the issue had been

¹²⁹ K.C. C. mins. 19 Aug. 1907.

¹³⁰ *K.O.*, 24 Aug. 1907.

¹³¹ K.C.C. mins 15 June 1908; *K.O.*, 20 June 1908.

¹³² K.C. C. mins. 17 May, 1909.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 14 Dec. 1908.

finally been resolved through the Irish Land Act of 1909.¹³⁴ It was reported locally as follows:

Under the new land bill introduced by Mr. Birrell, precautions are taken to ensure that in future no losses occasioned by the flotation of land stock shall fall on the Irish ratepayers but shall be borne out of imperial funds....It is not as some erroneously believe, proposed to make the relief of the rates retrospective. It is only intended to apply to losses in future issues of land stock, no proposal being made to make up the deficit in local government funds caused by the deductions from the treasury grants in 1907.¹³⁵

One prominent local, the county secretary, John T. Heffernan did not see the outcome of the grant deduction and the subsequent legal action. While all the anxiety was animating the council, he was fighting his own battle against an illness that would soon cost him his life. In December 1905 he was badly injured in a fall from a horse while hunting with the Kildare Harriers, of which he was master that year. His thigh was shattered with a multiple fracture and he was treated at the recently re-opened Kildare Infirmary.¹³⁶ He was off work on extended sick leave for the next six months.¹³⁷ When he returned to work he had a pronounced limp and used a walking stick. The medical treatment must have been inadequate, for an infection set in to the wound. In the middle of the financial crisis outlined above, this infection was getting worse, so that he had to take further sick leave from July 1907.¹³⁸ He weakened quickly and died of gangrene on 18 September 1907 aged fifty-seven. As *The Freeman's Journal* said 'a prominent and sterling nationalist of the county Kildare was removed by the death of John T. Heffernan'.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ 9 Edw. V11, c. 42.

¹³⁵ *K.O.*, 19 Dec. 1908.

¹³⁶ *L.L.*, 16 Dec, 1905.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 10 Mar.1906.

¹³⁸ *K.C.C. mins.* 19 Aug. 1907.

¹³⁹ *F. J.*, 20 Sept. 1907; *K.O.*, 21 Sept. 1907; *L.L.*, 21 Sept. 1907.

Among the many other issues the council dealt with during this period was the implementation of the Old Age Pensions Act, 1908.¹⁴⁰ This was among a raft of liberal reforms both in Ireland and Great Britain in general between 1906 and 1909.¹⁴¹ The move was first reported in Kildare as part of the budget speech of the treasury secretary, Mr Asquith. It was welcomed by the *Kildare Observer*, not as a piece of socially improving reform but as a means by which local taxation would be reduced, since those in receipt of the new pensions would no longer have to apply to the boards of guardians for outdoor relief.¹⁴² Pensions were to be issued from the following January so no time was wasted. The act came into effect on 1 August 1908 and by 10 August the LGB had written to the county councils outlining the procedure for administering the act. Although the funding for the pensions came directly from the central treasury the councils were charged with organising the assessment of those who were entitled to it. The money would actually be paid out through the post offices.¹⁴³

Pensions of up to 5 shillings per week were to be paid to anyone seventy years of age and over, who had no other means of subsistence. The major catch was that anyone who had been in receipt of outdoor relief from the poor law guardians' board within the previous six months was debarred from having a pension.¹⁴⁴

The council was obliged under the act to set up a pensions committee to consider the applications of those seeking a pension. The councillors saw at once the great opportunities for dispensing the largesse of the central government's funds and

¹⁴⁰ 8 Edw. V11, c. 40.

¹⁴¹ F.S.L. Lyons, 'The developing crisis, 1907-14,' in W.E. Vaughan, ed. *A new history of Ireland, vi: Ireland under the union, 11, 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996) p. 124 and R.K. Webb, *Modern England; from the eighteenth century to the present* (London, 1969) p. 456.

¹⁴² *K.O.*, 16 May 1908.

¹⁴³ K.C.C. mins. 10 Aug. 1908.

¹⁴⁴ *K.O.*, 15 Aug. 1908.

it was unanimously resolved 'That the council constitute the pension committee'.¹⁴⁵ No one wanted to be left out of the gratitude that would surely flow to those who were seen to get someone the pension. The actual vetting of the applications was left to sub-committees in each of the rural district councils and the urban district councils of the county. The local sub-committees then co-opted non-council members, in many cases a clergyman from each of the major denominations. The sub-committees went to work straight away and the one for Naas No.1 Urban District Council is typical of how they all operated. At its first meeting it considered thirty applications for pensions. Fourteen of them were granted while the other 16 were rejected 'by reason of their being in receipt of outdoor relief'.¹⁴⁶ Problems arose immediately. Some people who, because of accident or illness, were treated in a workhouse hospital were deemed to be disqualified from receiving a pension. Other, desperately poor people were now reluctant to seek the help they needed from the boards of guardians lest it would disqualify them also. Some who had received outdoor relief were anxious to give back the money they had received in order to get around the disqualification.¹⁴⁷

Another problem was that those refused a pension at this point and who might become eligible again in 1911 would now have nothing to live on for the following two years. The impression given from the tone of the reports is that the committees tried to deal with the applications as fairly as possible. The boards of guardians were obliged to give a full list of those who had received outdoor relief so there were no grounds for evading the regulations on that front.¹⁴⁸ The issue was to be a continuing source of debate and rancour at county council meeting for years to

¹⁴⁵ K.C.C. mins. 10 Aug. 1908.

¹⁴⁶ *K.O.*, 14 Nov. 1908.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

come.¹⁴⁹ The five shillings a week was according to one historian, ‘far from generous...but the concession in principle was a major departure in social policy’.¹⁵⁰

The local opinion of the first state old age pensions was expressed by an editorial in the *Kildare Observer* close to the day of its first payment, as follows: ‘The Old Age Pensions Act, which comes into force on January 1st next is undoubtedly a welcome measure, but few will be found to deny that its terms have come as disillusionment to many who expected great things from it’.¹⁵¹

Those applicants who were turned down by the local pensions committee, could appeal the decision directly to the LGB. Huge numbers did so. From the time of the coming into force of the act in 1909 until June 1910, 37,606 appeals were heard by the LGB. As that body explained:

The large number of appeals in Ireland ...is due not only to the absence of satisfactory evidence of age and the difficulty of valuing the means of small farmers, but also to the fact that claimants whose pensions have been struck off on appeal usually come forward on the expiration of four months with fresh claims, and in ‘means cases’ endeavour to show that their acreage under crops or in number of live stock, or on account of bad harvest, or other circumstances which bring their yearly income below the statutory limit.¹⁵²

Not everyone was unhappy with the act. The first pensions in Kildare were given out in Naas post office on Friday 1 January 1909. The office had opened at eight o’clock but, ‘contrary to expectations, it was not until ten minutes to nine that the first applicant tendered his form across the counter with a request for his allowance. His name was Thomas McDonnell, and he was seventy-two.’¹⁵³ The report goes on to say that the pensioner was unable to sign the document and had to

¹⁴⁹ K.C.C. mins. 14 Dec. 1908

¹⁵⁰ R.K.Webb, *Modern England; from the eighteenth century to the present* (London, 1969), p. 456

¹⁵¹ *K.O.*, 26 Dec. 1908.

¹⁵² *Annual report of the local government board for Ireland for the year ended 31 March 1910*, [Cd. 5319] xli pp. x-xi.

¹⁵³ *K.O.*, 2 Jan. 1909.

‘make his mark’. The postmaster said that ‘fully ninety per cent of the pensioners were unable to sign their own names’.¹⁵⁴

The perceived influence that local politicians had in granting favours to constituents in the area of pensions was part of the general perception of them as exercising undue influence in favour of their families or friends in a range of areas. In 1905 an editorial in the *Kildare Observer* commended the new rules of the LGB ‘in forcing on the local bodies all over Ireland the necessity of having their official appointments made only after a qualifying examination’.¹⁵⁵ It continued, ‘this new system will go far towards doing away with a good deal of jobbery while preserving the rights to members of public bodies to elect their own officers’.¹⁵⁶ The old system it claimed, ‘enabled men elected on the suffrage of the people – farmer, shopkeeper, artisan and labourer – to press forward family claims, and family influence every time beat honest ability’.¹⁵⁷

Later in the decade the issue of local appointments arose again and we can gain an insight into the thinking of the local representatives on the issue from the way they responded to it. In 1908 the Department of Agriculture issued a recommendation to the county agriculture and technical committees that for any jobs as instructors with the committees the advertisement should carry a statement to the effect that canvassing for the votes of the local representatives would disqualify a candidate. The *Leinster Leader* in an editorial on the recommendation felt that ‘canvassing is one of the things inherent in human nature and we might as well try to change our natures as stamp it out. No law and no regulation could stamp it out’.¹⁵⁸

The exchanges among the councillors and other public representatives on the

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ *K.O.*, 31 Oct. 1905.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid..

¹⁵⁸ *L.L.*, 16 May 1908.

Kildare Agricultural and Technical Committee are worth giving in detail. In its letter to the committee, the Department of Agriculture 'strongly urge the committee to adopt their idea,'¹⁵⁹ but:

Mr. L.Malone: That would be a hard thing.

Chairman (S.J.Brown): We might diminish the nuisance... but we could never do away with it.

Mr. J.O'Connor MP: Perhaps the gentleman who wrote that used all the influence he could to get into the position (laughter).

Mr. S. Heydon: Very probable (renewed laughter).

Col de Burgh: When they say canvassing they don't object to a person sending around his recommendations, qualifications etc. ?

Chairman: Persons canvassing. We had better discuss the question. I don't see by any possible means how you could put a stop to canvassing.

Mr. O'Connor: I think if you draw the line at what they call personal canvassing it would be reasonable.

Chairman: The question is, is there anything that can be done. I would rather stop the canvassing by third parties than by the person themselves.

Col. De Burgh: Would you be against letters being written?

Chairman: That is if they confined themselves to their own personal knowledge. I don't see any objection to writing letters saying what they know about a candidate but this thing of writing to a person to do this and that I unreasonable. I have given the same answer to anyone who comes to me about an appointment, that I absolutely decline to promise anything until the election come off off.

Mr. S. Heydon: You don't make a promise at all?

Chairman: I can't recollect ever having done so.

Mr. Farrell: I always act likewise.

Col de Burgh: I suggest that all members of the agriculture committee be required to leave on the table all letters they might receive from persons going forward as candidates for positions.

Chairman: It would be a splendid thing if you could carry it out, but how can you compel people to do so?

Mr.L. Malone: I don't think you can stop people from canvassing. I think if any position is open it is right for a man to ask for it.

Mr.O'Connor: The only thing I would ask is that no member give a definite promise to any candidate.¹⁶⁰

From the evidence in this exchange the local representatives in Kildare were not yet ready to concede that their influence in making local appointments was in

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ *L.L.*, 16 May 1908 report of meeting of Kildare Agricultural and Technical Committee, 13 May 1908

any way undesirable. In fact we can clearly read between the lines that many of them could see no point in being local representatives if they did not have an opportunity to exercise this influence. Following the above discussion, a resolution was adopted by the committee, to the effect that all advertisements for positions would state that, 'canvassing by candidates or their friend, other than giving information as to qualifications, may be unfavourably considered'.¹⁶¹

Stephen J. Brown had staked his reputation on his conviction that the deductions from the county council's grants in 1907 were illegal and that the petition of right would vindicate this opinion. When it was lost he obviously lost prestige among the other councillors. This chapter has already dealt with the questioning of the value for money of the agriculture and technical committee that was launched in 1909.¹⁶²

There was another issue in 1909 and 1910 on which he found himself at odds with the majority of the councillors and the long-term consequences of which led to the end of his county council career. The Tuberculosis Prevention (Ireland) Act, 1908, that came into effect in 1909 gave county councils the power to build sanatoria for the treatment of the disease.¹⁶³

In response to the LGB's circular outlining the powers the council had under the act, namely, 'a county council may, if they think fit, provide hospitals and dispensaries for the treatment of the inhabitants of their county suffering from tuberculosis',¹⁶⁴ Kildare County Council had appointed a committee to look into the matter.¹⁶⁵ Lord Frederick Fitzgerald chaired the committee which reported back to the council on 15 November. There were 133 people suffering from the disease in

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² See above 143.

¹⁶³ 8 Edw. 7.

¹⁶⁴ *The Tuberculosis Prevention (Ireland) Act, 1908*, part 11 sec. 3. p. 3.

¹⁶⁵ K.C.C. mins 9 Aug. 1909.

the county, of whom thirty-five were in the workhouses. The total cost of building a sanatorium would be £5,000 but there was a private subscription of £900 on offer from Lord Mayo, a major landlord in Naas. The maintenance of the facility was costed at £2635, including £300 loan repayment for the capital outlay.¹⁶⁶ This was calculated to equate to an increase in the rates of either 1d in the £ or 2d in the £ depending on whether Stephen J. Brown's contention, that over £1200 would be saved from the ratepayers by having the 35 TB patients currently in the workhouses treated in the new facility, was accepted or not.¹⁶⁷

Matthew Minch stated that he would like to get the opinions of the rural and urban district councils of Athy on the matter before a decision was made and he proposed an adjournment of the discussion until the meeting of 13 January 1910 to allow this to happen. Brown was very disturbed by the principle of the county council seeking the district councils' opinions before making up its mind. He said:

They (county council) were the authority that had been given the power and if they referred this question to the district councils what were they to do supposing they disapproved of it? Were they going to follow their decision? ...It was for the council to decide for itself when the question was put before it. Therefore, he would be strongly opposed to the suggestion to postpone it.¹⁶⁸

John Healy replied that although he supported the building of the sanatorium, and did not mind even paying 2d in the £ for it, he did not mean to delegate their power to a district council but merely to consult their constituents and he personally would call a meeting of his constituents if the matter was postponed.¹⁶⁹

The chairman replied that 'they were sent there by the voters because they believed they would truly represent their interest. It was never contemplated for a

¹⁶⁶ K.C.C. mins. 15 Nov. 1909.

¹⁶⁷ *L.L.*, 20 Nov. 1909.

¹⁶⁸ K.C.C. mins. 15 Nov. 1909.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

moment that on every question every one of them should look back to the ratepayers. If so, local government would become impossible'.¹⁷⁰

The adjournment was passed and the issue came up for discussion a month later. By then, three of the five rural district councils had voted against the county building its own sanatorium. A taste of some of the arguments against can be gleaned from the comments at the Naas No 1. RDC meeting which rejected the idea. One district councillor mentioned a man who had died of TB a few days earlier in Newbridge. 'He (the councillor) had tried to induce the man to go into the workhouse, but could not do so. The establishment of a sanatorium would keep consumptives from mixing with those unaffected and spreading the disease.'¹⁷¹ Mr Corry replied to this: Is it because there would be a man who was too big a "swell" to go into the unions? Is that the reason we are to make a grand hotel for these people?'¹⁷² The meeting voted against the proposal, 'That the council agree to have 1d in the £ raised for the maintenance of the hospital'.¹⁷³ An illustration of just how divided opinion was in the county is evident from the fact the Naas Board of Guardians which consisted of the district councillors from both the Naas No.1 RDC and the Naas No. 2 RDC (that portion of the poor law union in Co.Wicklow) meeting immediately after the RDC, voted in favour of the building of the sanatorium.¹⁷⁴

At Athy Urban District Council there was one member who shared Stephen J. Brown's misgiving about letting the district councils decide the issue. He said, 'I am glad the chairman of the county council refused to be party to that procedure, because without doubt it has lowered the dignity of that body, and the chairman and

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ *L.L.*, 4 Dec. 1909.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ *K.O.*, 4 Dec. 1909.

those who acted with him are the only people to come out of the controversy with credit'.¹⁷⁵ This view did not prevail and the meeting rejected the building of the sanatorium. Instead, a proposal of a cheaper option, namely to build a sort of a lean-to onto the local workhouse was adopted.¹⁷⁶

When Kildare County Council met on 13 December to decide the matter the pressure was on the councillors. There were three letters before the council on the issue. One was from Athy UDC recommending their solution of lean-to extensions to the workhouse. A very emotional letter from councillor Laurence Malone from the Killeel electoral area, who was himself unwell, was read to the meeting. It said:

Gentlemen,

Will you allow one who is lying on a sick bed from which I may never arise to put in a plea for the ill and suffering in favour of a sanatorium for consumptives? If able to be up and about I would certainly use my voice and vote in favour of it in every way I could. If you think the additional tax is too much, do away with some of the technical business and put the poor and the suffering before that. The old must go but in God's name give the young a chance.¹⁷⁷

The last letter was one signed by the seventeen medical practitioners in the county calling for the sanatorium to be built.

John Healy spoke in favour of the hospital and drew a comparison between this issue and the re-opening of the Kildare infirmary in 1903.¹⁷⁸ He had opposed the re-opening of that facility on the grounds of expense but now admitted that, 'he did not know of any institution that did as much good as it was doing. He now asked them to do something for themselves, for the small farmers and for others of that class who would not go into a union for treatment if their whole families were to die. The Kildare infirmary was restoring many breadwinners to families and the time

¹⁷⁵ *L.L.*, 11 Dec. 1909.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ K.C.C. mins. 13 Dec. 1909; *L.L.*, 18 Dec. 1909.

¹⁷⁸ See above pp 114-16

would come when this sanatorium was established they would see the good it had effected and the breadwinners it had saved'.¹⁷⁹

Stephen J. Brown spoke in favour of the sanatorium on the grounds of the medical necessity for it and also because he felt the county council should assert its right, under the Tuberculosis Prevention (Ireland) Act, to make the decision. He was still furious that the council had consulted the district council's before making up its own minds on the issue. Matthew Minch still led the opposition to the sanatorium and he was persuaded by the three out of five RDCs that had come out against it. He managed to get a decision on the matter deferred until the annual general meeting of the following June.¹⁸⁰ By then, an error in the drafting of the Tuberculosis Prevention Act had been discovered, that would have effectively prevented the costs of caring for T.B. patients in a new hospital being offset by what could be saved in the workhouse hospital. Rates would have to rise by more than was originally calculated and no savings could be counted on.¹⁸¹ In any event the mood in the county had swung away from the provision of the sanatorium and the issue was effectually dropped. No sanatorium was ever built in Kildare.

The first twelve years of Kildare County Council, with Stephen J. Brown as chairman present a mixed picture. On the one hand there were modernizing forces within the council seeking to promote economic development and improvements in social conditions. On the other there were forces seeking only to limit expenditure and to save on the rates. In politics, almost all the councillors were nationalists but in truth wider nationalist issues played a very limited part in the council's deliberations. In terms of attitude to social issues we can see individuals gaining an increased awareness of the possibilities for change through the county council. Some

¹⁷⁹ *L.L.*, 18 Dec. 1909.

¹⁸⁰ *K.C.C.* 13 Dec. 1909.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 8 June 1910.

even begin to speak of these possibilities as responsibilities. These were in the minority. This stage of the council's history ended with clear indications that councillors would rather be led by their constituents' attitudes, than offer leadership to shape the changes that the council's increasing powers could have made possible.

There were only two contested electoral division in the 1911 election to Kildare County Council. One was in Naas, where there were two nominations, Michael Fitzsimons, a local auctioneer and publican and a member of Naas UDC, and Michael Gogarthy, who owned a hardware shop in the town and was Naas UDC town clerk,¹⁸² Both ran as nationalists and ratepayers' representatives and promised to look after the interests of the Naas ratepayers. The outgoing councillor for the division, Stephen J. Brown, declined to stand for election.¹⁸³

Brown had had three major challenges to his influence on the council, on the appeal of the decision in the petition of right, in the questioning of the value for money of the technical instruction committee and on the building of the sanatorium. His influence was weakening. There were the expected public pleas to him to let his name go forward but he refused. He seems to have resented the fact that his handling of the council's affairs during the previous 12 years was not enough to have him returned unopposed to the council chamber.¹⁸⁴ Among the most vociferous in trying to get him to change his mind was Matthew Minch.¹⁸⁵

The other contest was in Celbridge, where the outgoing member, Edward Farrell, was opposed by a farmer, James O'Connor, and by William Dease, son of the Sir Gerald Dease, who had represented the division from 1899 to his death in

¹⁸² *L.L.*, 6 May 1911.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 13 May 1911.

¹⁸⁴ *K.O.*, 20 May 1911.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 27 May 1911.

1903.¹⁸⁶ Dease was, like his father, a unionist but was still very well thought of in the area and won the seat from O'Connor by 126 votes to 123. Farrell only got 47 votes.¹⁸⁷

Thus ended the first phase in the history of Kildare County Council. The next chapter will recount how the council fared without Stephen J. Brown as chairman, and with Matthew Minch in that role.

¹⁸⁶ See above p. 130.

¹⁸⁷ *K.O.*, 3 June 1911.

Chapter 4. Responding to national events, 1911-1916

Stephen J. Brown chaired the opening of the annual general meeting of Kildare County Council held on 12 June 1911 but only presided while a new council chairman was selected from those who had been returned as council members for the new session. Brown allowed his name to go forward as one of the two co-opted members but he refused the entreaties of the council to accept a nomination as chairman, because 'the people had not elected him'.¹ In fact, though Brown accepted the co-option, he never again attended a council meeting and his co-opted place on the body was given the following year to Joseph O'Connor from Celbridge.² Brown played no further part in the politics or administration of local government in the county.

Matthew Minch was selected as chairman and George Wolfe as vice-chairman, positions they held for the next nine years. The social and political backgrounds of both are outlined in chapter one above,³ and their political loyalties and affiliations will be further revealed in the course of this chapter, in the manner in which they steered the county council through the political maelstrom of the home rule crisis, the volunteer movement, and the outbreak of the war against Germany.

It may help in this area to realise that both Minch and Wolfe were in attendance at a reception in Dublin Castle in July 1911 during the visit of King George V to Ireland.⁴ Minch was formally presented to the King, and Wolfe was

¹ K.C.C. mins. 12 June 1911; *K.O.*, 17 June 1911.

² K.C.C. mins. 3 June 1912.

³ See above p. 81 and p. 86.

⁴ *The Times*, 31 July 1911.

there by virtue of his early military career (he had been decorated and promoted to Major for his role in the Egyptian campaign in 1882).⁵

The county council that began what might be termed the ‘Minch-Wolfe’ era was not dissimilar in personnel and social and political background to the original group which met in 1899 to begin the ‘Brown’ era.⁶ The new council consisted of the following members:

Table 1. Kildare County Council 1911.⁷

Matthew Minch,	Athy – mill-owner
Owen Cogan	Ballitore - farmer and auctioneer
George Wolfe	Forenaughts Naas - landowner
Wm. Patrick Bourke	Cadamstown - farmer
Richard Wright	Castledermot – farmer, auctioneer, grocer
Wm G. Dease	Celbridge – landowner
John Healy	Firmount Prosperous – grocer
James Sunderland	Walterstown, Kildare - big farmer
John Field	Kilcock - factory owner and merchant
Thos. Keatley	Blackrath – drapers and boot warehouse
Charles Bergin	Kildare – publican
John Quinn	Littletown – farmer
J.B. Malone	Hartwell, Kill – farmer
J.Dempsey	Quinsborough – farmer
J. Connolly	Bollardstown, Newbridge - farmer
M. Fitzsimons	Naas – publican, auctioneer, cycle shop
P.J. Doyle	Newbridge – grocer, publican, livery stables
James Coffey	Ellestown, Kildare
John Kelly	Newbridge – butcher
James O’Connor	Celbridge – farmer
Edward Hayden	Castledermot - publican and wine importer
Lord F. Fitzgerald	Maynooth - landlord

This chapter will show the councillors dealing with administrative issues such as their role under the National Insurance Act 1911⁸ and the Irish Universities Act

⁵ Ibid; see Wolfe’s obituary in *J.K.A.S.*, vol. xii, 1935-1945, pp. 231-2: Wolfe inherited Forenaughts, Naas and Bishopsland, Ballymore-Eustace, following the death of his older brother Richard at the battle of Abu Klea in the Sudan in 1885.

⁶ See above p. 71.

⁷ Information based on F. Porter, *Porter’s post office guide and directory of the counties Kildare and Carlow, 1910* (Dublin, 1910).

⁸ 1 & 2 Geo. V, c. 55

1908⁹ and with more political matters such as the Gaelic League's emerging influence on public opinion. It will also show them reacting to the re-emergence of home rule as a real possibility on the political agenda in Westminster.

Before the details of this however, an insight into the political tenor of the county in 1911 may be gained from the reports of the visit of King George V to Maynooth College in July of that year. In May, a meeting of the deputy lieutenants and magistrates of the county¹⁰ was held to consider the proposed presentation of an address of welcome to the king. Mr. Robert Kennedy, Lieutenant of the County Kildare, chaired the meeting. The following county councillors attended the meeting, namely, Lord Frederick Fitzgerald, S.J. Brown, who was still chairman of the county council at the time, George Wolfe, P.J. Doyle, Michael Fitzsimons, Edward Hayden, and William G. Dease. In addition, apologies for not attending were received from Matthew Minch and Charles Bergin. Dominic More O' Ferrall attended in place of his very recently deceased father Ambrose, who had been a county councillor since 1899.¹¹ The others at the meeting were predominantly members of the grand jury and the families from which it had been drawn for centuries, such as the Aylmers, the de Burghs and the Mansfields.¹²

That two quite parallel political and even social worlds existed in the county with little mutual understanding is hinted at in some of the comments made at the meeting. In the presence of the chairman of the county council, Lord Cloncurry congratulated Mr. Kennedy for the fact that the county over which he presided had set such an excellent example to other counties in Leinster. He referred to the inevitable political divisions in such a large body of people, but he was confident that

⁹ 8 Edw. V11, c. 40

¹⁰ For their functions, see above, introduction p. 42.

¹¹ *K.O.*, 6 May, 1911.

¹² See above p 52-3.

‘in matters like this (welcoming the visiting king and queen) they were all united’.¹³ He then went on to propose a sub-committee to draw up the address of welcome. It consisted of Lord Frederick Fitzgerald, Lord Mayo, George Mansfield, and Dominick More O’Ferrall, all former grand jury members.

At that point, P.J. Doyle, county councillor, proposed that S. J. Brown be added to the committee. He said,

His reasons for introducing this matter was that the magistracy was a mixed body and differed on questions, which had been referred to as small questions of politics.....He (Mr. Doyle) belonged to a class of magistrate, Catholic and nationalist, interested in the drafting of the address, so that it might represent faithfully the views of all the magistrates in the county, and that there might be nothing in it to which any one could take exception no matter what his religion or politics might be.¹⁴

Brown himself showed a subtle awareness of the difficulty of his own position as county council chairman when he said that he had earlier been asked by the lieutenant to propose a motion at the current meeting but he had thought it better not to do so for the reason that he was only a magistrate by virtue of his position as chairman of the county council, and ‘as there was no meeting in the meantime at which he could ascertain the views of the county council or obtain their authority to represent them that day, he did not think it right to propose or second any resolution when he had not their authority to do so’.¹⁵ He went on to say that the magistrates of the county, ‘of all classes and sections’ would be well served by the committee as proposed.¹⁶

¹³ *K.O.*, 6 May, 1911.

¹⁴ *K.O.*, 6 May 1911.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Brown's old electoral rival from Naas, Col. T. de Burgh¹⁷, pressed him, saying that, 'he thought no person could be of greater assistance in drafting the address or one better qualified to represent the views of the magistrates or the people of the county than Mr. Stephen Brown'.¹⁸

The chairman added that Brown 'was the first man I applied to help me, but he thought as he was only an ex-officio magistrate he was not in a position to do so. His name also was first on the committee, and I understood from his letter he didn't wish to take any active part in the matter'.¹⁹ Brown was added to the committee. In fact, though, the issue was not raised at Kildare County Council's next meeting, which was its annual meeting. By then of course, S.J. Brown no longer represented the Naas electoral division, having declined to face an election when Michael Fitzsimons and Michael Gogarthly opposed him.²⁰

It is perhaps worth noting that the meeting of magistrates described above took place on a morning and that that evening a meeting of the Co. Kildare landowners' convention was held in Naas attended by many of the same people, but by none of the county councillors, except Lord Frederick Fitzgerald.²¹

The royal visit went ahead as planned in July 1911 and one of the places they called to was Maynooth College. In view of the change in the political climate in Ireland over the subsequent decade, it is worth getting something of the flavour of the occasion as it was reported locally. The day was described as follows:

The decorations at Maynooth College were simple but effective. The royal standard and papal flag floated side by side above the main entrance, while beneath some pretty devices in flowers and silk were intertwined with union jacks. A large number of village folk, who

¹⁷ See above p. 73.

¹⁸ *K.O.*, 6 May 1911.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *L.L.*, 20 May 1911; *Ibid.*, 17 June, 1911.

²¹ *Ibid.*

were supplemented by many excursionists from Dublin, and elsewhere, had assembled outside the gates for fully an hour before the arrival of the king. His majesty's appearance was the signal for loud cheers from the entire gathering, and the cheering was at once taken up by the ticket-holders within the gates and vigorously sustained. The local brass band were in readiness at the bridge beside the police barracks, and having obtained permission from the police authorities, played the march *Bobs* in front of the royal motor, as far as the entrance to the famous college.²²

The events inside the college gates are recounted in P.J. Corish's history of the college. He tells us that 'the party motored from Dublin Castle and were received by a vast gathering in the grounds, with music from the Artane Boys' Band...the royal party was greeted with 'God Save the King' as it entered the chapel, and again there was tea for royalty in the president's room, and in the students' refectory for nearly eight hundred invited guests'.²³

Among the guests was S.J. Brown, but not representing Kildare County Council since he was no longer chairman of that body and a member only by virtue of having been co-opted. In fact, Kildare County Council was not officially represented at the event, their next meeting after the annual meeting not taking place until after the royal visit was over.²⁴ Other guests included the rest of the committee which drew up the address of welcome as well as most of the major landowners in the county.²⁵

The local brass band may not have got inside the gates but they had the last note. As the royal party left the college the band, stationed at the bridge, played, 'in good style, *Wander back again*'.²⁶

²² *K.O.*, 15 July 1911.

²³ P.J. Corish, *Maynooth College 1795-1995* (Dublin, 1995), p. 287.

²⁴ K.C.C. mins. 19 June 1911.

²⁵ *K.O.*, 15 July 1911..

²⁶ *Ibid.*

P.J. Corish sees ‘a certain irony in the fact that it was in these years of growing nationalist fervour that the college had its two visits from reigning monarchs’ (Edward VII had come in 1903).²⁷ The flag waving village folk at the bridge in Maynooth also suggest something of the poignancy that Philip Larkin noted about pre-World War I England in his poem MCMXIV when he said,

Never such innocence,
Never before or since,
As changed itself to past
Without a word -²⁸

Back in the real world of the day-to-day administration of Kildare, the county council was coming to terms with more of the responsibilities that new legislation was imposing on it all the time. This time the National Insurance Act, 1911²⁹ required a lead from the council if the benefits granted under it were to be available to workers in the county. The evidence is that the council acquitted itself quite well in this regard. The origin of the act in the Liberal Party’s reform agenda, and the subsequent watering down of the original proposals as they were applied to Ireland is dealt with in great detail in Ruth Barrington’s *Health, Medicine & Politics*.³⁰ There was fear throughout the Irish political establishment that the burden of the cost of such a scheme would ultimately fall on a home rule government which it was felt would not be able to afford the medical benefits part of the bill. In the end Ireland was excluded from the medical benefits part of the act, unless an organising friendly society, or county insurance committee chose to opt into a locally arranged version of it.

²⁷ P.J. Corish, *Maynooth College 1795-1995* (Dublin, 1995), p. 286.

²⁸ Philip Larkin, *Collected Poems* (Faber and Faber, 1989) p. 3,

²⁹ 1 & 2 Geo., V.

³⁰ Ruth Barrington, *Health, medicine & politics in Ireland since 1990* (Dublin, 1987), pp 38-66.

The strong farming representation on the council meant that the first notice taken of the National Insurance Bill concerned its implications for that interest group. A motion passed at the annual meeting of the council in June 1911 summed up the main worries of the farmers on the council. The motion approved of the bill 'in principle' but thought that 'the amount sought to be levied off farmers and small industries is excessive',³¹ and looked for amendments to make it 'suit the conditions prevailing in this country'.³²

In spite of this critical response the council acted quickly to implement the provisions of the act when it was passed in December 1911, for implementation the next year, even though it was not strictly speaking obliged to. Some county councils left it to the friendly societies like the Ancient Order of Hibernians or the Irish National Foresters to organise the workers, as the act permitted.³³

The desirability of moving quickly was explained in an editorial in the *Kildare Observer* in March. The council was encouraged to act before the friendly societies began to organise and 'poach the best and least risky lives'.³⁴ This would leave the council's sponsored society, 'the decrepit, the physically impaired and generally the least desirable portion of the population from the point of view of benefits to be dealt with by the county society'.³⁵ Kildare County Council was already aware of the situation. As early as February 1912 the finance committee of the council discussed setting up an insurance society in the county as a first step.³⁶ The same committee devised a scheme for such a society and had it approved by a

³¹ K.C.C. mins. 12 June 1911.

³² Ibid.

³³ Barrington, *Health, medicine & politics*, p. 35.

³⁴ *K.O.*, 16 Mar. 1912.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ K.C.C. fnce. cmte. 26 Feb. 1912.

special meeting of the full council on the same day in early April.³⁷ Not only that but the network of rate-collectors was paid extra to compile a list of those who would be willing to join a county insurance society. The rate-collectors were paid sixpence per name for all those who would later join the society if approved.³⁸

This development was met with some opposition from the Athy Ancient Order of Hibernians which was itself considering applying for recognition as a society under the terms of the act. It argued that county societies would have the disadvantage that benefits built up in one would not be transferable to other geographical locations, though this point turned out to be spurious.³⁹

The extent of opposition in some powerful quarters to the idea of the county societies is illustrated in nearby Carlow. The Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, Dr. Foley, was appointed chairman of the Carlow County Insurance Society. His first move was to try to get the society to disband and allow a diocesan society, 'which he, with great reluctance, would be willing to initiate'.⁴⁰ He was not opposed to the idea of national insurance, nor of a county society, but he explained that he felt that a diocesan society would be substantially bigger and would enjoy the cost advantages of a large group over a small one. Indeed, he went on to encourage farmers to join up by pointing out the advantages to a 'a young married man to insure for the sake of the maternity benefits, and it would be worth the while of others to insure themselves for the sake of the sick and medical benefits'.⁴¹ Barrington also notes how the bishops' concerns about the insurance bill 'stayed out of the realm of moral theology'.⁴²

³⁷ Ibid., 1 Apr. 1912; K.C.C. mins. 1 Apr. 1912.

³⁸ K.C.C. mins. 1 Apr. 1912.

³⁹ *K.O.*, 20 Apr. 1912.

⁴⁰ *K.O.*, 4 May, 1912.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Barrington, *Health, medicine & politics*, p. 50.

In Kildare the county society thrived. The management of the society consisted of eight members directly nominated by Kildare County Council and sixteen elected from the insured members of the society itself.⁴³ The council gave a further boost to the society when it resolved that the deductions it would make to insure its own employees would not be at the expense of the workers. In effect this is what the act required but the council was publicly demonstrating its correct operation.⁴⁴

By mid-June 1912 there were over 6,000 members of the Kildare County Insurance Society.⁴⁵ It was widely expected that when the benefits began to be paid out at the beginning of 1913, one consequence would be the reduction in the calls on the poor law boards for assistance. That this did not result in a reduction in the portion of the rates due to union charges was owing to the fact that the unions were now required to provide T.B. dispensary services for those sufferers who were insured.⁴⁶

The benefits under the insurance schemes were widened in later years and the act itself can be seen as one of the successes of the liberal period in government in that it brought a fairly immediate tangible improvement in the lives of ordinary people.⁴⁷ It was never a very popular system with the farming community though and they continued to resent paying the contributions. One Kildare farmer, on being the first person to be prosecuted for failure to comply with the provisions of the act

⁴³ *L.L.*, 20 Apr. 1912.

⁴⁴ K.C.C. mins. 5 July 1912.

⁴⁵ K.C.C. mins. 10 June 1912.

⁴⁶ K.C.C. mins. 27 Jan. 1913.

⁴⁷ H.D.Gribbon, 'Economic and social history, 1850-1921', in W.E. Vaughan, ed. *A new history of Ireland vi: Ireland under the union, 11 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996), p. 351.

declared the 'there'll be no peace in Ireland until Lloyd George (responsible for the act) is in hell!'⁴⁸

Two other important and linked issues which preoccupied Kildare County Council during these years were the granting of scholarships to students to attend university, under the Irish Universities Act, 1908⁴⁹ and the related issue of the proposed scholarship to secondary schools suggested by Chief Secretary Augustine Birrell in 1913. Both scholarship schemes came under immediate pressure from the Gaelic League and county councils were encouraged to make a knowledge of the Irish language compulsory for those receiving the awards. Kildare County Council's first scholarships under the Universities Act were granted for the academic year 1912-13 on an ad hoc basis to candidates who obtained the required marks in a competitive examination in English, Irish and Mathematics held in UCD.⁵⁰

When it was discovered that one of the scholarship winners intended to study medicine there was some consternation among the councillors. The chairman Matthew Minch commented that 'the finance committee was of opinion that it was never the intention that these scholarships would apply to students entering the medical or other profession, that they were only intended for students passing through the university to take their arts course'.⁵¹

Six months later Minch returned to this theme when he spoke at length at another meeting of,

the impropriety of compelling ratepayers in the county to pay for the education of sons of persons who were well able to afford to give them a university education without any assistance from the public. The act was never intended to inflict this injustice, and when the county council determined to raise ½ d. rate on the county - producing about £700 - it

⁴⁸ *L.L.*, 1 Feb. 1913.

⁴⁹ 8 Edw. V11, c.38.

⁵⁰ *K.C.C.mins.* 4 Dec. 1911

⁵¹ *K.O.*, 9 Dec. 1911.

certainly never proposed to spend money in providing free university education to the class of students to which scholarships had gone, not alone in Kildare, but throughout Ireland generally.⁵²

Minch went on to analyse the faults in the system, which kept those who needed the scholarships, from ever receiving them and this analysis was largely that underpinned the intermediate scholarship scheme proposed by Birrell the following year. Minch explained:

The class to which, in our interpretation of the act, the scholarships were expected to go was composed of the clever offspring of men who without this assistance would never have been able to send their sons to university....The public funds have been misapplied. We do not mean to allege that in this misapplication the council had any hand. It very properly, we think, agreed to provide these scholarships, but by reason of the fact that no facilities are provided for even the most brilliant pupils of the national schools – to which the vast majority of the class of pupils it was intended to assist are confined – passing on to university, the money raised must of necessity be given to educate a class to whom the legislation never meant it should go. Never, as long as this entirely regrettable state of affairs is allowed to continue, can the country benefit as it should from the National University Act.⁵³

These words almost exactly echo those of the Chief Secretary, Augustine Birrell as he explained the thinking behind his own scheme to provide access to secondary school for clever boys. Speaking to the House of Commons in 1911 Birrell said:

There is no doubt a missing link in the chain, and it would, I am sure be a very good thing if measures were forthcoming to establish scholarships under a wise and limited scheme, which would enable boys to go from the primary school to the secondary school .The ideal thing, would be, I think, if you could get the means of taking clever boys away from the primary school, say, at twelve, keeping them at secondary school until sixteen or seventeen, and then to have scholarships at the university.⁵⁴

⁵² *L.L.*, 18 May 1912; K.C.C. mins. 13 May 1912.

⁵³ *L.L.*, 8 June 1912.

⁵⁴ *Hansard 5, Parliamentary*, vol. xxvi, 23 May 1911, c. 212, quoted in J. McBride, 'A study of the contribution of chief secretary Augustine Birrell to primary and post-primary education in Ireland, 1907-1916, (M.ED. thesis, NUIM, 1997), pp 70-1.

Kildare County Council formalised its university scholarships scheme in the spring of 1913. The finance committee devised the scheme, which was approved by the full council without amendment a few weeks later.⁵⁵ It is worth outlining the scheme in detail here, for it is a subtle attempt to provide for a scheme and take account of the prevailing political and religious make-up of the council and the demands of the Gaelic League in relation to the Irish language. The scheme was as follows:

The Kildare County Council offer for competition amongst children of parents who have resided in the County Kildare for a period of five years prior to the 8 September 1913, four scholarships, of £50 each, tenable for three years at Dublin College of the National University of Ireland (except in the case where the successful candidate is not a Catholic the parents or guardians may select whatever university in Ireland they please), open to students of either sex, and subject to the following conditions:

1. Scholarships will be awarded in the order of merit in which the candidates stand in the results of the special examination to be conducted by the authorities of University College Dublin... Candidates will be required to answer on five subjects (one of which must be Irish) as at matriculation, and, as a minimum qualification for award of a scholarship, as candidate must obtain honours in two subjects.
2. Candidates to whom a scholarship has been awarded as a result of the special examination, must in addition comply with the university regulations by passing the usual matriculation examination to be held in the last week in September before entry, failing which the grant of a scholarship will lapse and will be awarded to the candidate next in order of merit at the special examination and who matriculates.
3. Students must have a knowledge of the Irish language, both oral and written, as same is an essential subject for the award of a scholarship.
4. Students must reside in a collegiate residence approved by the council.
5. The cost of the maintenance of each student – estimated at £31 per annum for a period of thirty-one weeks (the university session) – will be paid direct by the council to the managers of the collegiate hostel selected.
6. The fees for the university course of each student will be paid direct to the university authorities from the scholarship fund. These fees amount approximately to £10
7. The balance of the scholarship fund – estimated at £8 or £9 – will be paid to each student for the purpose of travelling and incidental expenses.

⁵⁵ K.C.C. fnce. cmte., 7 May 1913; K.C.C. mins., 26 May 1913.

8. Applications from candidates for admission to the examination must be accompanied by a certificate as to education and character, signed by the applicant's clergyman and some other respectable person to whom the applicant is known.⁵⁶

One of the councillors, P.J. Doyle, tried to amend the scheme at this point to make it compulsory for the student awarded a scholarship to study Irish throughout the course and to effectively rule out any possibility of a scholarship ever being awarded to someone who would choose to go to Trinity College. He did not get a seconder for his amendments.⁵⁷

Whatever about the agreement on this scheme, some very interesting differences arose among the councillors in response to the scheme of intermediate scholarships proposed by Birrell, as mentioned above. In late 1912 the council received a report from the Irish Council of County Councils General Council rejecting the proposals of the Chief Secretary Birrell for a scholarship scheme for secondary schools⁵⁸. The matter was referred to the finance committee for its consideration. The matter did not return to the full county council until March 1913, with a recommendation in favour of the Birrell scheme and against the report of the Irish Council of the County Councils General Council's stance. Michael Fitzsimons, in moving the resolution, said that under Birrell's plan 'there would be a grant of £10,000 and a further £50,000 for secondary teachers'.⁵⁹ He thought it would be a great mistake to refuse this grant. The motion to accept the Birrell plan was passed with only George Wolfe (who was it may be recalled, a Protestant, landowner and nationalist), and Patrick Phelan voting against.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ K.C.C. fnce. cmt. 7 May, 1913

⁵⁷ K.C.C. mins. 26 May 1913; *K.O.*, 31 May 1913.

⁵⁸ K.C.C. mins. 25 Nov. 1912.

⁵⁹ *K.O.*, 1 Mar. 1913; K.C.C. mins. 24 Feb. 1913.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

The decision caused uproar and divided the county. The nationalist *Leinster Leader* deprecated the move while the unionist *Kildare Observer*, approved of it. The former agreed with the Gaelic League that the lack of any requirement for recipients of Birrell's scholarships to have a knowledge of Irish was its biggest weakness and took to calling the whole thing 'Birrell's bribe'.⁶¹ The *Observer* felt that the exchequer funding as part of the deal was too good an offer to reject on narrow nationalistic lines.⁶²

Later in March it was mooted that the scheme was to be altered so as to meet the objections of the Gaelic League and the Irish Council of County Councils General Council and the *Leinster Leader* adopted a conciliatory tone towards county council saying that the majority of them (councillors) 'believe that they would be doing a wrong to the boys eligible for these scholarships were they to refuse it'.⁶³ Outside the council chamber the pressure to overturn the county council's decision mounted.

On 21 April a delegate meeting of Gaelic League branches from around the county was held in Naas to discuss the council's stance. The following were the delegates and the areas they represented:

Celbridge: S.Ó Conchuabhair, Eamonn.Ó Maologáin, and Sean O'Connor,
Ballymore: J. McBride,
Ballyshannon: S.Ó Dubhlainne,
Prosperous: L.O'Neill, T.Harris,
Maynooth: D.O'Neill, Donal Ó Buachailla,
Straffan: J. Salmon,
Brownsown: Eamonn Ó Modhráin,
Rathangan: S.Ó Loingsigh, C'Ó Ceanaiigh and Miss Seosaidhe
Naas: NicEochagain, Miss Máire Ní Raghallaigh and Peadar Ó Hanracháin.

⁶¹ *L.L.*, 1 Mar. 1913; *ibid.*, 8 Mar. 1913.

⁶² *K.O.*, 1 Mar. 1913.

⁶³ *L.L.*, 22 Mar. 1913.

Donal Ó Buachalla chaired the meeting and opened by saying that aside from the Gaelic League's objections to the Birrell scheme as being a 'danger to the national language',⁶⁴ there were some first class educational experts who rejected it as unworkable. He referred to the Irish County Council's General Council's report on it, as able and lucid, and said that the scheme had few sponsors 'except the *Irish Times*'.⁶⁵

A letter from the Athy branch of the Gaelic League referred to the 'reactionary policy' of the county council and credited the 'Birrell bribe' for the resuscitation of that branch. They also called on the county council, when they had rescinded their recent decision, to appoint a whole-time organiser of Irish for the county through the county Joint Technical Committee, noting that Meath already had one. The meeting then passed the following motion:

That this meeting of delegates from Gaelic League branches in the county considers the action of Kildare County Council in refusing to approve of the report of the General Council of County Councils on the Birrell scheme as calculated to mislead the public and mis-represent the views of the people of Kildare, seeing as it may be construed into an approval of the said scheme – a scheme that in our opinion, is not worthy of the support of self-respecting, self-reliant Irishmen. We respectfully call on the county council to rescind their resolution of 24 February.⁶⁶

Donal Ó Buachailla then went on to attack the council's recently approved university scholarship scheme, particularly that part of it which made special provision for Protestant students. He said he thought it was 'illogical and unpatriotic to assume that non-Catholics in County Kildare were not national in outlook and

⁶⁴ Ibid., 26 Apr. 1913.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

were so mentally distorted as to object to continue the study of Irish during the university course'.⁶⁷

By a logic that is hard to follow, Miss Ní Raghallaigh said that the nursing of sectarian distinctions in educational matters was not what Ireland needed now but quite the opposite, and the council should be urged to remove from their scheme any words that would build up sectarian differences. After some discussion it was decided 'to keep the council well informed on the Gaelic League's views of the county scholarship scheme and to point out the non-necessity of inserting the words referring to students who were not Catholics'.⁶⁸

In May there were reports of the Ancient Order of Hibernians disagreeing with the county council's stand and supporting the Gaelic League view.⁶⁹ The separatist *An Claidheamh Soluis* was quoted as praising the local efforts to get the county council decision reversed.⁷⁰

Inevitably there was a rescission motion put down for the next quarterly meeting of the county council. Patrick Phelan who had opposed the original decision, put it down for consideration at the meeting of 26 May. The council had also in the meantime received a request that a delegation representing the Gaelic League might address them. This was granted. Professor Eoin McNeill was among the delegates and he urged the council to change its decision. He pointed out two defects in the Birrell scheme, neither of which was directly related to the Irish language issue. The first was that the council would have no say in the selection of those to whom they would be obliged to give scholarships, and secondly, that the council would lose control of the programme of studies for which it was obliged to pay the fees. He tried

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ *K.O.*, 17 May 1913.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

to suggest that it was these and not the fact that Irish was not compulsory that were the main reasons for opposing it.⁷¹

Patrick Phelan in proposing the rescission motion used much the same arguments and these were seconded by Edward Hayden. Michael Fitzsimons proposed a direct negative to Phelan's motion and supported it by saying that he did not agree that they would kill the language in the country if it were not made compulsory to study it at university, 'for if people had the national spirit they would take up the language. He thought he would be doing a serious injustice to 95 per cent of the students of Kildare if he did not refuse to approve the report of the General Council, because he had it on good authority that there were not more than 5 per cent of the teachers in Co. Kildare competent to teach the Irish language'.⁷²

The debate seemed at times to confuse the Birrell scheme for secondary scholarships with the already established university scholarship scheme but the principle of fairness to all ratepayers, nationalist and unionist, Catholic and Protestant, seemed to lie behind the defence mounted by the county councillors of their defiance of the General Council of County Councils. There was also a hint of resentment that the general council had made a decision rejecting Birrell's offer, without consulting with the constituent councils. As one member put it, 'the council got no opportunity of expressing an opinion on the matter, and they were not bound by any agreement of any other body'.⁷³

John Healy spoke in defence of the council's current university scholarship scheme, which the Gaelic League had recently criticised: he said,

It was utter nonsense to say they should have compulsory Irish.
Who were they going to get to teach Irish to these boys? They had

⁷¹ K.C.C. mins. 26 May 1913; *K.O.*, 31 May 1913.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

adopted a scheme he would stand by against any man or body. He had preached tolerance and claimed toleration, freedom and fair play for every man and favour for none. If a student wanted to go to Trinity then let him go there. They were raising a rate from Protestant and Catholic alike and why should not the prejudices of the two sides be recognised and respected?'⁷⁴

Finally, the vote for the rescission was put. There were eleven in favour: and fourteen against. The council had withstood the pressure and stuck to its original decision. The *Leinster Leader* in its editorial commented that:

The Co.Council, by a majority of three votes, have decided to adhere to a resolution which sets them in direct antagonism to the Gaelic League and its work for the regeneration of the country, and how far that attitude commends itself to the approval of their constituents remains for the future to disclose.⁷⁵

The *Kildare Observer*, naturally, took the opposite view, saying:

We are sincerely glad that the county council on Monday refused to rescind its former resolution. For the past couple of months every artifice has been adopted to appeal to the sentiments of the council and the people the council represents, to show that a grave injustice should be perpetrated in order that sentiment should be satisfied and utility completely ignored.⁷⁶

The issues of national insurance and university scholarship were part of the ongoing administrative process of Kildare County Council. This process occurred in a wider context of politics, both national and international. The councillors responded to such wider events as the imminence of a home rule bill, the beginning of the Great War, and later, the uprising in Dublin 1916, in ways that both revealed their political allegiances and also that helped to shape their political thinking. For one striking fact about the period from 1911 to 1918 in Ireland is clear and that is

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ *L.L.*, 31 May, 1913.

⁷⁶ *K.O.*, 31 May 1913.

that people's attitudes were profoundly changed by the events they witnessed or participated in.

As soon as it was apparent, in the late summer of 1911, that the parliament bill was likely to become law, the local press were aware of its implications. The *Leinster Leader* wrote:

That the parliament bill will become law is now assured. How bitter have been the feelings which it aroused has been evident to all newspaper readers recently. And all the bravado which it brought out must give the man of thoughtful mind an unpleasant feeling of the make-believe of politics at their best and at their worst. During one of the debates this week Lord Hugh Cecil declared that the home rule issue 'would not be settled in Westminster but in the city of Belfast'. Sir Edward Carson said he 'would say on behalf of the unionists of Ireland that they were not going to accept home rule from this parliament. Force would be resisted by force'. The Earl of Mayo [a prominent Kildare landlord] said he would return to Ireland to 'use arguments stronger than mere resolutions' and to 'prepare for the worst'. Here we have direct threats of incitement to violence. The fact that they come from the lips of those who have spent their lives preaching law and order to political opponents give them a certain piquancy.⁷⁷

In fact any 'make-believe' involved turned out to be that of nationalists who consistently refused to take seriously the threat to home rule from the depth of unionist opposition to it. This tendency to dismiss unionist resistance to home rule as bluff extended right up to the leadership of the Irish parliamentary party, according to F.S.L.Lyons, when he quotes John Redmond as saying that 'the magnitude of the peril in Ulster is considerably exaggerated'.⁷⁸

Unfortunately for the nationalists the threat of resistance from Ulster proved to be all too real and it frustrated the hopes of nationalists everywhere. In the autumn of 1911 John Redmond made a triumphant anticipatory tour around Ireland. When he

⁷⁷ *L.L.*, 12 Aug. 1911.

⁷⁸ F.S.L.Lyons, 'The developing crisis, 1907-14' in W.E. Vaughan, ed. *A new history of Ireland vi: Ireland under the union, 11 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996), p. 135.

spoke in Baltinglass most of the Kildare county councillors were in attendance.⁷⁹ Redmond seemed to raise their expectations of a smooth transition to self-government when he explained that, ‘all the home rule bill has to do today is to pass the House of Commons (cheers) and in spite of all that the House of Lords can do, within a short space of specified time it must pass into law’.⁸⁰ Another speaker reassured them that despite what was rumoured about there being trouble in the north if home rule came, ‘let them not believe it for a moment’.⁸¹

In this sanguine mood county Kildare looked forward to the long awaited bill. An editorial in the *Leinster Leader* on the penultimate day of 1911 expressed the hopes of the nationalists in the county: ‘1912 will, of course be memorable in the annals of the country as the year in which the third home rule bill came due in the British House of Commons’.⁸² A week later it was in even more hopeful mood, saying:

The people of Ireland are not disposed to lose any undue time about entering into the luxury of their political star-turn this year. In two months time this country will jump to the eye of the world and people who had forgotten that Ireland existed or who had come to the conclusion that we had disappeared and become a province of England, will once more be aware that there is ‘an island beyond an island’ with an extraordinary vitality and a claim to recognition as a nation.⁸³

The suggestions that Ulster might, at the moment that a home rule bill would pass into law, set up a provisional government, were dismissed as ‘one of the greatest jokes in modern times’.⁸⁴

Members of Kildare County Council were prominent at local and national gatherings in support of home rule. In Naas in January 1912 a public

⁷⁹ *L.L.*, 28 Oct. 1911.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, 30 Dec. 1911

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 6 Jan. 1912.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

meeting had 12 of the council members on the platform. John Healy proposed the formal motion renewing confidence in the Irish Party and congratulating them on having brought the cause of home rule 'within a measurable distance of success'.⁸⁵ This position of support for John Redmond and the Irish Party was a consistent theme of the county council right through until 1918.

At a major Home Rule demonstration in Dublin just days before the introduction of the Home Rule Bill in parliament, almost the entire Kildare County Council, including the county secretary, Thomas Langan, attended. They heard John Redmond outline how the measure would satisfy all reasonable nationalist wishes while at the same time 'not injure a single Protestant, or violate the sanctity of his conscience, or interfere in any way with his liberty or his property'.⁸⁶

The Home Rule Bill was finally introduced to the House of Commons by the Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, on 11 April 1912. The *Leinster Leader* welcomed it as, 'as good a bill as Ireland could ever hope, or can ever hope to gain by parliamentary agitation'.⁸⁷

The paper printed the responses of many of the local political leaders to the bill. Matthew Minch, chairman of the county council 'heartily' approved it and considered its financial aspects to 'contain everything essential for ultimate fiscal autonomy'.⁸⁸ George Wolfe, vice-chairman of the council, thought the bill, 'excellent, with every reasonable protection for Protestants'. It should, he felt, 'satisfy the Ulster people, if anything will'.⁸⁹

Patrick Phelan, John Healy and P.J. Doyle, all prominent county councillors, are quoted and they all call for unity in support of John Redmond's

⁸⁵ *K.O.*, 6 Jan. 1912.

⁸⁶ *L.L.*, 6 Apr. 1912.

⁸⁷ *L.L.*, 20 Apr. 1912.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

acceptance of the bill. Michael Fitzsimons expressed what was no doubt a common wish, one which subsequent events make even more poignant than it already is, when he said 'that the measure is a splendid one and should prove a happy ending to the troubles and misunderstanding which for years have separated Irishmen'.⁹⁰

One of the immediate local consequences of the bill's introduction was an upsurge in activity of the United Irish League in the county. In March John Field who represented the Kilcock area on the county council had said that new branches of the U.I.L. were 'badly wanted in Kildare. The nationalist party are not supported in Kildare as they should be'.⁹¹ New or revived branches in Maynooth and Kilcock joined forces with that of Clane U.I.L. to form a more effective organisation.⁹²

Kildare County Council at its meeting of 3 June endorsed the Home Rule bill as 'an honest attempt to settle the longstanding quarrel between this country and Great Britain'.⁹³ The motion, proposed by John Healy and seconded by George Wolfe, also backed the leadership of John Redmond and congratulated him on the fulfilment of his lifetime's work in politics.⁹⁴

The growing opposition to home rule in Ulster throughout the summer of 1912 caused nationalists in Kildare to worry. In August, the *Leinster Leader* expressed its concern that Ulster unionism would go to any lengths to avoid being part of any home rule settlement, and quoted one as saying that 'when the time comes, Ulster will go into rebellion'.⁹⁵

During late 1912 the Home Rule Bill made its slow way through the House of Commons while in Ulster the unionist opposition to it hardened and deepened with

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 16 Mar. 1912.

⁹² Ibid., 20 Apr. 1912.

⁹³ K.C.C. mins. 3 June, 1912.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ *L.L.*, 10 Aug. 1912.

the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant to resist it at all costs.⁹⁶ In January 1913 the bill got its third reading in the lower house and was promptly defeated in the House of Lords. This defeat was expected and was treated with some contempt in the local nationalist press.⁹⁷

The county council took the opportunity of its next meeting on 24 February to pass another motion of congratulation to John Redmond and the Irish Party on,

the signal victory they have achieved by the triumphant passage of the Home Rule Bill through the House of Commons, a result which has been brought about by the splendid tactics of the national leaders and the devoted services of their colleagues, including our county representatives, Messrs. O'Connor and Kilbride. We also thank Mr. Asquith P.M. and the Liberal party for the fidelity with which they have carried into effect their pledges to confer the right of self-government on this country.⁹⁸

The bill was rejected by the House of Lords on 30 January 1913 and the next day the Ulster Volunteer Force was formed. When it was re-introduced into the House of Commons in June, the political temperature in Ireland had risen considerably and the two sides seemed more polarised than ever. The re-introduction was welcomed by Kildare County Council at its annual meeting of 12 June.⁹⁹ The *Leinster Leader* also commended the move and criticised the unionist opposition in the following terms:

The tactics of those extraordinary politicians have been so constantly inviting ridicule, that we find it hard to treat them with seriousness or bring commonsense to bear on their childish manoeuvres. As we have been told the drill clubs have been so proficient with the wooden weapons on which the covenant was solemnly made, they are now to be

⁹⁶ See , F.S.L.Lyons, 'The developing crisis, 1907-14' in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland vi: Ireland under the union, 11, 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996), pp 128-35; Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: an Irish History, 1800-2000* (London, 2003), pp 115-125; Leon O'Broin, *The Chief Secretary: Augustine Birrell in Ireland* (London, 1969), pp 42-50.

⁹⁷ *L.L.*, 8 Feb. 1913.

⁹⁸ K.C.C. mins. 4 Feb. 1913.

⁹⁹ K.C.C. mins. 12 June, 1913.

substituted for real rifles.¹⁰⁰

In September 1913 Denis Kilbride, M.P. for the South Kildare constituency, spoke at a meeting in Kildare town which was described as very poorly attended. He expressed his disappointment at the apathy of Kildare in nationalist matters, and in the lack of U.I.L. branches in the county. Some of his own remarks at the meeting partly explain the poor attendance. He said that in his opinion the opposition to home rule was nearly dead and that no serious notice was being taken of Sir Edward Carson and his 'mock-volunteer' force, even by the unionist party itself.¹⁰¹

This sort of complacency and misjudgement of the extent of the opposition on the part of an M.P. must surely have led his supporters to take an equally sanguine view of the threat to the home rule bill. Nationalists did stir themselves during October when there were U.I.L. meetings in Naas and Clane¹⁰² and an Ancient Order of Hibernians branch was established in Naas and a branch of the Irish National Foresters was set up in Sallins.¹⁰³ This new A.O.H. branch explicitly chose not to form a benefit society under the National Insurance Act, thus avoiding any tension with the county council-sponsored County Insurance Society.¹⁰⁴

For the third year in a row, 1913 ended with the local papers expressing variously their great expectations for the coming of home rule, as in the case of the *Leinster Leader*, or a note of caution, as in the case of the *Kildare Observer*. The latter was reluctant, presumably for pressing reasons of survival in the marketplace, to openly condemn home rule, given that it appeared that the measure was destined to come about and that the paper would still need to appeal to a wider readership than

¹⁰⁰ *L.L.*, 14 June, 1913.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 27 Sept. 1913.

¹⁰² *K.O.*, 25 Oct. 1913.

¹⁰³ *L.L.*, 11 Oct. 1913.

¹⁰⁴ See above, p. 182.

the minority of staunch unionists in Kildare. However, it managed to find a middle ground in editorials which questioned the practical implications of the expected new parliament in Dublin. On 20 December 1913 it noted the following:

Unfortunately in the present crisis too much attention is centred on the sentimental question of home rule by all sides and insufficient attention is given to the question of finance. We do not want to take over from the imperial shoulders a legacy of debt and worry. We believe the efforts of the antagonists of home rule would be much more fittingly applied to the question of finance and of securing the best bargain possible, when bargain it is obvious there must be, than in hysterical declamation and frenzied threats.¹⁰⁵

The surprising sentiments expressed here probably capture the general feelings among Kildare unionists. They did hold a few protest meetings, notably one in Palmerstown house, the home of the Earl of Mayo, in August, but the pronouncements from such meetings are lacking in any of the ‘fight to the death’ rhetoric of the unionist meetings in Ulster at the time.¹⁰⁶

Meanwhile the *Leinster Leader* ended 1913 with the hopeful but anxious belief, probably shared by most nationalist in the entire country, that ‘the birth of 1914 will mark in all probability the dawn of a new nation to which we all look forward with tense expectancy’.¹⁰⁷ And again, ‘the prospects for the coming year are brighter and more promising than ever before’¹⁰⁸. It is probably to the benefit of mankind that we are poor at predicting the future, for who, of any political persuasion, would have wished for 1914 to dawn, had he or she had an inkling of what that year would bring, both locally and internationally? The naval rivalry between the British empire and Germany which had been noted even in the local

¹⁰⁵ *K.O.*, 20 Dec. 1913.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 31 Aug., 1913.

¹⁰⁷ *L.L.*, 31 Dec. 1913.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 10 Jan. 1914.

press,¹⁰⁹ and the continuing formation in Ireland of two opposing volunteer movements, one to oppose home rule and one to support it, would see 1914 end in ways no one could have predicted.¹¹⁰

In March 1914 the county reacted with more reason and less alarmist rhetoric than much of the national and English press did to what has come to be called ‘The Curragh Mutiny’. The implications of this incident were discussed at the highest levels of the British government and in the press, both nationalist and unionist at home and liberal and conservative in England.¹¹¹ Locally the reaction was far more measured. The *Leinster Leader*, whose nationalist leanings would lead one to expect a ferocious outburst, summed the whole affair up quite calmly as follows:

The close of last week saw the centre of political interest suddenly transferred from Westminster to the Curragh camp where orders were received for the movement of some troops to the north, the receipt of which was resented so much by certain officers that for the moment their political predilections got the better of their military discipline.... From the maze of rumour and reports it has at length been possible to glean that nothing more sensational had happened than that a group of some seven or so, sons of Irish landlord families, and Tories serving as officers...tendered the resignation of their commissions rather than go on active service to the north.¹¹²

Much historical research since has changed the detail of that summary but has not substantially altered the conclusion of its relative insignificance.¹¹³ The government’s own attempt to throw light on the issue by publishing the

¹⁰⁹ *K.O.*, 18 May 1912.

¹¹⁰ See Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: an Irish history, 1800-2000* (London, 2003), pp 115-125.

¹¹¹ See Elizabeth A. Muenger, *The British military dilemma in Ireland: occupation politics, 1886-1914* (Kansas, 1991), pp. 184-202.

¹¹² *L.L.*, 28 Mar. 1914.

¹¹³ Elizabeth A. Muenger, *The British military dilemma in Ireland: occupation politics, 1886-1914* (Kansas, 1991), pp 184-202.

correspondence of those involved does not appear to have made the actions and motivations of the protagonists very clear.¹¹⁴

The local government elections of 1914 passed with little notice from the public. There was only one contested seat on Kildare County Council, that of William Dease in Celbridge, who was defeated by James O'Connor. The apathy in the county in relation to the elections is explained by the *Leinster Leader* in an editorial, as arising from three factors: one, that the novelty of local government elections had worn off after five previous votes; two, that the expense and bother of representing one's area was no longer attracting candidates; and finally, that everyone's attention was so firmly fixed on the home rule issue that local politics got little regard.¹¹⁵

When the Home Rule Bill passed its third reading in the House of Commons on 25 May, there was general rejoicing throughout the county. Now, as was noted in the *Kildare Observer*, 'In a month, unless there is a dissolution and the government goes to the country in the meantime, the bill will become law'.¹¹⁶ There were marches of celebration in Naas, Newbridge, Monasterevan, Athy and Kildare town.¹¹⁷

Kildare County Council continued to take an active part in nationalist politics throughout the spring of 1914. In May, George Wolfe, John Healy, and Patrick Phelan were appointed delegates of the council at a public meeting held in Naas to form a corps of the Irish National Volunteers. George Wolfe went on to become a prominent organiser of the National Volunteers throughout the county. The Irish National Volunteers had been formed in November 1913 for the 'defence of home

¹¹⁴ *Army correspondence relating to recent events in the Irish command*, [Cd. 7318, Cd. 7329], 1914 vol. lii.

¹¹⁵ *L.L.*, 16 May 1914.

¹¹⁶ *K.O.*, 30 May 1914.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

rule'.¹¹⁸ It was generally seen as a response to the setting up of the Ulster Volunteer Force the previous year.

The county council was fully behind the movement. In June it discussed and passed a motion calling on the Irish National Volunteers to develop plans for the defence of the Irish parliament and to prepare for active steps to ensure that nothing was done to frustrate the expectations of a waiting nation.¹¹⁹

The county council's political attitudes at this crucial stage of the home rule crisis, with the bill only awaiting the ritual but meaningless rejection in the House of Lords and its subsequent signing into law by the king, can be seen in the debate at its meeting on the same day as the bill passed through the House of Commons. George Wolfe put the following motion to the council:

That we, the members of the Kildare County Council, desire to reaffirm our confidence in the Irish Parliamentary Party, under the able guidance of Mr. J.E. Redmond, in the present momentous time in our national history; that we congratulate the party on the statesmanlike manner in which they have dealt with the existing political situation which was rendered difficult at times by the assaults of open enemies and the treachery of professing friends.¹²⁰

Wolfe recalled that at the first ever meeting of the council he had had the honour of proposing a resolution in favour of home rule, which was carried by a large majority,¹²¹ and he felt it only fitting to now express their opinion on the matter fifteen years later when the goal of home rule had been achieved. Patrick Phelan seconded the motion and it was a 'hopeful thing that they still had confidence in the party so ably led by Mr. Redmond'.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Joost Augusteijn, 'Irish (National) Volunteers', in S.J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford companion to Irish history* (Oxford, 1998), p. 270.

¹¹⁹ K.C.C. mins., special meeting, 15 June 1914.

¹²⁰ K.C.C. mins. 25 May 1914.

¹²¹ See above p. 92.

¹²² K.C.C. mins. 25 May 1914.

Throughout the summer of 1914 the national volunteers became an established part of the political scene in Kildare, though in a somewhat more tardy way than elsewhere. When the Athy corps of the volunteers was set up one speaker said that 'Kildare owed an apology to the rest of Ireland in being rather late in advancing the volunteer movement'.¹²³ Kildare county councillors took a prominent role in the National Volunteer movement. At a major recruitment meeting in Naas on 31 May 1914, senior figures from the council, including John Healy, George Wolfe, Michael Fitzsimons, and the county secretary, Thomas Langan, took leading roles. George Wolfe explicitly linked the formation of the volunteers in the south to the creation of the Ulster Volunteers in the north and tried to explain why a corps of volunteers was needed in the south:

He thought it was obviously necessary that volunteers should be formed in this country. Their neighbours in the north had been before hand with them, and had formed corps on a fairly extensive scale...The last three or four months had shown there was an absolute necessity that there should be a corps of this kind. It was not necessary to go into the reasons. They should know exactly where they were, and there should be men to be relied on in case anything unforeseen should occur, and there was no doubt that the best way to maintain peace was to be ready for war...and he was quite sure that the mere fact of having these corps all over the country would be a great matter for bringing about a peaceful solution of the state of affairs that existed at present.¹²⁴

John Healy, who represented Clane on the county council, seconded Wolfe's proposal to form a corps of the Irish National Volunteers for Naas and district in terms that may give us some insight into the ways that even conservative, middle-class people, with a stake in stability and order can get carried along on a wave of

¹²³ *L.L.*, 16 May 1914.

¹²⁴ *L.L.*, 6 June 1914.

events that is likely to bring about the destruction of the very values they most believe in. He began:

Too much stress cannot be laid on the importance of this great movement, and all it meant for the country. He had been asked several times, 'Why start volunteers?' He did not think in any other country in the world that question would be asked. It was the right of every freeman to bear arms and it was the duty of the government to put arms in the arms of men willing to use them (applause). This was not an aggressive movement. They meant to injure no man, but they meant, at all events to hold what they had got (applause). After what he had witnessed in '67, he thanked God that he had lived to see this day.¹²⁵

Healy continued, 'If a man could arm in the north, why should he not be allowed to arm in the south. The time was gone for talk. He had heard a good deal of talking for the last thirty or forty years. The time had come for action (applause)'.¹²⁶ Healy's comment on the right to bear arms was presumably a reference to a recent proclamation by the government banning the carrying of firearms in public, a proclamation that was the subject of a motion of censure by Kildare County Council, which had declared that, 'it is a clear interference with the rights of every Irish citizen, and further, it is not alone the right, but the duty of every man to bear arms in defence of his country'.¹²⁷

Later in June the county council formally positioned itself at the head of the volunteer movement in Kildare when its meeting of 15 June, suspended standing orders to discuss the new organisation. P.J.Doyle, who represented the Newbridge electoral division opened the debate and set it in context:

At the last meeting of the council they passed a resolution unanimously approving the formation of the Irish Volunteer force for the defence of Irish national rights. This action of ours, in my opinion, committed us to some responsibility in connection

¹²⁵ *L.L.*, 6 June 1914.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ K.C.C. mins. special meeting, 15 June 1914.

with the movement. The end of our triennial period came shortly after, and we, so to speak, went to the country. We have been re-elected, and our council is almost identical with the old. I think we can truthfully claim that we represent the people of this county, and I also think that if occasion arises, and we consider it necessary to speak words of advice and warning to our people that our word will be listened to as coming from public men in whom the people of the county trust.¹²⁸

Doyle went on to persuade the council to back John Redmond's control of the national volunteer movement against a 'self-appointed provisional committee sitting in Dublin'.¹²⁹ This was a reference to a power struggle then going on between Redmond and IRB members for control of the organisation.¹³⁰

In late July, a branch of Cumann na mBan was set up in Naas. It was a very respectable organisation. George Wolfe's daughter, Maud, was the branch president, and S.J. Brown's wife was on the committee. A Miss Bloxham, from the central council of the organisation explained their role and function:

They should not imagine they would be useless except they were able to do great things, but go on steadily doing the small things they were able to do from day to day, and no one could tell when the opportunity for doing the fine heroic things would present itself¹³¹.

It is unlikely that women from such a moderate nationalist background had any inkling of the radical position and actions that some Cumann na mBan members would be involved in in the space of a few short years.¹³² For now they understood their duties to be first aid, the defence of Ireland fund, 'collecting money to buy rifles

¹²⁸ K.C.C. mins 15 June 1914.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Joost Augusteijn, 'Irish (National) Volunteers', in S.J. Connolly, *The Oxford companion to Irish history* (Oxford, 1998), p. 270.

¹³¹ *L.L.*, 1 Aug. 1914.

¹³² See S. McCool, *No ordinary women: Irish female activists in the revolutionary years, 1900-1923* (Dublin, 2003), pp 34-58; none of the women mentioned in reports on the Naas branch feature in the photo of women who took part in the rising shown on p. 58 of this book.

to arm their men,'¹³³ as the report says, before finishing with, 'no one wished for peace more than they did but if they were going to be menaced, they must be prepared to answer the menace'.¹³⁴

For all the organising of volunteer corps, all the resolutions passed at innumerable public meetings throughout the country, north and south, even for all the parliamentary to-ing and fro-ing of the government over amendments to the Home Rule Act to accommodate, or at least temporarily pacify, Ulster, throughout the early summer of 1914, the events that would ultimately impact most on the course of history, were occurring on the other side of Europe, in the Balkans and the Austro-Hungarian empire. The Archduke Ferdinand and his wife were assassinated in Sarajevo on 28 June and this act, with what now appears to be tragic inevitability, but was probably as contingent as most human affairs, led to the declaration of war by Germany on France on 3 August and by Britain on Germany the next day.¹³⁵

The impact of the declaration of war on Kildare was immediate. Indeed a crowd had gathered outside Naas post office on Tuesday evening, 4 August, to await news of the German response to the English ultimatum, a response which did not come.¹³⁶ Throughout Wednesday and Thursday there was a constant stream of military traffic throughout the county as the mobilisation order was complied with and reservists reported for duty to the military barracks of Naas, Kildare town, Newbridge and the Curragh.¹³⁷

The first edition of the *Kildare Observer* published after the declaration of war carried a column called 'war notes', which captures something of the early

¹³³ *L.L.*, 1 Aug. 1914

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ T.W.Moody, F.X.Martin, F.J. Byrne (eds), *A new history of Ireland: a chronology of Irish history to 1976*, viii (Oxford, 1982), pp 387-8.

¹³⁶ *K.O.*, 8 Aug. 1914.

¹³⁷ *K.O.*, 8 Aug. 1914.

impact of the war in Kildare. In Newbridge, Sheridan's concert hall and The Curragh Stand public house were taken over by the military authorities for use in the troop mobilisation. On Thursday evening, 6 August 280 reservists of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers were met at the depot in Naas by the local band of the Irish National Volunteers who played them to the railway station at Sallins.¹³⁸ The cavalry divisions of the army at the Curragh camp began requisitioning horses, beginning with 'all the horses at the Kildare hunt stable at Jigginstown, together with a lot of Mr Young's, Mr Berney's and practically all the hunters in the county. Many farmers' heavy horses have also been called in'.¹³⁹ More worryingly for ordinary people, the prices of most staple foodstuffs, like sugar, bread and tea rose sharply in the towns almost overnight.¹⁴⁰

The *Leinster Leader's* immediate concern was with the likely impact of the war on the home rule issue, and they were worried that 'the unionists and Tories have concocted a secret deal with the government to end the conflict over home rule. It went on: 'with the cabinet and all British parties now solely absorbed in the international war, to the exclusion of home rule, it is difficult to pronounce a definite opinion as to the fate of the home rule bill'.¹⁴¹

Kildare County Council had no hesitation in backing the war effort and John Redmond's call to the National volunteers to join up. At its meeting on 17 August it resolved the following:

That in view of the present grave crisis, whereby our country is threatened with calamity, we, the Kildare County Council, endorse the action of Mr. John Redmond, pledging the support of the national volunteers to defend our shores against invasion, and hereby undertake in the event of our office staff taking up arms, to keep their respective offices open until their return, and our secretary is hereby

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 8 Aug. 1914.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *L.L.*, 8 Aug. 1914.

directed to make the necessary arrangements for the purpose of carrying this resolution into effect.¹⁴²

This solidly pro-Redmond stance allied to a strong support for the involvement of Irishmen in the British army continued to be Kildare County Council policy throughout the war. It was not the case with other voices of nationalist opinion in Kildare. From the very beginning the *Leinster Leader* opposed Redmond's call for the national volunteers to enlist in the British army. In its editorial on 15 August it said that the volunteers were:

face to face with the possibility of being absorbed into the British army as a force for the defence of Ireland and 'the empire'. How many volunteers ever contemplated giving their service to the empire when joining the ranks? If the volunteer movement is to be preserved as a distinctive national force for the defence of Ireland alone, its constitution and object must be held inviolable, and its personnel must be kept free from every element antagonistic to the ideal which its founders had in view.¹⁴³

From this point on there is growing divergence between the editorial line taken by the *Leinster Leader* and the attitude taken by Kildare County Council and this divergence grew more pronounced as the war progressed.

Some of the more mundane effects of the war on the county were reported early in August. Kildare town railway station was put under the control of military intelligence. Naas policemen were out on bicycles looking for foreigners, especially Germans. Two travelling Jews were arrested but they turned out to be Russians living in Dublin for the previous ten years. A man of 'teutonic appearance' stopped in Naas to buy petrol and was arrested, but was later released when he furnished convincing proof that he was a well-known resident of a southern town. Three priests

¹⁴² K.C.C. mins. 17 Aug. 1914.

¹⁴³ *L.L.*, 15 Aug. 1914.

who were holidaying in Naas were visited in their hotel. They were suspected of being Austrians, but turned out to be Belgians.¹⁴⁴

Two events sum up the lack of fine discrimination involved in the initial responses of many to the outbreak of the war. In the first, Lord Mayo, one of the chief spokesmen for unionism in the House of Lords, who lived in Palmerstown House in Kill, wrote to the *Leinster Leader* offering help 'in the equipping and maintenance of the volunteer movement in the south of Ireland'. As he said, 'all Irishmen must sink their differences and join together in the defence of the empire'.¹⁴⁵ His offer was not taken up.

The next week there was an even more bizarre letter to the same paper from F. Wogan-Brown explaining his attempt to set up a mounted corps of the Irish Volunteers in Naas. He claimed to have the approval of the chairman of the Naas committee of the Irish National Volunteers. He may have had, but most of those who rode to Naas with him on Sunday 26 August were stumped when they were offered the full Irish National Volunteer declaration to sign. They, good unionists as most of them were, balked at the references in the declaration to the support of the home rule cause, and they simply went home. The mounted volunteer corps never materialised.¹⁴⁶

Kildare men did enlist in the imperial army and many reservists in the county did report for duty. James Durney's study of the involvement of Kildare men in both world wars speaks of the long tradition of service by locals in the British army in the barracks in Kildare town, Naas, Newbridge and the Curragh. He says that over 2,000

¹⁴⁴ *L.L.*, 15 Aug. 1914.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 22 Aug. 1914.

men from the Athy area enlisted during the war.¹⁴⁷ The official figures for recruitment in the country as a whole in the early years of the war do not show Kildare men joining in markedly greater numbers than comparable parts where no strong influence of local army barracks could be detected. The figures for those who joined the army in the Leinster counties from the outbreak of the war to October 1916 illustrate this point:

Table 2. Number of men available for military service and number who joined the British army from 4 Aug. 1914 to 15 Oct. 1916, by county.¹⁴⁸

County	Available	Joined	%
Kildare	2,581	1,644	64%
Carlow	1,539	1,101	71%
Kilkenny	2,925	1,441	49%
Meath	2,891	1,070	37%
Leinster	30, 818	15, 636	51%
Antrim	6,205	5,896	95%
Down	6,426	6,065	94%
L'derry Co.& Bor.	4,150	4,636	112% ¹⁴⁹
Ulster	45,205	66,674	147%

The contrast with Ulster is stark and the figures do not suggest that Kildare men were more likely to join up than any others.

It was not long before news of the first deaths reached Kildare. Patrick Heydon, from Athy, a private in the Irish Guards, died at Mons in France on 4 September 1914 just one month after the outbreak of the war.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ James Durney, *Far from the short grass: the story of Kildare men in two world wars* (Revised ed. Naas, 1999) pp. 4-7 (henceforth cited as, *Far from the short grass*).

¹⁴⁸ *Statement giving particulars regarding men of military age in Ireland, 1916*[Cd. 8390] vol. xvii, p. 3.

¹⁴⁹ The apparently anomalous figures are accounted for by men from outside the RIC divisional areas, from which the statistics were compiled, who came there to enlist.

¹⁵⁰ *K.O.*, 12 Sept. 1914; Durney, *Far from the short grass*, p. 8.

Meanwhile the Home Rule bill finally received the royal assent on 18 September 1914, but its implementation was now, of course, delayed pending the prosecution of the war.¹⁵¹ Even the *Leinster Leader* gives the news a cautious welcome. There was a parade of national volunteers in Naas to celebrate and George Wolfe sent a telegram to John Redmond congratulating him on ‘the consummation of your life’s work’.¹⁵² There were reports of similar demonstrations at Kilcock, Monasterevan and Celbridge to celebrate the event.¹⁵³

Throughout the autumn of 1914 nationalist politics in Ireland was divided on the issue of the role of the National Volunteers in the war with Germany. John Redmond had called on the volunteers to commit themselves to fight for Britain, not just by defending Ireland at home, but by enlisting to fight in Europe. The result was an almost immediate split in the volunteer movement, into two groups, the National Volunteers who stayed loyal to Redmond and a much smaller, but as it turned out, a much more radical, group who followed Eoin McNeill into the Irish Volunteers.¹⁵⁴

In Kildare the *Leinster Leader* came out strongly against John Redmond’s call to volunteers to go to war: ‘there may be a time when it may be expedient for Ireland to relax her present objections to standing shoulder to shoulder with England in the field, but that time is not yet’.¹⁵⁵ This was a minority opinion in the county at the time, one of the few times the paper found itself seriously out of step with the prevailing mood of the people. In Naas the volunteers voted ‘unanimously’ to support Redmond’s stance. Michael Fitzsimons the local county council member was prominent in proposing the motion. In Robertstown, county councillor John Quinn

¹⁵¹ T.W. Moody et.al., *Chronology of Irish history*, p. 388.

¹⁵² *L.L.*, 26 Sept. 1914.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ 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, 11, 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996), pp 190-1.

¹⁵⁵ *L.L.*, 10 Oct. 1914.

was one of those voting for their volunteer corps to give its full backing to Redmond. That meeting went on to say that, ‘we strongly condemn the action of that small section of Irishmen in Dublin who are endeavouring to cause a split in the ranks of the volunteer movement at this critical period in Irish history’.¹⁵⁶

A split is exactly what did happen. In north Kildare the volunteers in most towns broke into different factions and ‘in all cases those in support of Mr. Redmond are largely in the majority’.¹⁵⁷ The newspaper report continues to describe how the Celbridge corps had divided and the majority who were in support of Mr. Redmond formed a committee of their own. In Maynooth, with a membership of about 150, seventeen decided against Redmond and set up their own committee following Eoin McNeill.¹⁵⁸ In Staplestown (Clane) there was only one ‘dissentient’ from Redmond’s policy and in Kill, the majority were in favour of his stance.¹⁵⁹

The county council itself made no reference to the split in its two meetings in 1914 after the setting up of McNeill’s Irish Volunteers in late October 1914, though it is worth noting that one of the council’s own employees, Art O’Connor, who was assistant county surveyor for the Celbridge No.1 Rural District Council was reported as one of those who attended the convention at which the new volunteer group was established.¹⁶⁰

Kildare County Council continued to support the war effort in very tangible ways. The County Kildare Distress Committee,¹⁶¹ was chaired by the county council chairman, Matthew Minch and was otherwise made up of, Lady Mayo, Lady

¹⁵⁶ Ibid; *ibid.*, 17 Oct. 1914.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 24 Oct. 1914.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 7 Nov. 1914.

¹⁶⁰ *K.O.*, 31 Oct. 1914.

¹⁶¹ Set up to look after specific instances of poverty and deprivation caused by the war, such as the hardship that was expected to hit families whose breadwinners had volunteered for active service at a time when prices of staples were rising; see *K.O.*, 24 Oct. 1914.

Weldon, Mrs. Mansfield, Miss de Robeck, Mrs Cassidy (wife of former county councillor Edward Cassidy), Rev. M. Norris PP Naas, Rev. Dean Waller, Rev. Canon Clover, Rev. M.W. Craig, and county councillors, Joseph O'Connor, Michael Fitzsimons, P.J.Doyle, and George Wolfe.¹⁶² Minch was in the happy position in November 1914, of being able to report that there was no distress as yet in the county outside of the Athy and Naas urban districts. As a result, he urged the committee to provide houses, furnished and unfurnished, for Belgian refugees. A direct appeal was made to the county council to help in this matter and this was very favourably received.¹⁶³

In fact, suitable housing was not found, but thirty-five refugees from Belgium were housed in Celbridge workhouse over Christmas 1914. Mrs Barton of Straffan House provided turkeys for Christmas dinner, and acting on instructions from the LGB relief committee, the master of the workhouse provided wine, sweets and cigars, 'so that nothing was wanting towards brightening the lives of these people, and they heartily enjoyed and appreciated it all'.¹⁶⁴ Their stay in the workhouse was only temporary and by early January 1915 they had all been relocated to Cappoquin Co. Waterford.¹⁶⁵

Throughout 1915 Kildare county councillors were active in the organisation of the National Volunteers. On 6 January at a major convention of delegates from all over the county, councillors John Healy, P.J. Doyle, Patrick Phelan, Michael Fitzsimons, George Wolfe and the county secretary, Thomas Langan, were reported as present, with Healy proposing and Phelan seconding the resolution that reaffirmed 'our confidence in the Irish Parliamentary Party, and we hereby undertake by every

¹⁶² *L.L.*, 21 Nov. 1914.

¹⁶³ *K.O.*, 21 Nov. 1914; *K.C. C. mins.* 23 Nov. 1914.

¹⁶⁴ *K.O.*, 2 Jan. 1915.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 16 Jan. 1915 (Supplement)

possible means to support the Irish National Volunteer movement in accordance with the policy of the central committee, presided over by the leader of the Irish people, Mr. J. E. Redmond'.¹⁶⁶

This support for Redmond and his policy on the war was not entirely one of empty rhetoric. Former county councillor for Celbridge, William Dease, son of Sir Gerald Dease, was commissioned in Kitchener's army as a major.¹⁶⁷ Matthew Minch's son and John Healy's nephew were commissioned as well. In both of the latter cases the reports emphasise the connection of the new officers with the National Volunteers. The report on Minch mentions that 'there are now over 400 men gone into the ranks from Athy, most of whom were in the reserve of active members of the National Volunteers in the district. A few have been killed in action and a large number wounded'.¹⁶⁸

John Healy's nephew, Lieut. J.J. Dempsey, of the 6th Black Watch, was from Carbury, and had got his commission shortly after the war started. He had been a member of the volunteers also. He wrote to the local paper emphasising the need for the National Volunteers to become a more organised and effective force and suggesting that a 'determination on the part of the rank and file to secure at least proper physical equipment, and a military cohesiveness must take the place of the present apathy and disjointedness. Otherwise the volunteers can never become a national army in the true sense'.¹⁶⁹

This criticism from within its own ranks may have been barely palatable, but that from without, by Lord Mayo, raised the hackles of nationalist Ireland. In January 1915 Mayo had said in the House of Lords that, 'The Irish Volunteers, I can assure

¹⁶⁶ *L.L.*, 9 Jan. 1915.

¹⁶⁷ *K.O.*, 2 Jan. 1915.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *K.O.*, 13 Feb. 1915.

your lordships, are not taken seriously. We think, if the Germans landed the Irish Volunteers would most likely run away'¹⁷⁰ He compounded the insult then by writing to the *Freeman's Journal* to explain himself. The letter is worth giving in full for the light it throws on the political temperature of the country at the time:

Sir, - It is not always wise to say publicly what one thinks, and I am quite prepared to be further abused for what I did say in the House of Lords concerning the Irish National Volunteers. It seems to have caused many to be very indignant, and I am not surprised. The Irish National Volunteers are not at present properly drilled, properly armed, or properly equipped. What chance would they have against German disciplined troops landed in Ireland?

I myself subscribed to the county committee of the Irish Volunteers [he meant the National Volunteers], and mentioned that I hope the troop drilling in my village close by should be given some arms and equipment. As far as I know this has not been done.

An undisciplined and improperly armed force can never stand against disciplined troops, and if I put the matter crudely and somewhat rudely, I trust my countrymen will forgive me.

Individually the Irish National Volunteers are as brave as Irishmen always are, but as a force they cannot be relied upon. If the Irish nationalists in the south and west had with money and arms supported their volunteers, we should have by this time an efficient force that would have been capable of resisting invasion. If I have spoken strongly and roughly on this subject, I trust it may have the effect of bringing home to Irishmen the seriousness of this war and the dangers we incur.

Yours truly,

Mayo,

Palmerstown, Straffan, Co. Kildare¹⁷¹.

People in Kildare took the insult very badly, perhaps because Lord Mayo was their own local unionist bete-noir. Kildare County Council passed a motion condemning him as 'scandalous and murderous'.¹⁷² The chairman, Matthew Minch said that he couldn't stand by and allow such a statement to be made without contradicting it, for, from time immemorial Irishmen showed great courage on many a hard fought field. He continued, 'we all understand Lord Mayo pretty well here, but

¹⁷⁰ *L.L.*, 16 Jan. 1915.

¹⁷¹ *F. J.*, 14 Jan. 1915.

¹⁷² *K.C.C. mins.* 20 Jan. 1915.

people on the other side of the channel don't and for that reason we want to refute his remarks',¹⁷³.

Naas Board of Guardians went further and called for Lord Mayo to be interned for the duration of the war! Funny as it seems now, there was a serious context to their anger, namely the large number of young men from Kildare and elsewhere in Ireland who were at that point out in France risking their lives. Every week's editions of both local papers carried notices of young men from the county, either enlisting and leaving for the front, or for the lucky ones, home on leave. One such was Pte. John Sheridan, of the Connaught Rangers, who arrived 'war worn and maimed' at his home in Kilcock, on Christmas Eve.¹⁷⁴ A Sergeant Gerraty of the Royal Engineers, was awarded the Legion of Honour and was 'returning to the firing line'.¹⁷⁵ The King family of Narraghmore, had five sons on active service by early 1915.¹⁷⁶ Almost weekly there were reports of the deaths of soldiers from Kildare, such as that of Lieutenant Kennedy, from Annfield, of the rifle brigade,¹⁷⁷ and Lieutenant Walter Borrowes, serving in 'H.M. submarine'.¹⁷⁸ By June 1915 the chairman of the county council, Matthew Minch, had three sons commissioned in the army.¹⁷⁹

Kildare County Council's support, in word and practice for the war effort went parallel with its support for the Irish National Volunteers of John Redmond. Council members were prominent in the preparations in the county for a major gathering of volunteers from all over the country that was held in Dublin in April.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ *K.O.*, 2 Jan. 1915.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 16 Jan. 1915.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 30 Jan. 1915.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 16 Jan. 1915.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 23 Jan. 1915.

¹⁷⁹ *L.L.* 26 June 1915.

¹⁸⁰ *L.L.* 6 Mar. 1915.

At the 'great review' itself many of the Kildare corps of National Volunteers were led by county council members, including, P.J. Doyle, William Bourke, Michael Fitzsimons, and John Healy, while George Wolfe was one of the invited guests on the platform with John Redmond and Col. Maurice Moore commander-in-chief of the volunteers.¹⁸¹

In June the county council was addressed by the vice-lieutenant of the county, George Mansfield on the subject of recruitment to the army in Europe. The meeting reveals the complexity in even moderate nationalists' attitudes to the war. Mansfield admitted that 'county Kildare had done fairly well. There might be some who had not done so well as others, but Kildare had given a large number to the fighting forces, many of whom had given their lives to the cause'.¹⁸² Nevertheless, he urged the setting up of a recruiting committee to further the effort to persuade those men 'who could be spared'¹⁸³ to go forward. Mathew Minch replied in the following way:

So far as I can see there are very few men that are eligible to join the colours who are free to join at the present moment. The steps that Mr. Mansfield suggests should be taken were not in order that we should be pressing any men to join who are not free to join, but in order to show our sympathy in this hour of trouble with recruiting generally in Ireland, because we in county Kildare are absolutely opposed to coercion or compulsion in any shape or form (hear, hear). We have done very well, and there are some hints going about that conscription is going to be proposed by the new government. [Asquith's recently announced coalition cabinet¹⁸⁴]. In order that no question can arise as to the loyalty of county Kildare, I beg to propose that we form ourselves into a recruiting committee to show our sympathy with the objects in view and to get free young men not otherwise engaged and who can be spared to join their brethren at the front.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ K.O. 10 Apr. 1915.

¹⁸² K.C.C. mins. 31 May 1915.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ T.W.Moody, F.X.Martin, F.J. Byrne (eds), *A new history of Ireland: a chronology of Irish history to 1976, vol. viii* (Oxford, 1982), p. 389.

¹⁸⁵ K.C.C. mins. 31 May 1915; *L.L.* 5 June 1915.

Edward Hayden seconded the motion and drew attention to the already evident shortage of labour in the county and the consequences this would have on food production. George Mansfield admitted that, 'It is very nearly as important to maintain the food supply as is the supply of munitions'.¹⁸⁶ Patrick Phelan spoke up for the north of the county where, 'farmers at present found it difficult to procure labour, owing to the number of men who had gone to the colours. If they had to supply many more men he was afraid land would have to go out of cultivation. Of course, all their sympathies were with the allies'.¹⁸⁷ Minch rounded off the discussion by commenting that he thought, 'there was very little necessity for this committee' but nevertheless, a recruiting committee consisting of the whole council was appointed.¹⁸⁸

Some of the underlying unease of nationalist opinions of the political situation was more evident in the same council's discussion of the government's decision to give the unionist leader, Edward Carson a cabinet position. John Healy said that it negated any effort to persuade men to join the British army. He said that 'if he went tomorrow and asked young men to go out and fight he knew the answer he would get.... No man could now stand upon a public platform and ask men to go out and fight'.¹⁸⁹

The appointment seems to have undermined the confidence of moderate nationalists that the Home Rule Act was secure. Michael Fitzsimons commented that people were now beginning to question the whole strategy of supporting the government and trusting their word. According to his way of looking at the appointment of Carson, people were now beginning to ask, 'What has become of

¹⁸⁶ K.C.C. mins. 31 May 1915; *L.L.* 5 June 1915.

¹⁸⁷ K.C.C. mins. 31 May 1915; *L.L.* 5 June 1915.

¹⁸⁸ K.C.C. mins. 31 May 1915.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

your Home Rule bill and your Irish Party? Where is Mr. Redmond? The people believed the Home Rule bill was secure, and that the act would become operative and a good number of nationalists had gone out to war on this understanding'.¹⁹⁰

That attitudes in Ireland were changing towards the war was evident late in 1915 when George Wolfe, who had been tirelessly organising recruiting meetings throughout Kildare, and indeed all of Leinster (he was provincial sub-director of the national recruiting committee¹⁹¹) was heckled at a meeting in Kilcock and a group of people conspicuously left to join a Sinn Féin meeting in a nearby hall.¹⁹² Still very much a minority party, this group, founded by Arthur Griffith in 1905 became more vocal as the Great War continued.¹⁹³

At another meeting in Naas around the same date there were numerous interruptions, 'most of them from Sinn Féin sympathisers'.¹⁹⁴ The speakers included two prominent county councillors, Michael Fitzsimons and John Healy. Fitzsimons used the strong nationalist credentials of his colleague George Wolfe to bolster his argument in favour of enlisting in the army. Wolfe had always been, he said,

a friend of the people, fighting for the people and their aspirations in every movement calculated to benefit the people. He was always found foremost in the ranks of those out to promote the interests and advance the cause of the people. Mr Wolfe's identification with recruiting ought in itself be sufficient guarantee that the question was a serious and important one for Ireland as well as for England. Therefore it was that Mr. Wolfe under the presidency of the Lord Lieutenant, was appealing to them to do what they could in this Great War – to come and help¹⁹⁵.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ *K.O.*, 20 Nov. 1915.

¹⁹² *L.L.*, 27 Nov. 1915.

¹⁹³ See J. Augusteijn, 'Sinn Féin' in S.J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford companion to Irish history* (Oxford, 1998) p. 514.

¹⁹⁴ *K.O.*, 27 Nov. 1915.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

The crowd seemed less impressed than he was by the role the Lord Lieutenant of the county was playing in the recruiting of soldiers. There was much heckling and jeering, the thrust of which was that John Redmond and the Irish Party had indeed gained benefits for Ireland but that those benefits were mostly for ‘the farmers and shopkeepers’.¹⁹⁶

1915 turned to 1916 with sombre editorials from both local papers about how the war was proving more difficult and costly than had been expected, both in terms of casualties and resources. The *Leinster Leader* was changing its opinion on recruitment, now supporting Redmond’s call as a means of preventing a worse situation, namely conscription.¹⁹⁷ The *Kildare Observer* reminded readers of the harsh conditions being endured by those at the front in terms that must have done little to encourage any potential recruits.¹⁹⁸

This then is ‘the living stream’ that was the life of Kildare, as seen through the prism of its county council, in the years immediately preceding 1916. What happened in April of that year would alter forever the political landscape of the country and the county, and how that process occurred in county Kildare and was reflected in and through its county council, will be the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ *L.L.*, 1 Jan 1916

¹⁹⁸ *K.O.*, 1 Jan.

Chapter 5. The council in a time of change, 1916-18

By early 1916 it was clear that the European war was not going to be a short one and that it would demand ever more resources in terms of money and man power. Conscription to the army was introduced in Great Britain, but not in Ireland, from January 1916.¹ To the Irish parliamentary party this presented itself as a pressure to either increase the rate of voluntary enlistment to the army or to acquiesce in the implementation in Ireland of some form of conscription.² John Redmond and his supporters naturally preferred the first option, knowing that the second would hand over considerable political advantage to the increasingly vocal and organised militants who were steadily gaining in support and confidence as the war dragged on and the promised home rule looked like it would be delayed by a protracted struggle in the trenches.³

In Kildare there was a recruitment meeting in Naas in early 1916 at which Michael Fitzsimons, county council member for the local electoral division, spoke strongly in support of Redmond's position:

Fellow townsmen, I felt it my duty to attend this meeting tonight to speak to you upon the importance of fulfilling the undertaking given by Mr. Redmond M.P. when he said in the House of Commons that Ireland would do her duty without any compulsion in supplying the recruits necessary to fill the gaps in the Irish regiments. I am proud to be the representative of the town of Naas on the Kildare County Council and I am proud also to be the representative of the men from Naas who are now fighting so gallantly in France, Flanders, Gallipoli and Greece, to defend you and all of us at home (hear, hear).⁴

¹ K. Jeffery, *Ireland and the great war* (Cambridge, 2000), pp 25-6.

² F.S.L. Lyons 'The rising and after', in W.E. Vaughan, (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, vi: Ireland under the Union 11, 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996), p. 207; James Loughlin, 'Mobilising the sacred dead: Ulster unionism, the Great War and the politics of remembrance', in A. Gregory and S. Paseta, (eds.) *Ireland and the Great War: 'A war to unite us all'* (Manchester, 2002), p.134.

³ Lyons, 'The rising and after', p. 209; *L.L.*, 16 Jan. 1916.

⁴ *K.O.*, 29 Jan. 1916.

This was very largely the view of most supporters of Redmond and the Irish party at this stage and even those who had reservations about the war saw volunteering as a better alternative than the conscription that was looking an increasingly likely option. The *Leinster Leader* commented on Redmond's appeal to Irish farmers to provide more recruits to the three Irish divisions, thereby enabling them to remain 'distinctively Irish', by saying that his words should not fall on deaf ears, and warning that a failure to respond could lead to conscription.⁵ This was from a nationalist paper that had originally criticised Redmond for his comments offering the support of the National Volunteers to the war effort in August of 1914.⁶

The appeal seems to have indeed fallen on deaf ears. The chief inspector of police's monthly report to Dublin Castle for January 1916 said that 'During the four weeks ending January 15 only 2,256 men enlisted in the army – a poor result which is in a measure due to Sinn Féin influence'.⁷ The total figure for recruitment in the country as a whole from the beginning of the war to that date is given as 94,358 and this is followed by the comment that, 'Farmers all over the country are still holding back and appear to feel no interest in the war except as a means of making money'.⁸ In fairness to the farmers, the issue of whether they would be more usefully occupied at home increasing their production of food for the army and the civilians in general as the war progressed, was a complex one and will be dealt with later in this chapter.⁹

There was at least an effort being made in Kildare to encourage men to enlist. According to the sub-inspector of police in Naas, in early 1916, there were

⁵ *L.L.*, 1 Apr. 1916; for a description of the three Irish divisions in the British army at the time, see Myles Dungan, *They shall not grow old: Irish soldiers and the great war* (Dublin, 1997) p.15.

⁶ *L.L.*, 15 Aug. 1914.

⁷ Inspector General's monthly report for Jan. 1916, (CO. 904/99) [consulted on microfilm in National Archives of Ireland].

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ See below pp. 238-42.

recruitment meetings in three places every night (presumably he meant three new locations every night) and ‘a house to house canvas is being made by ladies accompanied by soldiers, but I believe they have only got twenty promises so far’.¹⁰

It is difficult now to appreciate how the events of Easter week 1916 came as such a surprise to both the people and the authorities at the time, given the extent of the warnings, both explicit and circumstantial, that preceded the outbreak of the hostilities.¹¹ Something of the complacent lack of awareness can be gleaned from the following description of the state of the country in early 1916 that was being conveyed to the Chief Secretary’s office in Dublin Castle. ‘The great majority of the people of Ireland may be regarded as loyal to the empire, expecting home rule when the war is over’.¹²

The situation in Kildare seemed even more benign. It is worth quoting in detail to get a flavour of the atmosphere of the time.

There is little crime in the county, but a good deal of drunkenness, the large separation allowance in many cases causing the women to drink.Secret societies are not known to exist. There are some signs that a Sinn Fein feeling is growing but its members or sympathisers are not strong enough to openly show an anti-recruiting spirit....I have not included the Gaelic Association [Gaelic League?], nor the G.A.A. which is entirely devoted to sport in the county. The leading nationalists have advocated recruiting and in some instances the R.C. clergy have publicly advocated it.¹³

In fact, out of the view of the police there was a well-organised series of meetings between the Irish Volunteer leaders in Kildare in late 1915 and early 1916 which would indicate a fairly advanced state of readiness among the local leadership for some imminent action.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the country was taken completely by surprise when news of the events unfolding in Dublin on Easter Monday began to

¹⁰ N.A. Sub-Inspector’s report for Kildare, Jan. 1916, (CO 904/99).

¹¹ See Lyons, ‘The rising and after’, pp 210-11.

¹² N.A. Inspector general’s monthly report for Jan.1916, (CO 904/99).

¹³ N.A. Sub-inspector’s report for Kildare, Jan. 1916, (CO 904/99).

¹⁴ Durney, *On the one road: political unrest in Kildare, 1913-1994* (Naas, 2001), p. 16.

spread. This surprise and shock was felt equally in Kildare. For most of the week of the rebellion the people of Kildare had to rely on rumour and the visible evidence of British army troop movements from the various barracks in the county for news of what was happening in Dublin. These rumours came by a variety of channels. A bread van driver brought news of shooting on the streets of Dublin to Maynooth early on Easter Monday afternoon itself. This prompted the local activist Donal Ó Buachalla to investigate for himself and when he reached Dublin he found that in fact the rising was in full swing. He returned to Maynooth and gathered a small party of volunteers who marched into the city that evening, joining the other rebels on the Tuesday morning.¹⁵ The police later confirmed that the county organiser of the Irish Volunteers, Dr. Ted O’Kelly, called to Ó Buachalla’s house in Maynooth on Easter Monday and the two were later joined by fourteen volunteers, twelve from the locality and two others, most of whom were armed. As they marched through the town they held up the local RIC patrol and threatened to shoot them if they followed them.¹⁶

The fear and uncertainty that a lack of firm news about such an event engendered in people is well caught in the contemporary account by Maurice Headlam, a civil servant working for the treasury out of offices in Dublin Castle, of his journey back into Dublin through Kildare on Easter Monday after a weekend away with Lord and Lady Donoughmore in Clonmel. His train was stopped at Thurles and the rumour was that there had been a rebellion in Dublin and the train was not going any further, and ‘no one seemed to know exactly what had happened’.¹⁷ He and his companion hired a car and drove on towards Dublin but were forced to seek shelter for the night at the home of a friend at the National Stud

¹⁵ James Durney, *On the one road: political unrest in Kildare, 1913-1994* (Naas, 2001), pp 21-22.

¹⁶ N.A. Sub-inspector’s report for Kildare, Apr. 1916, (CO 904/99).

¹⁷ Maurice Headlam, *Irish reminiscences* (Dublin, 1947), p. 163.

near the Curragh. Even here they could get little information except that ‘the rebellion was a fact and that there was much activity in the Curragh camp’.¹⁸ Leaving early the next morning (Tuesday 25), they met a detachment of the 17th Lancers advancing ‘with great caution’ towards Dublin. The commanding officer would only confirm that the situation was serious.

At his friend’s house in Belgard, eight miles from the city there was no news except that there had been trouble of some sort. Headlam rang Dublin Castle and to his surprise got through to the under-secretary who was naturally reluctant to divulge much over the phone, but insisted that the situation was under control and that officials of the treasury would not be of any especial use in Dublin Castle at that point. Headlam then rang Mrs. Ernest Guinness, a friend who lived at Knockmaroon on the edge of the Phoenix Park, who knew as much as anyone outside of the city centre of what was going on. She confirmed that there was fighting going on all the time, that the post office had been seized, but that ‘Guinness’s itself had not been attacked’.¹⁹ Headlam also quotes the diary of his host for that weekend, Lord Donoughmore, which recounts his own journey back into the capital, in a hired car, on Tuesday 25 April. All was well until they reached Naas where a young policeman stopped them and advised that ‘there was fighting in Dublin, but that he thought that reports were exaggerated and that the military was patrolling the roads between Naas and the capital’.²⁰

Ordinary people were just as caught up in the rumour and excitement of the event. The *Leinster Leader* described the early days of the rebellion as follows:

During Monday evening and all that night, troops were being rushed to Dublin by the military, both by rail, road and sea, while

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 164.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 165.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 169.

motors continually passed through Naas to and from Dublin. People met in the streets and discussed the situation with all the seriousness which the position invited and alarm was the prevailing feeling manifested.²¹

The hunger for news is indicated also by the fact that the *Kildare Observer* produced and sold out three editions, 'for the first time in our history',²² on Friday 28 and Saturday 29 April, and the *Leinster Leader* published a 'special' edition, for the first time ever on a Monday, 1 May 1916.

The earliest reports of the impact of the events in Dublin on the lives of Kildare people have a homely tone to them. Cattle bought at fairs on Tuesday 25 April could not be brought home because of the disturbance to the railways caused by the rebellion,²³ while for others, the lack of petrol made journeys by car very difficult to complete. A man from Fermoy offered £40 to hire a car in Naas to take him home but was frustrated by the shortage of petrol to undertake the trip.²⁴ For others their only inconvenience was a shortage of baker's bread.²⁵ The baker who made it to Maynooth on Easter Monday was the last to get out of Dublin during the disturbance.

The extent to which news of the events was only slowly making its way out of Dublin is evident in the reports of the exchanges in the House of Commons in the days immediately following the rebellion. The Chief Secretary for Ireland, Augustine Birrell announced on Tuesday 25 April, that 'at noon yesterday grave disturbances broke out in Dublin. The post office was forcibly taken possession of. Soldiers arrived from the Curragh. The situation is now well in hand'.²⁶ Asked if there had

²¹ *L.L.*, 6 May 1916.

²² *K. O.*, 6 May 1916.

²³ *L.L.*, 29 Apr. 1916.

²⁴ *K.O.*, 29 Apr. 1916.

²⁵ *L.L.*, 6 May 1916.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 29 Apr. 1916.

been any lives lost, he replied, 'Yes, as far as I can say, twelve'²⁷. When asked for a statement of the current situation he replied that 'Telegraphic communications is difficult at the moment, but that the rebels were still in possession of four or five parts of the city'.²⁸

The imposition of martial law on the city and county of Dublin on 25 April, and with it, the censorship of news,²⁹ made further understanding of the occurrence difficult for the people and press, and the surrender of the rebels on Saturday 29 April had occurred well before the papers were able to tell much of the story. The *Leinster Leader* special edition on Monday 1 May reported the 'unconditional surrender of the rebel leaders'.³⁰ It also reported that Padraic Pearse had suffered a broken thigh and that James Connolly had been killed in battle, neither of which was true.³¹

By the time the regular editions of the local press appeared on Saturday 6 May there was a clearer grasp of the facts and sufficient distance for editors to try to make some comment on the events. By way of excusing any errors in its reports the *Leinster Leader* referred to the absence of definite news during the rebellion and to the wild speculation this gave rise to 'among the more impressionable'.³² It tried to make up for this by giving a full page to the story of the week's events, interspersing its own reports with articles culled from the *Irish Times*, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Mail*. The general tone of the reports at this stage is noticeably against the rebels and in favour of the British army and authorities, though the sources of some of the reports and the strict censorship may account for this impression. There is no

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See T.W. Moody et.al., *A new history of Ireland vol. viii : chronology of Irish history to 1976* (Oxford, 1982), pp 390-1; martial law was extended to the rest of the country on 29 Apr..

³⁰ *L.L.*, special edition, 1 May 1916.

³¹ Ibid.

³² *L.L.*, 6 May 1916.

editorial comment on the reports of the executions of the first of the court-martialled leaders.³³

Two of the *Leinster Leader's* own staff, the editor, Michael O'Kelly and reporter, T.J. Williams were among a group of men arrested in Naas during the first week in May, suspected of involvement in the rebellion. The latter was released almost immediately, but O'Kelly was sent to Wakefield prison as an internee, with, among others, Jack Fitzgerald, chairman of Kildare County Board, G.A.A.³⁴ This fact may also account for the paper's reticence about commenting on the events, beyond a fairly neutral, 'now that the rebellion has been crushed, we may in common express the hope that we may soon revert to that state of order which only peace, prosperity and mutual good will can give'.³⁵

The police reports of the extent of the involvement of Kildare in the rebellion tell us that apart from the sixteen men who marched from Maynooth the only other 'acts of participation in the rebellion were the cutting of telegraph wires between Athy and Carlow and the placing of disused telegraph on the railway line'.³⁶ The report also says that, in all, twenty men from the area were arrested and sent to Richmond barracks and that a further three prominent Sinn Féiners had disappeared since the rebellion.³⁷

The *Kildare Observer* commented and condemned the rebellion while trying to give some credit for the bravery of those involved. Its editorial of 6 May headed 'The Dublin Horror' went as follows:

The Dublin revolt has fizzled out....It collapsed within a week, leaving ruin, havoc and unnumbered graves to mark the madness of an attempt not alone to outrage the feelings of the vast majority

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ *L.L.*, 6 May 1916; Durney, *On the one road* (Naas, 2001), pp. 34-6.

³⁵ *L.L.*, 6 May 1916.

³⁶ N.A.Sub-inspector' report for Kildare, Apr. 1916. (CO. 904/99).

³⁷ Ibid.

of the Irish people, but also to defy the might of England.... Far be it from us to attempt to detract from the courage of the handful of men who rose in revolt against a constitution which is admitted to be the freest in the world. They were brave, no doubt, but bravery so utterly divested of common sense can never accomplish anything for Ireland or for any other country³⁸.

The paper reverted to its more usual political forthrightness when discussing the executions of the leaders. It went on as follows:

Up to the time of writing seven of the leaders of the rebels have paid the penalty of their rashness by being shot after court-martial.... The list [of the executed] is a terrible one, but of what consequence is it in comparison with the list of those who have been sacrificed - soldiers, rebels and innocent civilians - at the bidding of a few fanatics in Dublin? Strong measures are needed to deal with the situation....It is no time for kid-glove methods³⁹.

The *Leinster Leader* finally commented on the events in its 13 May edition and was beginning to find its political voice again. Under the heading, 'Fixing the responsibility', it said:

Of course the leaders of the rebellion themselves were the direct and immediate persons responsible for the strife which has, so to speak, plucked the heart out of the capital; they have paid the penalty for their acts and over their graves we are silent: it will be for some historians of the future, removed from the passions and the prejudices of our day to inquire into the motives and estimate the culpability at its true worth of these men....An inquiry pretending to investigate the circumstances of the insurrection must surely go back to the date when the home rule controversy was violently plucked from the constitutional methods and made the sport of an amazing physical force campaign....Since Sir Edward Carson threw over constitutional methods in political controversy the situation in Ireland has been intolerable and impossible.⁴⁰

The writer may have been surprised at just how long it has taken for the passions and prejudices of his day to no longer feature in the assessments of the events.

³⁸ *K.O.*, 6 May 1916.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *L.L.*, 13 May 1916.

The local representatives of the people got their first chance to express their opinions on the Easter rebellion at the first meetings of the Boards of Guardians and of Urban District Councils in early May and some of them showed a subtle understanding of the perils and opportunities inherent in the feelings of ordinary people about the events. At Naas Board of Guardians on 8 May, P.J. Doyle, also a member of the Kildare County Council, proposed a motion condemning the rising outright and insisting that the rebels had ‘no real grievance’.⁴¹ Michael Gogarty who was the clerk of the Urban District Council in Naas, as well as a poor law guardian, objected and put forward a view that seems to have been well developed throughout the county at the time, namely, that the authorities might easily go too far in their punishment of the rebels and risk alienating the general public. It is worth quoting this opinion in full:

Mr. Gogarty said that the spirit of vengeance was having a very bad effect in the country at the present moment. This was no hour for any such thing as vengeance when they remembered that 150,000 brave Irishmen were to be found fighting for the protection of England as well as Ireland. Now that the authority was placed in the hands of the military in Ireland, who possibly did not understand the Irish people, the extreme penalty of twelve men having been executed was in danger of turning large numbers of people in sympathy with the rebels. He was firmly of the belief that the seeds of further revolt were sown by such excesses.⁴²

At Naas Urban District Council, Michael Fitzsimons, a member of Kildare County Council, proposed a motion condemning the rebellion outright but again Michael Gogarty, this time in attendance as town clerk, objected. Thomas Langan who was secretary of Kildare County Council and a member of the UDC suggested putting in a plea for clemency ‘along the lines that Mr. Redmond has already made’.⁴³ The motion as it finally passed condemned ‘the wickedness and insanity of the recent rising of Sinn Féiners... and we trust that Mr. Redmond will continue his

⁴¹ *K.O.*, 13 May 1916.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

efforts in securing clemency for these misguided Irishmen who took part in this unfortunate business'.⁴⁴

The pleas for clemency on the part of the local bodies was not supported by the *Kildare Observer*, whose editorial commented that, 'They [the rebels] and those who led the Dublin trouble must endure the consequences of their treachery'.⁴⁵ The *Leinster Leader* on the other hand called such pleas 'commendable indeed' and continued:

With their condemnatory resolutions they have combined a plea for mercy- a plea that correctly interprets the public feeling on the subject. It was generally recognised that in some cases leaders of the lamentable revolt would have to pay the extreme penalty but when over a dozen executions have followed in rapid succession the public conscience is stirred to protest.⁴⁶

The paper continued to try to strike a balance in its coverage of the rebellion, publishing pen-pictures of the executed leaders alongside reports of locals who were involved in the military task of suppressing the outbreak.⁴⁷ The *Kildare Observer* noted a local casualty of the revolt, a Private William Mulranney from Edenderry in the neighbouring King's County, who was killed in action fighting the rebels. He left a wife and child.⁴⁸

The battle for the hearts and minds of the Irish people was well and truly underway. Writing of the 'Political effects of the Rebellion', the *Kildare Observer* on 20 May noted:

There is already a tendency on the part of the more advanced local politicians to give expression to their views on the situation and now that the rigors of military law have been relaxed, men who hesitated to criticise the government and its Irish policy speak freely on the subject of the rebellion and its causes.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *L.L.*, 13 May 1916.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ *K.O.*, 13 May 1916.

⁴⁹ *K.O.*, 20 May 1916.

In the same edition it published a ‘ Naas soldier’s opinion of the rebels’ - a letter purportedly from a soldier in the trenches to a friend at home which went as follows:

British Expeditionary Force
France
6 May 1916

Dear John,

.... What do you think of the Sinn Féiners? They are a right lot of rotters – after ruining Ireland. You should hear the boys out here ‘giving out the pay’ about them....Thank God the National Volunteers had more sense or we were done altogether. I hope its bad effects won’t interfere with home rule.

Hoping this scribble will reach you in safety and won’t fall into the hands of the rebels (bad luck to them).⁵⁰

Even if this is the mere propaganda it sounds suspiciously like (how many Naas people ever used the term ‘rotter’?) it illustrates an early appreciation of the possible political consequences of the rebellion for the Irish parliamentary party and the prospects of home rule.

Kildare County Council met for the first time since the rising on 29 May 1916.⁵¹ George Wolfe, the vice-chairman of the council presided, in the absence of Matthew Minch, who was experiencing bad health which restricted his attendance at meetings for much of 1916 and 1917.⁵² Before there was any comment on the rising the meeting voted a motion of sympathy to Lord Frederick Fitzgerald on the death of his nephew, Desmond on active service in France, the tone and contents of which poignantly captures the attitudes and outlook of a large section of Irish opinion at a

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ K.C.C. mins. 29 May 1916.

⁵² K.C.C. mins. 14 June 1916 shows Minch only attended three out of twelve council meetings in the period June 1915 to June 1916.

moment just before such attitudes were swept aside (or were perhaps, silenced by the emergence of a new orthodoxy) by a new more militant set of opinions. The motion was proposed by George Wolfe and seconded by John Healy and stated:

That we, the members of the Kildare County Council, hereby express our sympathy with our colleague, Lord Frederick Fitzgerald, and the other members of the Leinster family in their sad bereavement through the death, while on active service in France, of Lord Desmond Fitzgerald, and we are confident that the sympathetic knowledge which is shared by an appreciative and grateful people, that he gave his life for his country after a brief but glorious period of service will tend to mitigate in some degree the great sorrow which they feel for the early ending of a promising and brilliant career.⁵³

The country he gave his life for was, of course, Ireland, though public recognition of such lives lost for the country in the Great War was to become very rare as the Sinn Féin revolution began to dominate politics in the southern part of the country.

There was another vote of sympathy to the family of John Field who had recently died. Field had been the councillor for the Kilcock electoral division since 1899. That the councillors had not lost their political dexterity is evident in the way his replacement on the council was handled. John Healy proposed and Charles Bergin seconded the motion:

That in accordance with article 12 (9), Application of Enactments Order, 1898, the council hereby declare the office of councillor for the county electoral division of Kilcock vacant, and that notice in writing signed by three members of the council, and countersigned by the secretary, be forthwith published by affixing a copy of the said notice on the outer door of the courthouse, Naas, and that the question of filling the vacancy be dealt with at 2 o'clock p.m.⁵⁴

Considering that the meeting didn't begin until 1.p.m. it is no surprise that when the time came there was only one nominee to the vacant seat. The minutes make clear that the replacement, Mr. James J. Lube, of the The Square, Kilcock, had been chosen at a public meeting in Rathcoffey on 19 May and he happened to be on hand

⁵³ K.C.C. mins. 29 May 1916.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

to make the necessary declaration.⁵⁵ In this manner the political elite of the county managed to control who joined their ranks. In the normal course of event they could even manage to avoid most electoral contests at the triennial elections to the council. When the next scheduled local elections, those of May 1917, were postponed, initially on account of the war in Europe, and in further years because of the crisis caused by the war of independence, the council elected in 1914 remained unchallenged electorally until 1920.

When the county council finally got around to its response to the rising it passed the following motion, proposed by John Healy and seconded by Patrick Phelan:

That we, the members of the Kildare County Council, strongly deprecate the recent deplorable action of a section of our countrymen in resorting to force of arms. At the same time we strongly appeal in what we consider the best interests of this country, and the empire as a whole, to the government to extend the greatest possible clemency to the rank and file, who we believe were deceived into taking part in the rising. That we take this opportunity of again recording our unabated confidence in Mr. J.E. Redmond and the Irish parliamentary party, and we thoroughly endorse the attitude they adopted during the crisis we are passing through.⁵⁶

Redmond and the Irish party were trying desperately at this point to convince the British government to adopt a restrained approach to the treatment of the participants in the rising, realising that the policy of executions and mass internment was rapidly turning an initially hostile Irish public into sympathisers with and supporters of, the rebels.⁵⁷

This process of alienation of the bulk of Irish people from the authorities and towards the rebels is very well expressed by the nationalist M.P. for the constituency of North Kildare, John O'Connor, speaking in the House of Commons adjournment debate in August 1916. He said:

⁵⁵ The declaration is quoted above, ch.1. pp 87-8.

⁵⁶ K.C.C. mins. 29 May 1916.

⁵⁷ Lyons 'The rising and after', pp 218-20.

What I wish to dwell upon for a few moments is what happened subsequently to the rebellion. The rebellion was suppressed. Executions took place in Dublin day after day. Had those executions been carried out on the first or second day in the heat of the suppression, I believe the Irish people would not have felt so strongly about them. It was the continued courts-martial, the object of these trials being brought out day after day, for weeks, some of them brought out in invalid chairs, put in a chair to be shot and under these circumstances executed, which aroused the feeling of compassion in the Irish people. The inhabitants of Dublin and other towns who greeted the arrival of the troops to suppress the rebellion afterwards became intense haters of the military who carried out those executions. I am afraid that that feeling still exists. It was aggravated by the arrests that followed. Let me give my own experience. I represent a county in which there was no rebellion, a county in which, except for one small corner of it, no men appeared in arms at all, yet every town and village in my constituency was ransacked, houses searched, people were insulted, and men were torn from their homes, thrown into prison and brought over to this country.⁵⁸

With this sense of the country slipping away from them, and in an attempt to get home rule back on the political agenda as quickly as possible, the Irish party even went so far as to agree to the temporary exclusion of six Ulster counties from the initial implementation of the home rule act.⁵⁹ The party's supporters on Kildare County Council loyally followed the leaders on this and endorsed the policy at a meeting in July. Patrick Phelan in proposing the motion of support said that:

As an elected body representing the people of the county they should not let the opportunity pass without expressing their opinion on the question of the temporary arrangement suggested by Mr. Lloyd George and accepted by the Irish party for the settlement of the Irish question.⁶⁰

Edward Hayden said that if it was to be a matter of permanent exclusion he would vote dead against. John Healy said that all the other members of the council would do likewise, as long as it was understood that it was not accepted as a permanent arrangement they could tolerate it. Phelan noted that even the nationalists of the counties to be excluded had agreed to the measure and had, so to speak, 'sacrificed

⁵⁸ *K.O.*, 26 Aug. 1916.

⁵⁹ Lyons, 'The rising and after', pp 221-2; Redmond was given to understand that the exclusion of the six counties would be temporary while Carson had it in writing that it would be permanent.

⁶⁰ *K.C.C. mins.* 14 July 1916; *K.O.*, 22 July 1916.

themselves in the interests of the people as a whole'.⁶¹ He was referring to the convention of northern nationalists held in Belfast on 23 June 1916 at which Redmond had, with great difficulty, persuaded delegates from the six counties which it was proposed to exclude from the provisions of the home rule act to go along with the measure on the grounds that the exclusion was only temporary.⁶²

George Wolfe, who chaired the county council meeting which discussed this development, said that as he understood it, the view was 'that under the operation of the Home Rule Act the people of the north, who showed a certain nervousness, would be given confidence in their administration, and he believed the administration would be carried out in a manner that would inspire confidence (hear, hear)'.⁶³

As it happened Lloyd George's proposals fell through and left a political vacuum in Ireland, with most of the leaders of Sinn Féin still interned in England and home rule stuck in a rut. The situation is well captured by the comment of the chief inspector of police that, 'Nationalists seem without a policy and though not showing any open hostility to England, show no signs of friendly feeling'.⁶⁴ This is quite a change from the 'loyal to the empire' statement of the previous January.⁶⁵

Meanwhile the county council continued to respond to new responsibilities that were imposed on it by the war. One of these was the appointment of a local committee under the Naval and Military War Pensions Act, 1915, which obliged the council to appoint a committee to consist of twenty-five members, five of whom were to be women, and to draft a scheme for the administration of the 'pensions,

⁶¹ *K.O.*, 22 July 1916.

⁶² T.W. Moody et.al., *A new history of Ireland vol. viii : chronology of Irish history to 1976* (Oxford, 1982) p. 391; Lyons, 'The rising and after' p. 221.

⁶³ *K.O.*, 22 July 1916.

⁶⁴ N.A. Chief Inspector's monthly report, Aug. 1916 (CO. 904/99).

⁶⁵ See footnote 12 above.

grants and allowances made in respect of the present war to officers and men and their dependents'.⁶⁶

The committee as appointed at the quarterly meeting of the council in August 1916 comprised members recommended to the county council by three external bodies and by the council itself. The Soldier's and Sailors' Help Society, the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association and the County Kildare Insurance Society each put forward five representatives, while the council itself nominated ten members, including five women, who were obviously not members of the council. It is worth giving all the names of the committee members for the insight it gives into the continuing links between the county council and the old grand jury families it replaced in local government after the Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898, but also because it is one of the earliest occasions of a significant role for women in the administration of a statutory committee in the county.

The council members on the committee were Matthew Minch, George Wolfe, Michael Fitzsimons, P.J. Doyle and Lord Frederick Fitzgerald. The five women appointed directly by the council were, Mrs N.J. Synnott, Naas, Mrs Smyth, Donadea, Miss Nash, Kilcock, Mrs Waldron, Kildare and Mrs Williams, Sallins, all from the northern end of the county. The Soldiers' and Sailors' Help Society put forward Sir Anthony Weldon, Athy, Lady Mayo, Straffan, Major Thackery, R.M. Curragh, Dr J.Kilbride, Athy, and William Kirkpatrick, Celbridge.

The Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association nominees were all women, namely; Mrs Loveband, Naas, Miss de Roebeck, Naas, Lady Weldon Athy (wife of Sir Anthony above), Mrs N. Uniacke, Monasterevan and Miss Thackery, Curragh (daughter of Major Thackery above). The County Kildare Insurance Society's

⁶⁶ K.C.C. mins. 30 May 1916.

members on the pensions committee were John Shiel O'Grady, Naas, secretary of the society, John Hennessey, Kildare, James Coffey, Clane, John Keogh, Ballymore and Thomas O'Neill, Newbridge.⁶⁷

The county secretary, Thomas Langan, who had replaced John T.Heffernan in the position in 1907, died suddenly in July 1916 aged forty-four. Apart from his council role he was also a member of the Ancient Order of Hibernians in Naas and an elected member of Naas Urban District Council. He also fulfilled the functions of secretary for the North Kildare Farming Society and the Kildare County Insurance Society.⁶⁸ The county accountant, W. E. Coffey replaced him as temporary secretary pending a permanent appointment in November 1916 which saw Coffey, being the only one of the three candidates for the position to attend the council meeting on the appointed day, unanimously elected to the position.⁶⁹

An issue of immediate concern to Kildare County Council during late 1916 and early 1917 was the necessity to increase food production in response to the extra demands made by the war. Early confidence that British naval superiority would ensure an uninterrupted supply of imported food to the British Isles had soon given way to a realisation that the war was not going to be a short one and that German submarine attacks were making importing enough food to maintain the islands of Britain and Ireland very difficult indeed.⁷⁰ In Ireland, the department of agriculture assumed responsibility for food production and one of its first moves was to set up a committee to report on food production. T.W. Russell, vice-president of the department, chaired the committee. Among the other seventeen members was

⁶⁷ K.C.C. mins. 21 Aug. 1916.

⁶⁸ *K.O.*, 22 July, 1916; *L.L.*, 22 July 1916.

⁶⁹ K.C.C. mins. 14 July 1916; *ibid.*, 21 Aug. 1916; *ibid.*, 20 Nov. 1916.

⁷⁰ D.Hoctor, *The department's story: a history of the department of agriculture* (Dublin, 1971), pp 99-100; M.E. Daly, *The first department: a history of the department of agriculture* (Dublin, 2002), p.52.

Kildare County Council member Joseph O'Connor, himself a farmer and a member of the Council of Agriculture.⁷¹

The committee was appointed in June 1915 and worked quickly to report by August the same year. The report proposed a variety of methods to encourage the following: (1) a marked increase in the area under tillage for human food crops and fodder for cattle, (2) improved breeding stocks of all kinds, (3) better access for farmers to machinery and implements, (4) the conservation of the artificial manure supply and (5) the maintenance of the Irish fishing industry.⁷² At this stage there was no element of compulsion in the proposals.

That the farmers of Ireland, and the county councils which represented their interests to such a significant degree, were anxious about what was planned to boost food production is indicated by the fact that late in 1916 a deputation from the Irish General Council of County Councils met the Chief Secretary, H.E. Duke to try to find out what was afoot. Kildare County Council vice-chairman George Wolfe was part of the delegation.⁷³ What they heard was not entirely to their liking. Duke outlined government proposals, under the Defence of the Realm Act, to demand compulsory tillage, the sequestering of land in the west of Ireland from graziers, the allocation of allotments to urban dwellers and the fixing of a minimum price for grains to encourage farmers to comply.⁷⁴

George Wolfe argued that since the lands of north Kildare were so suitable for raising cattle and sheep that if they were forced to break up farms with tillage of crops then the minimum prices should be offered for at least three years to compensate. Some others on the deputation felt that the compulsion should apply

⁷¹ For the background of the Council of Agriculture see M.E. Daly, *The first department*, pp. 17-8.

⁷² *Report of the departmental committee on food production in Ireland*, (Cd. 8046), vol. v, p.2.

⁷³ *K.O.*, 6 Jan. 1917.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

only to farms over 200 acres and that twenty five per cent of the acreage of such farms should be tilled. Wolfe felt that farmers might find this proportion too high.⁷⁵

Farmers had done very well out of the war thus far. The steep rise in prices for agricultural produce during the war is termed ‘spectacular’ by one historian,⁷⁶ and the contemporary opinion was that farmers as a class had reaped the benefits of the war without making any sacrifice in return. In a report which describes the country in general as being ‘in an unsettled condition’, the Inspector General of police noted that ‘cattle and agricultural produce continue to command high prices, and farmers generally are in prosperous circumstances’.⁷⁷

An editorial in the *Kildare Observer* criticised the farmers for their tardiness in turning to tillage and ‘the least that could be expected of our farmers is that they should perform the duty which so obviously rested upon them by increasing the production of food’.⁷⁸ Warming to its theme the paper hoped that the ‘farmers would view the situation from the national and less selfish standpoint, and would by breaking up the lands hitherto exclusively dedicated to the grazing of a few bullocks, provide employment and a more equitable distribution of the profits’.⁷⁹ Pressure came on Leinster farmers from their bishops as well. A number of them, including Dr. Foley of Kildare and Leighlin, issued a statement reminding them of their responsibility to feed the country and telling them ‘not to be selfish’ and ‘get on with the tillage’.⁸⁰

The compulsory tillage order was eventually issued in early January 1917. Former county council chairman S.J. Brown had been against the element of

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ H.D. Gibbon, ‘Economic and social history, 1850-1921’, in W.E. Vaughan, ed. *A new history of Ireland, vi: Ireland under the Union II, 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996), p. 344.

⁷⁷ N.A. Chief Inspector’s monthly report, June 1916, (CO 904/99).

⁷⁸ *K.O.*, 6 Jan. 1917.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ *Meath Chronicle*, 17 Feb. 1917.

compulsion in the order and spoke against this aspect of it at a Kildare County Agricultural Committee meeting and at a North Kildare Farming Society (of which he was chairman) meeting as well.⁸¹ However, when the order was made he advised farmers to abide by it, saying that he had commented on the order before it was out, 'to no avail'. Now that it was out 'he would suggest that they refrain as far as possible from criticising it'.⁸² Indeed it was already reported that there were public demonstrations of motor ploughing on Brown's land during January.⁸³ George Wolfe had been in favour of compulsion but on a small portion of land only.⁸⁴ The order settled on ten per cent of arable land, a big reduction on the twenty five per cent originally mooted.

The full scheme is outlined in the following advertisement carried in the local press for the scheme:⁸⁵

Farmers to the Rescue!

National Duty – Through various effects of the war, a great extra quantity of food grown at home this year is obviously necessary to secure our population against the danger of starvation. The farmer alone can supply the need.

Guarantee against loss – To secure him against the risk of loss in performing this vital duty the government have guaranteed him a fixed or contract price for wheat, oats and potatoes of the 1917 crop.

Means of production – Supplies of seeds and manure will be made available.

Compulsory Tillage – Under the Defence of the Realm Act, occupiers who hold 10 acres or over are required to cultivate in 1917 one tenth of the arable land on their holdings in addition to their tillage area of last year. That is, if you hold, say, 40 acres of which 30 are arable, you must till the same amount that you tilled last year and 3 acres in addition.

⁸¹ *L.L.*, 13 Jan. 1917; *K.O.*, 13 Jan. 1917.

⁸² *L.L.*, 27 Jan. 1917.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 20 Jan. 1917.

⁸⁴ *K.O.*, 13 Jan. 1917.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 27 Jan. 1917.

Arable Land – means land which is cultivated, or can be cultivated. Every farmer knows just what portion of his land can be cultivated. Therefore do not wait for the Inspector to tell you. Go ahead and ...

Plough Now – with the horses and the ploughs at present in the country. We have enough of both in most districts. Motor tractors are good but there are few of them yet in Ireland, and a supply may not get here in time. Don't wait for them. Use the horse and plough at once...

Get to work on your arable land. Leave the appealing and the asking for exemptions to others...

From: The Agricultural and Technical Instruction Department, Dublin, January 1917

A recent study of IRA activity in Kildare at that period quotes local activist Tom Harris as saying, 'there is no interest in Kildare in politics'.⁸⁶ The above might throw some light on what was of interest in the county.

County councillor Joseph O'Connor, who had been a member of the Departmental Committee on Food Production was clearly upset to see the recommendation of his committee on increased tillage made mandatory and called it a 'hardship to farmers', at a Kildare County Agricultural Committee meeting, but other councillors, including John Healy were willing to give the scheme time before condemning it.⁸⁷ The county council itself endorsed the scheme with some reservations at its next meeting.⁸⁸ They also dealt with a request from the LGB that as far as possible labourers be released from road works for agricultural work. The matter was referred to the county surveyor with directions to accede as far as possible to the wishes of the board.⁸⁹ A proposal was passed to ask the chief

⁸⁶ Terence Dooley, 'IRA activity in Kildare during the war of independence' in Wm. Nolan and Thos. McGrath (eds.) *Kildare – history and society* (Dublin, 2006), p. 646.

⁸⁷ *L.L.*, 27 Jan. 1917.

⁸⁸ K.C.C. mins. 14 Feb. 1917.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

secretary to make any army horses not immediately required for war available to farmers to help them fulfil their obligations under the compulsory tillage scheme.⁹⁰

Among the other suggestions as to how to deal with the shortage of labour was that the casual labour from the west of Ireland that had previously gone to Scotland and England, could be used now on the expanded tillage production in Leinster, especially in Kildare.⁹¹ An alternative was the use of machinery and the war and the labour shortage was a great stimulus to the development of tractors and motorised farm machinery, especially ploughs. North Kildare Farming Society, chaired by S.J. Brown bought a 'motor plough' for the use of its members⁹². The county agricultural committee tried to persuade the county council to purchase such a machine for hire among the farmers in other parts, but this did not happen.⁹³ Nevertheless a new business opportunity had emerged and the following advertisement appeared:

Tillage !

Sole agents for North Kildare

for

The Overtime farm tractor

&

Ransome 4-furrow ploughs

P.J. Gogarthy & Co. Naas⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ *K.O.*, 27 Jan. 1917.

⁹² Ibid., 17 Mar. 1917.

⁹³ K.C.C. fnce.cmte 30 Apr. 1917

⁹⁴ *K.O.*, 24 Mar. 1917.



Not everyone was happy to see such technological progress. The police reported in March that a motor plough had been extensively damaged by labourers near Kildare town, fearful that they would lose the work they had traditionally done.⁹⁵ The police also reported that the tillage order was being largely followed: ‘There is not much grumbling on the whole about the tillage order’,⁹⁶ and, ‘the tillage scheme is very fairly being carried out’.⁹⁷

A number of points emerge from a study of this issue. Firstly, the farmers of Kildare had a great deal of effective representation. Most county councillors were substantial farmers. They were further represented by the General Council of County Councils which directly lobbied the Chief Secretary on their behalf. At local level they had the statutory county committee of agriculture and their own independent and very well run, North Kildare Farming Society. South Kildare had an equivalent organisation. Secondly, farming was an extremely profitable business during these war years. These profits were available to those who merely grazed cattle and to those who took their responsibility for food production seriously and engaged in

⁹⁵ N.A. Sub-inspector’s report for Kildare, Mar. 1917, (CO904/102).

⁹⁶ N.A. Sub-inspector’s report for Kildare, Jan. 1917, (CO 904/102).

⁹⁷ N.A. Sub-inspector’s report for Kildare, Feb. 1917, (CO 904/102).

tillage voluntarily or under the compulsion of the ministerial order. Finally, the only shadow on the economic horizon for farmers at this time was the labour shortage and the upward pressure on wages this created. The consequences of this will be considered later in this chapter.

At this point it may be useful to return to the middle of 1916 to pick up on another issue that was on the minds of people in Kildare, and specifically, the minds of its county councillors. For most of 1916 the eyes of the world were focussed, not on Ireland's domestic dispute with the British empire, but on the battlefields of Europe as the struggle for a breakthrough in the deadlocked war led to the massive British offensive at the Somme in July. Many Kildare men were involved in that offensive and some, like Private Andrew Farrell from Naas, lost their lives, while others, such as Private J. Kelly were honoured for their part in the attack.⁹⁸

In September, a Lieutenant J.V. Holland of the 7th Leinsters, a native of Athy, won a Victoria Cross for his part in an assault on German trench positions at Guillemont in the Somme valley. There was a wider significance to this achievement as it represented the first battle honour to go to the 16th Division and the 47th 'Irish' Brigade which had been promoted by John Redmond as the unit the National Volunteers should properly enlist to.⁹⁹

Holland's hometown of Athy was very proud of his achievement and arranged a ceremony of celebration for him on his return to Ireland early in 1917. The Athy Urban Council organised the event and local county council member Matthew Minch, even though he had been absent from most meetings throughout 1916 due to poor health, was instrumental in having the county council involved as well. The finance committee gave full authority to Minch to arrange an address and a

⁹⁸ James Durney, *Far from the short grass: Kildaremen in the two world wars* (Naas, 1999), pp 69-71.

⁹⁹ Terence Denman, *Ireland's unknown soldiers: the 16th (Irish) Division in the great war, 1914-1918*, (Dublin, 1992), pp 82-100.

presentation on behalf of the council.¹⁰⁰ The presentation was of a silver tea service inscribed, 'Presented by Co. Kildare to Lieut. John Vincent Holland V.C. Leinster Regiment, the first Kildare man to earn the Victoria Cross in the great world war, 1916'.¹⁰¹ The address included a reminder to all Irishmen at the front (Minch's own son Capt. Sydney Basil Minch among them) that, 'they are fighting Ireland's battle no less than England's'.¹⁰²

The address and presentation to Lt. Holland on behalf of the county council were not formally approved by the full council meeting until a week after the celebration in Athy.¹⁰³ There was no dissent about either but it is worth noting that Minch was the only county councillor who attended the function and it may be valid to speculate that earlier in the war, when support for Irish involvement in it was much stronger among the population in general, there might have been more made by the council of the whole issue of the county's first V.C. award than was the case. It may reflect the changing political realities and perceptions as the war moved into its fourth year.

Just as Kildare was honouring its great war-hero the by-election result in North Roscommon on 3 February 1917 was signalling, however ambiguously, a new set of political loyalties emerging on the Irish scene. Count Plunkett's victory over the Irish parliamentary party, while it may not have been a clear endorsement of Sinn Féin's new way, was a severe blow to John Redmond and to his supporters and their older ways.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ K.C.C. fnce.cmtc. 13 Dec. 1916; *ibid.* 20 Dec. 1916.

¹⁰¹ *L.L.*, 17 Feb. 1917.

¹⁰² *K.O.*, 17 Feb. 1917.

¹⁰³ K.C.C. mins. 14 Feb. 1917.

¹⁰⁴ Lyons, 'The new nationalism, 1916-18', in W.E. Vaughan, ed. *A new history of Ireland, vi: Ireland under the Union 11, 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996), p. 226 (henceforth cited as 'The new nationalism').

Throughout the middle of 1917 the local papers reported the establishment of Sinn Féin clubs in the county. Branches were set up in Carbury, incorporating Prosperous and Robertstown as well.¹⁰⁵ Nearby Timahoe had its own branch.¹⁰⁶ The Naas Sinn Féin branch styled itself the ‘Sean Connolly Sinn Féin Branch’ after a local man, Sean Connolly, who died while leading a charge against City Hall in Dublin in Easter week 1916.¹⁰⁷ A meeting in August 1917 of the recently formed Newbridge branch was described as ‘largely attended’.¹⁰⁸ In no instances is there evidence of sitting county councillors attending the Sinn Féin meetings mentioned. There was a series of letters in the *Leinster Leader* which debated a recent discussion at the Naas Board of Guardians, of the Sinn Féin policy ‘as an alternative to parliamentarianism’¹⁰⁹ but none of the county councillors was involved. In October 1917 at the founding of a Sinn Féin branch in Ballymore-Eustace a letter from the local Catholic curate commented that since ‘the archbishop said a few months ago that the Irish parliamentary party had sold the country, I believe that the Sinn Féin party is now the only real nationalist party’.¹¹⁰

The growth of Sinn Féin in Co. Kildare at this time was carefully monitored by the police and their evidence for when it occurred matches that from the local press. Early in the year there was no sign of any activity. It was reported that there was no attempt to mark the first anniversary of the Easter rising in Kildare except for

¹⁰⁵ *L.L.*, 23 June, 1917.

¹⁰⁶ *L.L.*, 30 June, 1917.

¹⁰⁷ Brian McCabe, ‘Sean Connolly – first rebel casualty of the 1916 Rising’ on www.kildare.ie/ehistory/2006/05/sinn_fein_sean_connolly_br.asp (accessed 2 Jan. 2007); Connolly is one of the seven people commemorated on the ‘1916 Plaque’ in the Abbey Theatre where he was a well-known actor before his involvement in the rising.

¹⁰⁸ *L.L.*, 25 Aug. 1917.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 11 Aug. 1917; *ibid.*, 18 Aug. 1917.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6 Oct. 1917; the writer was presumably referring to the declaration of 8 May 1917 against partition signed by 16 Catholic and 3 Protestant bishops: see T.W. Moody, *Chronology of Irish history*, p. 303.

the raising of five republican flags in various locations.¹¹¹ By July the sub-inspector's report for the county comments:

All political societies outside of Sinn Féin have not been in evidence. The latter has only four clubs and the wave of Sinn Féinism has not come to Kildare yet, tho' there's no doubt a Sinn Féin candidate w'd be elected if there was a parliamentary election.¹¹²

In September it was reported that 'Sinn Féin is active' and that a paid organiser, Edward Fleming, was working with Michael O'Kelly, editor of the *Leinster Leader*, and Jack Fitzgerald, chairman of the county board of the G.A.A. to spread the Sinn Féin message in Kildare.¹¹³ The close association of Sinn Féin activity and G.A.A. events is emphasised several times in the police reports and from now the sub-inspectors begin to list the G.A.A. as one of the 'political organisations' reported on every month. The efforts of the three obviously paid off as the following table of the police estimates of Sinn Féin membership for 1917 suggest:

Table 1. Sinn Féin branches and membership in Kildare, July-Dec. 1917¹¹⁴

	Branches	Membership
July	4	205
Sept.	9	405
Oct.	14	745
Nov.	14	805
Dec.	15	851

The real growth in Sinn Féin membership in Kildare did not happen until 1918 and in response to the direct threat of conscription. Even in late 1917 the police assessment of the nature of Sinn Féin in the county concludes, 'Sinn Féinism in this

¹¹¹ N.A. Sub-inspector's report for Kildare, Mar. 1917 (CO. 904/102); *ibid.* Apr. 1917, (CO. 904/102).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, July, 1917 (CO. 904/102).

¹¹³ *Ibid.* Sept. 1917 (CO. 904/102).

¹¹⁴ N.A. Compiled from the sub-inspector's monthly reports for the relevant period; the report for Aug. 1917 is missing: (CO.904/102).

county is not considered to be of a revolutionary nature, with very few exceptions'.¹¹⁵

Dr. Foley, the bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, at a confirmation ceremony in Naas in September 1917, issued a very clear directive to his flock about the lack of a morally acceptable basis for the policy of revolution then being developed by Sinn Féin. He impressed 'on his congregation the duty of subjects to obey the supreme civil authority and pointed out that even in an extreme case of oppression there must be a competent authority behind a revolution to make it lawful; and that in the circumstances of Ireland, rebellion was absolutely unjustifiable from the point of view of divine law'.¹¹⁶

The police report of these remarks is in the context of a general complaint from them about the ambiguous message coming from the clergy to their flock about the issue. 'Young priests support it and a few bishops are beginning to soften their line on it'.¹¹⁷ Bishop Foley continued his opposition and repeated his warnings to his flock in almost exactly the same terms in his Lenten pastoral early the next year.¹¹⁸

The attitude of Kildare County Council to Sinn Féin's policies is most clearly illustrated by its response to an attempt by the newly elected Count Plunkett to shape the Sinn Féin agenda. Plunkett sent a circular to all the local government bodies inviting them to send delegates to a conference in the Mansion House in April 1917. Though part of a more complex process by which relations between the various nationalist groups who had either been involved in the Easter rising or had subsequently supported its aims,¹¹⁹ to the local authorities in Kildare the invitation was seen as simply being from elements trying to supplant the Irish parliamentary

¹¹⁵ N.A. Sub-inspector's report for Kildare, Dec. 1917 (CO. 904/102).

¹¹⁶ *I.L.*, 5 Oct., 1917; N.A. Insp. general's monthly report for Sept. 1917, (CO 904/103).

¹¹⁷ N.A. Insp. general's monthly report for Sept. 1917, (CO 904/103).

¹¹⁸ *K.O.*, 23 Feb. 1918.

¹¹⁹ Lyons, 'The new nationalism', pp 229-31.

party. When the circular was discussed and rejected at a meeting of Athy Poor Law Guardians, John Conlon, a member of Kildare County Council responded as follows:

He did not think that the members wanted to have anything to do with Count Plunkett or his new policy. There was an old policy before the country which the great majority of the people had supported for years and of which they had seen the advantages.... We have seen the results of the constitutional movement for years and would not abandon it now. Count Plunkett was a dreamer and his policy of complete liberty was not that of Grattan, O'Connell, Butt, Parnell nor was it Redmond's policy.... He did not think they should encourage those idle dreamers who were misleading the young people of the country and leading them on to revolution and socialistic paths which would lead to nothing but ruin and desolation for Ireland.¹²⁰

When the same circular was discussed at Naas No.1 Rural District Council, Kildare county councillors were again prominent in rejecting it, though there was more division of opinion about it here. We can hear some of the genuine surprise and dismay in the response of George Wolfe to what Plunkett was proposing. 'Apparently his idea was to do away with parliament and to veto the Irish party'.¹²¹ On abstentionism he said, 'If they looked back over many years they would see the benefits to Ireland by the Irish Party in the House of Commons.'¹²² One of those who spoke in favour of sending a delegation to the conference was Edward Moran, better known as Eamon Ó Modhrain who in later years was a prominent Sinn Féin member of the county council. Here, however his view did not prevail and the circular was rejected.

The only county councillor to advocate sending delegates to the conference was James O'Connor of Celbridge, whose brother Art, an assistant county surveyor employed by the council, would later be elected as Sinn Féin M.P. for the Kildare South constituency in the general election of 1918. At the meeting of Celbridge no. 1

¹²⁰ *K.O.*, 24 Mar. 1917.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 7 Apr., 1917

¹²² *Ibid.*

RDC which debated the issue, one of the members put the matter in the simple terms in which many understood it: 'I think Count Plunkett wants to get at Mr.Redmond', to which James O'Connor replied, 'An English parliament failed to settle this country and I think the only thing is to appeal to Europe' (the last remark was a reference to the emerging idea that Ireland's case for independence might be made to any future peace conference called to end the current European war).¹²³ A former county council member, Mr. Ronaldson responded that 'They (Sinn Féin) don't want a settlement, they want a republic'.¹²⁴

It is a useful historical perspective to remind ourselves that to those living their lives in early 1917 there was still no clear sense of what a Sinn Féin policy of boycotting Westminster would mean in reality and that it was as yet merely a suggestion, and one that many observers must have found very hard to imagine in practice. The long years during which Irish nationalism had seemed like a homogenous and familiar thing were now over but the divisions into which it would split were as yet unclear.

When the issue was finally discussed at a Kildare County Council meeting in May, the conference was already over and the council treated the circular as 'not read' on the proposal of George Wolfe, seconded by John Conlon. There was some disquiet expressed about this by Patrick Phelan, but no counter proposal was put and the issue was quietly dropped.¹²⁵

We get a further insight into the political thinking of the councillors as they responded to the Irish Convention, recently called for by the British government as its latest initiative to try to bring into reality the Home Rule Act which had been passed in 1914. At a special meeting to discuss the matter (held immediately

¹²³ Ibid., 21 Apr., 1917.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ K.C.C. mins. 21 May 1917.

following the annual general meeting which again returned Minch and Wolfe as chairman and vice-chairman respectively) most of the councillors supported Patrick Phelan's call for the people of Ireland to 'avail of the convention'.¹²⁶ James O'Connor was again the one dissenting voice. He called for an election to see what the Irish people really thought, but got no support for this.¹²⁷

Coincidentally this council meeting was held on the very day on which the final release took place of Irish prisoners held for offences connected with the rebellion, and the councillors did refer to the continued detentions, obviously unaware that they were being released as they spoke. Patrick Phelan proposed a motion 'protesting against the treatment of Countess Markiewicz and the other Irish prisoners'.¹²⁸ In doing so he said that 'he had no sympathy with the rising of Easter week or with the Sinn Féin movement, but every Irishman must protest at the treatment of these Irish men'.¹²⁹ John Healy said in supporting the motion that, 'to ask Sinn Féin to the convention whilst their leaders lay in prison and were treated as convicts was simply ridiculous. By keeping them in prison the government were adding every day to the ranks of their supporters'.¹³⁰

The widening gulf between the opinions of the constitutional nationalist such as those on Kildare County Council and Sinn Féin supporters, is well illustrated by the fact that Sinn Féin turned down the invitation to be part of the convention and six months later Matthew Minch, this time speaking on behalf of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce, of which he was chairman, said that he was very optimistic about the

¹²⁶ Ibid., 16 June, 1917.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

outcome of the convention. He went on to say that, ‘with a little give and take by all parties a solution would be found with good results for the country’.¹³¹

The more advanced nationalists in the county were more sceptical about the convention. The *Leinster Leader*, now becoming more forthright in its support for Sinn Féin, commented in an editorial that, ‘The government which called the convention had already refused to implement one of its own statutes [The Home Rule Act] because of the menace of a tiny minority of unionists, ...so... how can we be confident that it will implement the will of the Irish Convention’.¹³²

1918 opened in Kildare with the first serious agrarian disturbances in the county in many years. Laurence Ginnell, M.P. for Westmeath addressed a meeting in Naas organised by the Sinn Féin club, where he was introduced as ‘the man who was out to smash the ranches’.¹³³ A farm at Blackhall, Clane, came up for sale and many locals felt it should be broken up into smaller plots and divided among tenants and labourers. A public meeting was held at the farm and was attended by two county councillors, Patrick Phelan and John Healy, among others. The result was a decision to boycott the sale. Also among the attendance, and the one credited by the police with leading the decision to boycott, was Art O’Connor.

There was a marked increase in the instances of cattle driving in Kildare over the next two months. Reports in the local press attest to this.¹³⁴ The police explained the reason behind this increase as being due to ‘Sinn Féin’ influence. They also say that, ‘There is a good deal of unease among the labourers and small farmers in various parts of the county who are anxious to have some of the grazing ranches divided amongst them. This spirit of unrest is encouraged by Arthur O’Connor of

¹³¹ *I.L.*, 19 Jan. 1918.

¹³² *L.L.*, 28 July, 1917.

¹³³ *K.O.*, 26 Jan. 1918.

¹³⁴ *L.L.*, 12 Jan. 1918; *ibid.*, 19 Jan. 1918; *ibid.*, 26 Jan. 1918.

Celbridge and is no doubt the outcome of advice given by Mr Ginnell at the Naas meeting on 18 January'.¹³⁵

An incident that particularly worried the police occurred at Donadea where those doing the actual driving of the cattle were part of a group of seventy men who marched in military formation.¹³⁶ The few policemen in attendance did not think it wise to intervene.¹³⁷ A serious case of cattle driving at Kill, led to an all-night patrol of police for weeks in an effort to quell the unrest.¹³⁸ The tactic worked in this instance and indeed the phenomenon of cattle-driving as a whole had died out in the county by March with the police commenting, 'Cattle-driving is probably at an end'.¹³⁹

That the political outlook of county Kildare was still very much in flux in these early days of 1918 is evidenced by a meeting that took place in the town hall, Naas on 22 January, held for the purposes of 'considering what steps should be taken to avert the danger of a shortage of food to the district and also to consider the general condition of the food supply in Ireland'.¹⁴⁰ The north Kildare Sinn Féin 'executive' convened the meeting and its posters expressly stated that it was a non-political event. Local Sinn Féin activist, and later IRA member, Pat Dunne¹⁴¹ proposed, and James O'Connor of Kildare County Council seconded, that John Healy of the county council, chair the meeting.¹⁴² Kildare county councillors rarely found themselves on a joint platform with Sinn Féin members.

¹³⁵N.A. Sub-inspector's report for Kildare, Feb. 1918 (CO. 904/106).

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ N.A. Sub-inspector's report for Kildare, Mar. 1918 (CO 904/106).

¹⁴⁰ *K.O.*, 26 Jan. 1918.

¹⁴¹ Durney, *On the one road*, p. 53.

¹⁴² *K.O.*, 26 Jan. 1918.

Another issue which tended to unite nationalists of all hues was now coming into sharp focus, namely, the threat of conscription. Lloyd George may or may not have linked the introduction of conscription to home rule¹⁴³ but in reality it was probably the single most effective recruiting factor for Sinn Féin in Ireland. As the Kildare sub-inspector Kerry Supple put it, ‘Sinn Féin is seen as a bulwark against conscription’.¹⁴⁴ As he reported, ‘The priests and all nationalists have taken up the anti-conscription agitation warmly.... For the time being the Sinn Féin party have united with the ordinary nationalists in condemning conscription’.¹⁴⁵ In fact, the Irish party and Sinn Féin did not share anti-conscription meetings but held separate protests in Naas, on 14 April and 28 April, respectively.¹⁴⁶

The Irish party, now without its long-time leader, John Redmond, who died in March, immediately saw the threat to its own support from conscription and the political capital Sinn Féin could make of the issue. They began vigorously campaigning against the move.

The Irish party protest at Naas gives us a clear picture of the political views of its supporters at this critical point in the struggle for the allegiance of the population in general. Most of the members of Kildare County Council were present. Michael Fitzsimons and John Healy spoke in favour of the war aims but against conscription. George Wolfe, the Protestant landlord and nationalist then spoke at length and it is worth quoting him in detail for what it shows us about how many moderate nationalists felt at this time. ‘He spoke’, he said,

As one who believed in the justice of the war, and still did so, (and) he had given all the help he could to get men to join the colours. Compelling people was another question, however (hear, hear). He had attended recruiting meetings in snow and

¹⁴³ Lyons, ‘The new nationalism’, p. 235.

¹⁴⁴ N.A. Sub-inspector’s report for Kildare, Apr., 1918 (CO 904/106).

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ *L.L.*, 20 Apr., 1918; *ibid.*, 27 Apr., 1918.

rain - he did not know how many times. For many months they had very good returns in recruiting, and then they had come up against a hard rock. Why? Because the people began to think that the government was not true to its promises. What was done with regard to Mr. Redmond's offer of the volunteers when he said that he had no doubt that many of the men after home service would go abroad voluntarily and serve. The government accepted the offer and said that after the first 100,000 men had been trained from Ireland, Lord Kitchener would take the volunteers in hand.¹⁴⁷ They did not do so and it became clear after a while that they had no intention of doing so. That had a bad effect on voluntary recruiting; and another thing was the favouritism shown to a northern section. Suppose nationalist officers had behaved as the Curragh officers (cries of 'Gough'¹⁴⁸) had behaved about four years ago, would they have got off as light as the Curragh officers did? ('No'). Would they have been promoted and given charge of divisions to carry on the war with? ('They'd have been shot')¹⁴⁹

Another of Wolfe's points referred to the hurt felt by nationalists at the appointment of unionist leader Sir Edward Carson to the cabinet in 1914. It was, he said, 'not encouraging recruiting to find the greatest enemy of Irish liberty a member of the government'.¹⁵⁰ His final argument against conscription came directly from his experience as a farmer. He wondered how, if conscription came to pass, would the country be able to fulfil its obligations under the compulsory tillage order, since the requirements of the conscription would, 'counting himself as a workman, [leave him with] only three men left to carry on'.¹⁵¹

Moderate nationalists such as these members of Kildare County Council were still firmly committed to the war against Germany and opposed conscription on specific political and practical grounds. They felt threatened by the rise of the much more radical Sinn Féin point of view and felt as if conscription was the last straw in handing over their supporters into the hands of that party. There was still among the

¹⁴⁷ Presumably Wolfe means that Kitchener would accept the National Volunteers on the same basis as the UVF were accepted as the 36th Division.

¹⁴⁸ Sir Hubert Gough, a major who was involved in the 'Curragh Mutiny' in Apr. 1914; see above p. 199.

¹⁴⁹ *K.O.*, 20 Apr. 1918.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

moderates the illusion that their cause could be saved and a vigorous campaign against conscription was part of their plan to regain the ground lost. Michael Fizzsimons stressed the unity of the country on the issue and said that, 'Sectional differences have disappeared, and now the aim and object of the people of Ireland was to show a united front against the attempt of the government to conscript the country'.¹⁵² Such unity as there was benefited Sinn Féin more than it did the Irish party, bringing the radicals onto platforms with the moderates and helping to make the more extreme views acceptable to a wider constituency than heretofore.

The backing of the Irish hierarchy for the anti-conscription stance was probably more important in putting Sinn Féin in a more favourable light among the supporters of more moderate nationalists. On 18 April 1918 a joint conference of nationalists, including the Irish party, Sinn Féin, Labour and some independents, was held at the Mansion House in Dublin to devise a strategy to oppose conscription. A delegation consisting of Eamonn de Valera for Sinn Féin, John Dillon for the Irish party and the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Laurence O'Neill, left the Dublin event to travel to Maynooth, where a meeting of the bishops was taking place. At Maynooth the bishops agreed to ask all the priests of the country to celebrate a special mass of intercession on the following Sunday, 'to avert the scourge of conscription'.¹⁵³ A significant feature of the Maynooth meeting was the warm reception given to de Valera by the students, the more senior of whom would have been taught Mathematics by him.¹⁵⁴ The police had been noticing for a considerable time now the extent of the support that the 'younger clergy' were giving to Sinn Féin and de Valera's reception by the students probably reflects this as well.¹⁵⁵ The bishops also

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ *I.L.*, 19 Apr. 1918.

¹⁵⁴ P.J. Corish, *Maynooth College, 1795-1995* (Dublin, 1995), p. 303.

¹⁵⁵ N.A. Inspector General's monthly report, Sept. 1917 (CO 904/103).

asked the priests to help in the organising of the ‘Solemn Pledge’ against conscription which was to be part of the joint strategy of the parties.¹⁵⁶

Meanwhile in Kildare, the county council, at a special meeting called for the purpose, passed the following motion:

That we, the members of the Kildare County Council, regard the application of the Compulsory Military Service Act to Ireland without the consent of the Irish people as oppressive and an outrage on the national rights of the country. We therefore record our emphatic protest against the enactment, and resolve to oppose it by every means in our power.¹⁵⁷

The moderate nationalists on the council were fully behind the motion..

Matthew Minch, in proposing the motion, said the following:

Personally he would like to say that from the beginning of the war his sentiments were altogether on the side of the Allies because he believed it to be a just and righteous war. His sons had joined the colours with his full approval because he considered it right that they should give their services in defence of small nations. He believed it was Ireland’s as well as England’s war – a war to crush militarism. He was from the beginning in favour of the policy of their late leader, Mr. Redmond, and he was there that day holding the same views. He was always opposed to coercion of this country in any shape or form. He was opposed to this latest act of coercion that was now proposed.... He had advocated voluntary military service and he had supported all war charities such as the Red Cross, but he was determined to oppose conscription in any form.¹⁵⁸

John Healy, whose nephew was a casualty of the war, likewise said that he was in favour of the war but against forcing men to join up. ‘They saw that the finest of the young men of the country had gone to fight under the impression that they were fighting for the rights of small nations’.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ *I.L.*, 19 Apr. 1918.

¹⁵⁷ K.C.C. mins. 29 Apr. 1918.

¹⁵⁸ K.C.C. mins. 29 Apr. 1918; *L.L.*, 4 May 1918; *K.O.*, 4 May 1918.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Joseph O'Connor (not James, Art O'Connor's brother), said that at the beginning of the war 'all his sympathies were in favour of the allies,'¹⁶⁰ but that,

He had changed his mind since that. The hollow and hypocritical way in which the [government] had treated the Irish representatives and their leaders' offer of Irish aid was a gross scandal. Their representatives were insulted. When the late lamented Irish leader offered the services of the volunteers the offer was sneered at, and they were practically told that they could win the war without them. Now, when things had changed, in a fit of panic they had lost their heads. Sir Edward Carson had set an example to them of preaching rebellion. The people could now claim a distinguished example in rebelling against this act. Sir Edward Carson was promoted to the highest position whilst for the same thing other men were put with their backs to a wall and shot. It was a cruel thing to see that there was one law for one section of the people and one law for the rest.¹⁶¹

It is worth remembering that these are the words of the same respectable farmer who had proposed, in 1914, that the county council give financial help to the Kildare Hunt to allow it to continue to function after they had fallen into debt.¹⁶² Here was no rebel, but an ordinary man responding and changing his attitude in response to his perception of events as they unfolded and as he became aware of them.

George Wolfe re-iterated much of what he had said at the Naas public meeting some weeks earlier¹⁶³ and added that he was not opposed to conscription in principle, but that it was appropriate only in a free country which had control of its own destiny. He said:

Any free country possessed the right to call upon its people to resist foreign invasion. But this matter was different. We [are] not free. We had given largely and more freely of our manhood in proportion to other countries in defence of what we considered right: - 130,000 men, he would say, had answered the call.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² K.C.C. mins. 23 Nov., 1914.

¹⁶³ See note 151 above.

¹⁶⁴ K.C.C. mins. 29 Apr., 1918; *L.L.*, 4 May, 1918; *K.O.*, 4 May, 1918.

Wolfe went on to repeat the claim he made at the Naas public meeting, that the government and Lord Kitchener had reneged on a promise to set up the national volunteers as a distinct division on a par with the UVF-based 36th once 100,000 Irish men had enlisted in other units. This he believed was based on a basic mistrust of the Irish on the part of the English authorities. He may have been right about that, given some of the comments attributed to Kitchener and Lord Mayo during 1914,¹⁶⁵ but Wolfe went on to extract a sort of an explanation from this mistrust, for the political unrest that broke out in Ireland at Easter 1916. He said that:

If one treated a servant as a thief or a nation as a pack of rogues, what could one expect from them? The government had simply got what it deserved.¹⁶⁶

He then repeated his earlier assertion that the county could not afford the man-power loss and that the tillage campaign needed the men just as urgently as the army did. Another councillor, John Kelly, put that point quite starkly, if perhaps a little melodramatically:

When the farmers were appealed to to increase their tillage, they had responded. The reward for that was that the remaining men were to be made fodder for the guns whilst the crops would be left to rot. The demon of famine would stalk the land if this insane measure were enforced; every Irish industry would be destroyed, and the end would be the extermination of the Irish race – Protestant and Catholic.¹⁶⁷

The motion condemning conscription was carried unanimously.

In spite of this mobilisation of moderate opinion, support for Sinn Féin in Kildare continued to grow. It has been pointed out that relative to many parts of the

¹⁶⁵ See chapter 3 above p. 215.

¹⁶⁶ K.C.C. mins. 29 Apr., 1918 and *L.L.*, 4 May, 1918 and *K.O.*, 4 May, 1918.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

country Sinn Féin support in Kildare was slow to begin and limited in its extent.¹⁶⁸

This may be true but nevertheless the reported numbers of its clubs and followers grew as 1918 progressed. According to the sub-inspector's reports for Kildare for the period the support for Sinn Féin grew as follows:

Table 2. Sinn Féin branches and membership, Feb.-Sept. 1918¹⁶⁹

	Clubs	Members
Feb.	18	1045
Mar.	21	1327
April	21	1386
May	23	1632
June	24	1714
July	25	1814
Sept.	25	1771

In May the government tried to take the heat out of the anti-conscription campaign by arresting many of the Sinn Féin leaders, including de Valera, Griffith, and Countess Markievicz, while accusing them of being involved in a conspiracy with Germany to damage Britain's war effort.¹⁷⁰ Nationalist opinion was ostensibly outraged, though there may be some truth in the police opinion that 'moderate nationalists are reported to be pleased, though afraid to say so'.¹⁷¹ It is perfectly understandable why such moderates would be pleased to see their more effective and better-supported rivals for local influence taken out of the scene for a few months. Nevertheless it is a mark of how the political tenor of the country had changed that the county councillors, in their motion condemning the arrests, were forced into so much ambiguity in order to express their opinions.

¹⁶⁸ Terence Dooley, 'IRA activity in Kildare during the war of independence' in Wm. Nolan and Thos. McGrath (eds.), *Kildare – history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 2006) pp. 625-51.

¹⁶⁹ Compiled from N.A. Sub-inspector's monthly reports for Kildare (CO 904/106) and (CO 904/107); see above p. 253.

¹⁷⁰ See Moody et.al., *Chronology of Irish history*, p. 395.

¹⁷¹ N.A. Insp. general's monthly report for May 1918 (CO 904/106).

The tensions even within the ranks of the constitutional nationalists on Kildare County Council were evident at the beginning of the meeting which considered the arrests, when John Healy from Clane challenged the chairman, Matthew Minch, about the decision of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce, of which the latter was a member, to issue an address of welcome to the new Lord Lieutenant, Lord Ffrench, on the occasion of his official inauguration in Dublin.¹⁷² Lord Ffrench had been specifically sent to Ireland with widespread powers of coercion that were little short of martial law.¹⁷³

In a belligerent tone almost unheard in the council chamber since the earliest days of 1899, at least in a purely political debate, Healy proposed that the council dissociate itself from the chamber of commerce's welcome address and he asked if Minch was present at the Dublin Chamber meeting which decided to 'present an address to Lord Ffrench, military governor of Ireland, who had been sent to this country for the purpose of enforcing Lloyd George's blood-tax and trampling upon the liberties of the Irish people'.¹⁷⁴ Matthew Minch then had to endure the following while he awaited a chance to reply:

It was remarkable that after 100 years of British government in Ireland we should here today, in the twentieth century get military rule again, but they were not going to present an address of welcome to anyone who came to enforce conscription. Their chairman was a member and past president of the Chamber of Commerce. Every man had a right to his opinion, and the chairman had a perfect right to his, but if he elected to remain neutral as a member of the Chamber of Commerce, and by his absence to allow the people to think he favoured the action in welcoming Lord Ffrench, he (Mr. Healy) wanted to make it plain that his attitude did not represent the views of Kildare County Council, nor of the people of Kildare, and [he wanted] to give the chairman the opportunity of saying whether he approved or disapproved of this action of the Chamber of Commerce. The people expected that he (chairman) would have been present at the meeting of the Chamber. The action of

¹⁷² *I.I.*, 16 May, 1918; *F.J.*, 16 May 1918; K.C.C. mins. 27 May 1918.

¹⁷³ See F.S.L. Lyons, 'The new nationalism, 1916-18', p. 236.

¹⁷⁴ *L.L.*, 1 June, 1918.

the Dublin Chamber of Commerce did not reflect the feelings of the people of Dublin, of Ireland, and certainly not of the people of that county, Kildare: and he wanted to ensure that in expressing any support for the resolution of welcome it would be taken that the chairman expressed that opinion solely on his own, and not on behalf of the county council of Kildare or of the people of Kildare.¹⁷⁵

Patrick Phelan seconded Healy and Minch got a chance to reply:

I was rather taken aback by my friend Mr. Healy, that he found it necessary to question me or my national principles, either now or long ago, in my representation of the people of Kildare. I did not vote or support or approve of the resolution to which he refers. I was not present on the occasion, and I know nothing about it than what I saw in the papers.¹⁷⁶

Healy was having none of it. He countered:

The people told me you were neutral, and I think it would be your business to be there. You have a right to your opinion, and there is no man in the county for whom I have a greater respect for over forty years; but I believe it was your duty, and the people told me you should be there. You, the chairman of the county council of Kildare, should not be neutral.¹⁷⁷

Minch finished by saying:

You could not say I was neutral. I was not at the meeting. I really feel a bit hurt that being known here in Co. Kildare, my old friend Mr. Healy, should find it necessary to question me. I am now, as I have always been and will be, I hope, a sincere nationalist. Is there anything else you wish to ask me.¹⁷⁸

Matthew Minch was not the only member of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce anxious to dissociate himself from the address of welcome, with twenty-one members of the organisation signing a petition asking for it to be rescinded.¹⁷⁹

Among those opposed to it was Alderman Alfie Byrne.¹⁸⁰

The meeting of Kildare County Council finally got around to debating the arrests and conspiracy charges. A motion was proposed by John Conlon, a farmer

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *L.L.*, 1 June 1918.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *F.J.*, 25 May 1918.

¹⁸⁰ *I.L.*, 17 May 1918.

from Athy and seconded by Michael Fitzsimons the auctioneer from Naas. Both men were consistent opponents of Sinn Féin¹⁸¹ and yet they felt compelled to put forward the following to the council:

That we, the members of the Kildare County Council, having read and considered the statement issued in regard to the arrests that have taken place on the plea of a Sinn Féin conspiracy with Germany, are of opinion that this statement does not justify the government's action which we believe was inspired solely to misrepresent the Irish people in the eyes of the allied nations. We feel bound therefore to protest against the arrests and deportations, and we demand in the interests of fair play and justice that the prisoners be given an opportunity of meeting the charges made against them before a jury of their fellow countrymen.¹⁸²

George Wolfe spoke and made an intriguing suggestion that a charge of conspiracy with the Germans would have been better made straight after the Easter rising, in place of the courts martial and executions that had occurred. He said:

There was nobody who condemned Sinn Féin more than he did, and probably what had been done now should probably have been done after the rebellion and those horrible executions should never have taken place. But he thought that the principles of justice would certainly be strained whether there was damning evidence against them or not if they were not brought to trial. If there was proof of a plot with the German enemy, they should get the punishment they deserved. If not, they should be released.¹⁸³

P.J.Doyle, the councillor who represented Newbridge, also felt that the conspiracy charges should either be put before a court or withdrawn, since their currency as mere rumour and accusation left all nationalists disadvantaged in their efforts to have Ireland's demand for home rule recognised by the allies. He said:

None of those who spoke [in favour of the motion] could be accused

¹⁸¹ Conlon later represented Kildare as a pro-treaty Farmers' party TD from 1923-7, while Fitzsimons was the only county councillor who voted against repudiating the council's resolution of 1916 condemning the Easter rising; see below p. 373 and p. 310, respectively.

¹⁸² K.C.C. 27 May 1918.

¹⁸³ Ibid; *L.L.*, 1 June 1918.

of sympathy with the Sinn Féin movement. The penalty for treasonable conspiracy was the most severe that could be imposed, and he thought that there was no Irishman outside their own followers [i.e. Sinn Féin supporters] who could make any objection to the punishment of these men if they were guilty. The charge against them put nationalists like himself in a false and peculiar position.¹⁸⁴

Part of the ‘peculiar position’ may well have included a wish that there was in fact evidence to support the allegations of a conspiracy between Sinn Féin and the German government. It seems to have been the belief that this would be the cause of such revulsion among the general body of Irish nationalists that it would swing support back from Sinn Féin towards the Irish party. The police may have got the situation partly right when they suggested that, in relation to the arrests, ‘moderate nationalists are reported to be pleased, though afraid to say so’.¹⁸⁵

The *Kildare Observer’s* editorial on the issue articulates this belief and goes on to say that, ‘In fact, we firmly believe that if a real test could be applied tomorrow, despite all that has happened, three fourths of the people would declare against Sinn Féin and its ambitions, as a hopeless movement’.¹⁸⁶ Conservative, or even moderate newspapers such as this may well give a more realistic picture of where ordinary people stood on an issue, than papers, such as the *Leinster Leader*, which at this time was edited by the committed republican Michael O’Kelly. The *Observer* goes on to outline a sense of where moderate nationalist were at the time, which, in hindsight may seem naïve, but which may well give an accurate sense of how many people felt:

Orthodox nationalists, who have contributed very considerably towards the fighting forces of the empire from amongst their best-loved, naturally feel deeply stung by the stigma of treachery which has been cast upon the country. Their goodwill is worth a lot to the empire. They are, we believe, prepared to await the trial [of the accusation of conspiracy against the Sinn Féin leaders] and to

¹⁸⁴ *L.L.*, 1 June 1918.

¹⁸⁵ N.A. Insp. general’s monthly report, May 1918 (CO 904/106).

¹⁸⁶ *K.O.*, 1 June 1918.

express their opinions in no uncertain voice, if guilt should be brought home to the men who have been arrested...¹⁸⁷

The paper then seems to endorse the county council as the true voice of this moderate opinion, by suggesting that, in reference to the meeting just described, ‘The observations of the members of the Kildare County Council who spoke on this subject might be regarded as typical of the state of feeling throughout the greater part of the country’.¹⁸⁸

Meanwhile the growing crisis was having a direct effect on the council’s day-to-day functioning. The assistant county surveyor for the Celbridge Rural District Council, Art O’Connor, was ‘on the run’ from the authorities, and unable to fulfil his duties and a temporary replacement was appointed in his place.¹⁸⁹ Art’s brother, James had been a county councillor since being co-opted to that body in 1914.¹⁹⁰ Art O’Connor had in fact made a surprise appearance at a public meeting organised by Sinn Féin to protest against the ‘German conspiracy’ deportations. When he appeared on the platform he was roundly cheered. As luck would have it, just at that point the district sub-inspector of the RIC, Kerry Supple, drove past, observing the proceedings. Some of the policemen with him made an attempt to arrest O’Connor but as they were hopelessly outnumbered, they let discretion be the better part of valour and let him fade away to wherever he was hiding.¹⁹¹

The county council meanwhile had mundane issues to attend to. One of the unexpected consequences of the war was the increase in the incidence of venereal disease in Ireland. A scheme was devised to combat this and was to be implemented

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ K.C.C. mins. 27 May 1918.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 15 June 1914.

¹⁹¹ *K.O.*, 1 June 1918; he was soon arrested, for when he later stood as a candidate for South Kildare in the December 1918 general election, he was one of the interned candidates; see *L.L.*, 23 Nov. 1918.

by the county councils, in a manner similar to the anti -T.B. scheme. The council duly established its committee for the prevention and treatment of venereal disease,¹⁹² and set about fulfilling its obligations under the scheme. Rather than provide the medical treatment required locally the committee entered an agreement with Dr. Stephen's Hospital in Dublin, for the treatment of two male and two female patients at a rate of five shillings per night for occupied beds¹⁹³ They subsequently sought and received the permission of the LGB to merge with counties Carlow and Wicklow to appoint a joint medical officer under the scheme.¹⁹⁴

The shortage of horses and manpower due to the war was continuing to interfere with the ability of farmers to produce food. The department of agriculture requested the county council to make any spare traction engines it had at its disposal available to farmers in order to have land tilled in late winter and spring of 1918. The council gave the county surveyor its blessing to co-operate if possible.¹⁹⁵ Considering that most of the council members were substantial farmers who fully understood the difficulties of implementing the tillage requirements, this is not surprising.

The shortage of food had caused a serious increase in food prices during the course of the war.¹⁹⁶ The shortage of manpower to work either on the land or anywhere else had put pressure on wages and gave the labour movement a major boost to its campaign to recruit members. Throughout 1918 there was an escalation of worker unrest¹⁹⁷ throughout the country and Kildare did not escape this

¹⁹² K.C.C. mins. 26 Feb. 1918.

¹⁹³ K.C.C. fnce.cmte. 11 Mar. 1918.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. 7 Aug. 1918.

¹⁹⁵ K.C.C. mins. 26 Feb. 1918.

¹⁹⁶ H.D.Gribben, 'Economic and social history, 1850-1921', pp.342-6.

¹⁹⁷ N.A. Inspector general's monthly reports, Mar. to Oct. 1918 (CO904/104-106).

phenomenon. The police reports note that throughout the summer of 1918 there was much labour unrest in the county, 'due to the intervention of the transport union'.¹⁹⁸

County council road workers struck for more money in March 1918. The workers were in fact working for the individual road contractors, as Kildare County Council had never adopted the direct labour system of road works, as some other counties had.¹⁹⁹ The organisation of the strike and the determination of the men seems to have been somewhat lacking as the council and the individual contractors had no great difficulty in resisting the workers' demand for an increase of wages to thirty five shillings a week.²⁰⁰

At this time also there was an interesting exchange between the rural members of the county council and those who represented the urban areas of Naas and Athy. The two towns were finding it difficult to meet their responsibilities for the maintenance of designated main roads in their areas and submitted a claim to the county council for an increase in the grant from the rates for this purpose. Thomas Hickey, who was a member of Athy UDC as well as a county councillor proposed the motion for the increase in the grant, while Michael Fitzsimons who was a member of Naas UDC, seconded. A counter motion refusing to increase the grant was put forward by John Healy, a farmer from Clane and seconded by Patrick Phelan who farmed in Timahoe. The latter motion won the vote by twelve votes to eight.²⁰¹ This decision was appealed in a joint submission from both urban councils but the letter got a very cursory 'read with no action taken' mention at a subsequent council meeting.²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ N.A. Sub-inspector's reports for Kildare, Aug. 1918, (CO904/106).

¹⁹⁹ See above p 112.

²⁰⁰ *L.L.*, 16 Mar. 1918; K.C.C. mins. 11 Mar. 1918.

²⁰¹ K.C.C. mins. 27 May 1918; *L.L.*, 1 June 1918.

²⁰² K.C.C. mins. 26 Aug. 1918.

During the last quarter of 1918 three major issues dominated the attention of the members of Kildare County Council and indeed of the county in general, namely, the impending general election to be held at the end of the year, the expected end of the war in Europe and the quite devastating epidemic of influenza which swept the country as the year ended. The historical record probably reckons the election as the most important of these but it may well be that to those living through those months the end of the war and the outbreak of 'flu were of more significance.

The Irish parliamentary party M.P.s in Kildare put in a serious effort to counter the Sinn Féin challenge for their seats and they were assisted to a significant extent by sitting members of Kildare County Council. As early as September the M.P. for the constituency in the north of the county, John O'Connor, held a series of meetings in Naas, 'in view of the imminence of a general election'.²⁰³ One of these meetings was described as a 'private conference in the council chamber of the town hall at which members of the county council and others were present. The conference was summoned by the town clerk'.²⁰⁴ Michael Fitzsimons chaired the 'conference' and John Healy and Patrick Phelan spoke in favour of O'Connor.²⁰⁵ The close association between the council members and the Irish party continued throughout the election campaign. Later in September, O'Connor held another meeting in Newbridge, chaired by county councillor P.J. Doyle.²⁰⁶ Denis Kilbride, the Irish party M.P. for the Kildare South constituency was slower to declare his intentions and even as late as November it was not clear that he would defend his seat.²⁰⁷ When he did declare, however he was joined on the platform at his first campaign

²⁰³ *L.L.*, 14 Sept. 1918.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *L.L.*, 12 Sept. 1918.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 28 Sept. 1918.

²⁰⁷ *K.O.*, 23 Nov. 1918.

meeting in Athy by Matthew Minch and John Holland, father of the Lieutenant Vincent Holland who had been awarded the VC the previous year.²⁰⁸

Meanwhile the Sinn Féin organisation in the county was lining up its candidates. Art O'Connor wanted to stand in Kildare north as he was from Celbridge, but two factors persuaded him to accept the nomination in the south. The first was the fact that Donal Ó Buachalla, the leader of the Maynooth contingent in the Easter rising, was anxious for the nomination in the north as well, and secondly, it was felt that if Art O'Connor ran against John O'Connor some votes might be lost in the confusion of the two names. Therefore, Art opted to stand against Kilbride in the south, leaving Ó Buachalla to take on John O'Connor in the north.²⁰⁹

By October the county was severely effected by the 'flu epidemic. Something of its severity is glimpsed in the following:

Naas is just now in the grip of an epidemic of what is described as influenza....Several cases had to be adjourned at Naas quarter sessions during the week owing to the absence of doctors whose evidence was considered necessary. All three Naas doctors, Dr. Coady, Dr. Murphy and Dr. Brown, were confined to bed during the past week as a result of the disease which they contracted in the course of their professional ministrations.... A strange feature of the ailment is that it would seem to be raging at the moment in similar form in various parts of the world.²¹⁰

Only a week later there was a report of 'upwards of a dozen deaths in Naas caused by the epidemic.²¹¹ By November there had been multiple deaths throughout the county, but mostly in the towns,²¹² and such was the infectiousness of the 'flu that whole families were being wiped out by it. In Celbridge, eight members of one

²⁰⁸ See above p. 245.

²⁰⁹ *K.O.*, 28 Oct. 1918.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19 Oct. 1918

²¹¹ *L.L.*, 26 Oct. 1918.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 9 Nov. 1918.

family contracted the disease and the mother and two sons died from it.²¹³ The county council itself was affected by the epidemic. The county secretary W.E. Coffey contracted the 'flu, as did the county veterinary inspector. As a result some work was behind schedule.²¹⁴

The worry over the 'flu, and the uncertain political situation in the country somewhat took the joy out of the ending of the war. In early October the local press had alerted the county to the imminence of the end of hostilities in an editorial headed 'The beginning of the end'.²¹⁵ Some of the members of Kildare County Council took the opportunity of the near ending of the war to reiterate their support for it and for Ireland's active participation in it. A recruitment meeting was held in Naas in mid-October, chaired by George Wolfe and attended by two other councillors, John Healy and Michael Fitzsimons.²¹⁶ George Wolfe said that while he wished Ireland to get her rights in regards to home rule, he saw no reason why the country 'should now hold back' and should enlist as a matter of urgency and avenge *The Leinster* (sunk by German u-boats on 10 Oct).²¹⁷ Michael Fitzsimons said that he had always supported fighting for the allies and 'he did so still'.²¹⁸ The consistency of their views and their openness in expressing them may be considered quite unusual in the light of the political developments that followed in late 1918 and 1919.

When the end of the war finally came on Monday 11 November the news was greeted quietly in Kildare. There was a bonfire in Celbridge to celebrate the end of the war, and the news that local man, Arthur Dease had been awarded the Croix de

²¹³ Ibid., 16 Nov. 1918.

²¹⁴ K.C.C. mins. 6 Nov. 1918.

²¹⁵ *K.O.*, 5 Oct. 1918.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 19 Oct. 1918.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

Guerre for his role in the ambulance section of the French army since 1915 was just reaching the town as well. He was the grandson of Sir Gerald, and the son of William Dease, both of whom had represented Celbridge on the county council.

In Naas, the news of the signing of the armistice was marked by the hoisting of the union jack over the courthouse, in which building the county council held its meetings and at the back of which its administrative staff worked. Later in the evening there was some flag-waving and celebration by some military personnel in other parts of the town.²¹⁹

The hopes of moderate nationalists and the Irish party following the peace were expressed in an editorial in the *Leinster Leader*. It was hoped that somehow the peace conference could be used to, 'promote the cause of Ireland being treated as a separate nation and not just a 'mere conquered province'.²²⁰ What was patently obvious to the paper however was that this new policy of the Irish party was being dictated by the failure of the British government to give them any great prospects of a speedy or a satisfactory resolution to the home rule crisis, and by the rapid evolution of Sinn Féin as a political force. As the paper saw it:

The recess debate in the House of Commons inaugurated by the Irish party on the Irish question, while disappointing to their followers and supporters, nevertheless helps to clear away misunderstanding, and to make for united action in having Ireland's claims to self-determination recognised by the international tribunal which is expected will now engage in the general reconstruction based on President Wilson's great principle of 'self-determination'. The Irish party...have decided to appeal to President Wilson to have this principle applied to Ireland.²²¹

²¹⁹ *K.O.*, 16 Nov. 1916.

²²⁰ *L.L.*, 16 Nov. 1918.

²²¹ *L.L.*, 16 Nov. 1918; Lyons, 'The new nationalism', p. 238.

The editorial in the *Kildare Observer* did not yet betray any realisation of the new political realities in Ireland as it chose to look back on, and extol, the Irish party's backing for the war. It said:

The glorious end to the nightmare of the last four years has more than justified the attitude taken up at the beginning of the war and maintained, in spite of the taunts of quondam friends, until the day of his death by the late Mr. John Redmond. Do his spirit and the spirit of his heroic brother who died fighting for freedom on the blood-soaked battlefield, not today hover joyfully in the triumph they predicted and for which they struggled to the end in their different spheres, thankful that the country they so dearly loved has maintained her honour to the end in spite of folly and treachery?²²²

It must have been difficult for those who shared these views to watch over the subsequent few weeks as those whom they blamed for this 'folly and treachery' succeeded to the extent that they did in destroying the party of which Redmond had been leader for so long.

The general election campaign was soon in full swing. From the evidence of its campaign in Kildare the Irish party did not surrender its hegemony without a fight.

At the meeting in Naas town hall to formally select John O'Connor M.P. to run for parliament again, Kildare County Councillors were prominent. George Wolfe chaired the meeting and Michael Fitzsimons and P.J. Doyle spoke in support of O'Connor and the Irish party policy.²²³ Wolfe opened the meeting by stating that they were 'out that day to stand for good old-fashioned constitutional lines from which so much had been gained in the past and from which so much would be gained in the near future'.²²⁴ P.J. Doyle, in proposing a resolution supporting the

²²² *K.O.*, 16 Nov. 1918.

²²³ *L.L.*, 30 Nov. 1918.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

parliamentary policy of the Irish party as the only practical one, said that he was chosen to propose it because of his years of experience as ...

one of a dwindling number of men in north Kildare who had been in the national movement for a great number of years. His mind and his experience went back to the early eighties. He knew what Ireland was then and he knew what Ireland was today: he knew that the improvements had been brought about by a united party acting in parliament.²²⁵

John Healy's contribution reminds us that no one living in late 1918 was aware of how the Sinn Féin policy of abstention would work in practice, as it was a reality only evolving to meet situations as they arose. Healy was naturally concerned that allowing unionist M.P.s to have Westminster to themselves would leave the interests of nationalists entirely unguarded in all areas. It would, he said, 'be political suicide. If Sinn Féin won this election Carson and his followers would go over to Westminster and in the case of such bills as the land for Irish soldiers bill, the Irish people would be impotent to prevent its passage'.²²⁶

This appeal to old and tried ways failed to attract the support of the new and younger voters. The franchise had been radically extended by the Representation of the People Act, 1918, with all men over twenty-one and most women over thirty enfranchised.²²⁷ The uncertainty that this extension of the franchise introduced to the election was picked up by the *Kildare Observer* in an editorial. It noted:

The ardent Sinn Féin supporters are all the younger people, whose enthusiasm and energy import a rather new element into the election campaign. The extension of the franchise makes it difficult to hazard an opinion either as to the public feeling or the number who will go to the polling booths.²²⁸

Michael Fitzsimons, one of the Kildare County Council members present at John O'Connor's selection meeting was conscious of the youthful profile of the Sinn Féin

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ 7 Geo. V. cc 64.

²²⁸ *K.O.*, 30 Nov. 1918.

support and obviously nettled by it. He said that he could not agree with Sinn Féin on the question of abstention. ‘The old saying was that the older we lived the more we knew. It was apparently now that the older we lived the greater fools we grow, according to Sinn Féin’.²²⁹

John O’Connor’s own speech recalled his long association with Davitt and Parnell and the land league and linked the success of these earlier campaigners to their engagement with the British government through political involvement at Westminster. He also mentioned the contribution of the unity brought to the Irish party under John Redmond to the achievements in the areas of local government reform and land purchase and he appealed for that unity to continue.²³⁰

Both local papers were pleased that at least this time there were to be electoral contests in the county’s two constituencies. The *Kildare Observer* noted that, ‘It is so long since there has been a contest in north Kildare that the boundaries of the constituency have been forgotten by the man in the street’.²³¹ The *Leinster Leader* went further:

It is over twenty years since there was a contest in south Kildare, the last, between M. J. Minch and the late Mr. Leahy, being waged on the parnellite leadership. As in many other constituencies south Kildare electors have been virtually disenfranchised since by the notoriously evil convention system. Every member of parliament should be called upon to give an account of his stewardship from time to time and the only effective manner of doing so is through a contested election.²³²

A contest there now certainly was. When the nominations closed on Friday 6 December the nomination papers of John O’Connor in north Kildare were signed by, among others, the following Kildare county councillors: John Healy, George Wolfe, P.J. Doyle and Michael Fitzsimons. The Sinn Féin candidate, Donal Ó Buachalla’s

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ *K.O.*, 30 Nov. 1918.

²³² *L.L.*, 23 Nov. 1918.

papers were endorsed by James O'Connor, county councillor for Celbridge and Art O'Connor's brother, and also by Pat Dunne from Kill, Tom Harris from Naas, both IRA activists, and J.J. (Jack) Fitzgerald, chairman of Kildare county G.A.A. board.²³³

It was felt that it would be a close contest. The students in Maynooth College who were thought to be mostly Sinn Féin supporters were considered vital to that party's chances of taking the north Kildare seat. The problem was that the students had been sent home to their dioceses on account of the 'flu epidemic. As reported,

Maynooth college, assuming it has reassembled after the 'flu, will have a rather important say in the election in north Kildare, inasmuch as it has a very large number of voters. It is claimed that practically all the students and about one half of the professors are Sinn Féiners.²³⁴

In fact the students were not called back and Sinn Féin was concerned enough to issue a specific election notice to them in the national press. The following appeared in the *Irish Independent* on the day before polling:²³⁵

To Maynooth Students

North Kildare Election

All Maynooth students are earnestly requested to travel to Maynooth on Saturday next and record their votes for Donal Buckley, the Sinn

²³³ *K.O.*, 7 Dec. 1918 and T.Dooley, 'IRA activity in Kildare during the war of independence', p. 638.

²³⁴ *K.O.*, 30 Nov. 1918.

²³⁵ *I.I.*, 13 Dec. 1918

Féin candidate. Proxy voting does not apply in these cases. Personal attendance at Maynooth is therefore absolutely necessary. Owing to a misunderstanding it was stated that the college would be open for the accommodation of the students, and it has been found impossible. All arrangements have been made for the reception of the students. Every vote will be required to ensure the return of the Sinn Féin nominee, and every student is appealed to to record his vote at Maynooth on Saturday next.

Tomás Macliam
Constituency Director

It is not known how many students made the trip to Maynooth to vote but Sinn Féin need not have worried. When the results were declared two weeks later, on 28 December, Donal Ó Buachalla had won the north Kildare seat by 5,979 votes to John O'Connor's 2,722. Art O'Connor took the south Kildare seat by 7,104 votes to Denis Kilbride's 1,545.²³⁶

Countrywide, the results 'surpassed all expectations' as one historian puts it, with Sinn Féin winning seventy-three of the now 105 Irish seats.²³⁷ The Irish parliamentary party was reduced to six seats, four of which were won in northern constituencies where, by agreement, no Sinn Féin candidates stood.

A full week before the results of the count were officially known the *Kildare Observer* had expressed its concern over the expected scale of the Sinn Féin victory. 'The Sinn Féiners claim that they have captured seventy-five seats. What this will mean for the country it is impossible to conjecture'.²³⁸ An ominous hint of what it might mean for the county councillors in Kildare who had supported the Irish party was carried a week later in a report, in the *Leinster Leader*, of a meeting of the Naas branch of Sinn Féin which began preparing for the expected local elections of the

²³⁶ B.M. Walker, ed. *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978), p. 391.

²³⁷ Lyons, 'The new nationalism', p. 238.

²³⁸ *K.O.*, 21 Dec. 1918.

following spring.²³⁹ In fact the local elections were postponed until 1920 and the story of Sinn Féin's capture of Kildare County Council will be one of the main themes of the next chapter of this study.

²³⁹ *L.L.*, 28 Dec. 1918.

Chapter 6. The council through the war of independence, 1919-1921

That a new political reality had come into being with the victory of Sinn Féin in the general election of 1918 was evident to commentators at the time.¹ What was not evident, of course was the nature of the change and the impact it would have on everyday life. Early hints of the change in Kildare occurred in February 1919 when the meeting of the Kildare Hunt at Clane was prevented from taking place by a Sinn Féin protest, which claimed that it was a manifestation of the old order's dominance over the ordinary people and should not be allowed to continue 'while English prisons were filled with untried Irishmen whose only crime was to stand up for the right of the Irish people to self-determination'.²

The volatility of public opinion is well illustrated by what happened next. A public meeting of landowners was held in Naas in March to protest against the Sinn Féin position and to support the hunt. Joseph O'Connor, a member of Kildare County Council chaired the meeting. He said that 'he did not see why the hunt should be brought into politics at all....The people identified with the hunt which had always been very courteous and very civil and not inclined to do harm to anyone's crops'.³ However, O'Connor lost control of the meeting and a large number of the farmers attending were in favour of the ban on hunting remaining until the prisoners were released from jail. A motion was carried to the effect that:

This meeting of farmers, comprising all sections of political opinion, while unanimously in favour of hunting, is convinced that the untried prisoners in English jails should be released or put on trial, and that a copy of his resolution should be sent to the Kildare Hunt Club for adoption.⁴

¹ *F.J.*, 4 Jan. 1919; *K.O.*, 11 Jan. 1919; *L.L.*, 4 Jan. 1919.

² *L.L.*, 15 Feb. 1919.

³ *Ibid.*, 8 Mar. 1919.

⁴ *Ibid.*

The hunt club met immediately after this meeting and replied to the motion in the following manner: 'The hunt, which is entirely unconnected with politics cannot entertain it [the resolution], while at the same time gratefully acknowledge the goodwill towards hunting expressed in the resolution'.⁵ It is worth recalling that in late 1914 when the sudden demand for horses by the army left the hunt club in serious difficulty, the county council was very supportive, passing a resolution calling on 'all classes in county Kildare to co-operate by every means in their power, in preventing the break-up of the historic hunt, which in our firm conviction, would be nothing short of a calamity'.⁶

A flavour of the more aggressive confidence of Sinn Féin in the county is evident in the fact that in January 1919 Naas town hall was forcibly taken over by them for a meeting, and in spite of the urban district council's disapproval, no action was taken to officially censure them.⁷ Meetings throughout the county were held in the early weeks of the new year to demand the release of the remaining prisoners and to outline the Sinn Féin programme for future action, both at national level and in local government. Donal Ó Buachalla, who was one of the two M.P.s elected for Kildare the previous month, spoke at this meeting, as did Tom Harris, who would later lead the Kildare battalion of the IRA when the war of independence began. The other M.P., Art O'Connor, was one of those still imprisoned and whose release was being sought.⁸

The immediate threat of a takeover of local government by Sinn Féin and labour followers was abated somewhat by the decision of the government to

⁵ *L.L.*, 8 Mar. 1919.

⁶ K.C.C. mins. 23 Nov. 1914; see above p. 259.

⁷ *K.O.*, 18 Jan. 1919.

⁸ *L.L.*, 11 Jan. 1919.

postpone for a further year the local elections.⁹ These had been put to one side when last due, in 1917, and again in 1918, on account of the war. This time the postponement had more to do with the disturbed state of Ireland. The result was that the cohort of county councillors elected in 1914 continued to control local affairs in a rapidly changing political and economic context.

The meeting of the first Dail on 21 January 1919 signalled the complete break that Sinn Féin's policy of abstention made with earlier nationalist campaigns. This was picked up in the local press. The *Leinster Leader* commented:

The transformation effected in Irish political outlook by the recent general election in eliminating what for three or four decades had come to be regarded as orthodox nationalism and substituting for constitutional agitation the more virile policy represented by republicans has been emphasised by the assembly of An Dáil. It was one of the most remarkable assemblies witnessed in Dublin since the last parliament sat in College Green and was regarded with sufficient importance to warrant the attendance of newspaper representatives from many parts of the world.¹⁰

The Sinn Féin and IRA campaign had little or no impact in Kildare County Council chamber or indeed in much of the county in general during 1919.¹¹ The council was aware of the wider events when Art O'Connor, now T.D. rather than M.P., was released from jail in March. He immediately resumed his duties as assistant county surveyor.¹² When he complained to the council in May that his motorbike had been confiscated by the police and thus he could not carry out his work, the council had no hesitation in voting him extra funds to hire a car and passed a motion strongly protesting against the police action in costing the ratepayers money

⁹ *L.L.*, 8 Mar. 1919.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1 Feb. 1919.

¹¹ For an account of the war of independence in Kildare and an analysis of the reasons for the county's relative lack of involvement in the armed struggle from 1919-22 see Dooley, 'IRA activity in Kildare'; see also Durney, *On the one road* (Naas, 2001).

¹² *K.O.*, 29 Mar. 1919.

by them having to replace O'Connor's bike.¹³ O'Connor attended the second session of the Dáil and he began to work for the newly established Dáil Department of Agriculture. Since his job with the council was part-time anyway he was able to continue to function as an assistant surveyor while becoming increasingly involved in settling land disputes in the west of Ireland on behalf of the Dáil.¹⁴ In early 1920 he was finally forced to ask for leave of absence from the council when he took over the office of director of the Dáil Department of Agriculture on the arrest of Robert Childers Barton. The leave of absence was freely granted.¹⁵

The existence of the Dáil did not impinge on the county council in any meaningful way throughout 1919. The first communication directly to the council from the Dáil was a letter dated 27 August 1919 and was about the necessity for re-forestation in the country in general. The item was referred to the county committee of agriculture which was directed to communicate information to the secretary, Dáil Eireann, 'as to the area which the council has at present under woodlands'.¹⁶

If the overtly republican and military aspects of the disturbed times failed to make much of an impact on Kildare County Council in 1919, the same cannot be said for that other significant parallel struggle, namely that of organised labour versus the employers, which began in earnest early in the new year. The county surveyor's report to the finance committee of the council, (usually a list of road-works to be undertaken and their estimated cost in the next financial year) which met on 5 February 1919, departed from the norm by including the following ominous account:

¹³ *L.L.*, 31 May 1919.

¹⁴ For an account of O'Connor's work for the Dáil, see Hooctor, *The department's story* (Dublin, 1971), pp 114-128.

¹⁵ K.C.C.mins. 24 Feb. 1920.

¹⁶ K.C.C. mins. 29 Sept. 1919.

Mr Chairman and gentlemen, -

I have to report that a strike has taken place of men employed at road repair in Newbridge, Kildare and Kilcullen sections. This is in connection with works placed in my charge by county council, but whatever authority I may have to alter a rate of wages in such cases I would, of course, like to have your approval for doing so, and hence this report. Under the recent out-of-work donation scheme¹⁷ men who are not working at all are paid, I understand, 29/- a week, and naturally this makes men dissatisfied who have to work hard for a lesser sum, 28/-, as ours had in the Clane and Celbridge districts. However the chief cause of the trouble appears to originate in the Curragh district, and I believe the military authorities are there paying unskilled labourers at the rate of 39/- or 40/- a week, where ours were working nearby for 33/-. To make the wages even for all parts of the county, I offered the men's representatives, who came to interview me on last Friday, a rate of 36/- a week for labourers. According to the prevailing opinion of the decline in the value of the pound sterling, this would represent more than 16/- a week in pre-war wages....On getting word since that the Newbridge men were refusing to return to work because the overseers would not join their union, I wrote withdrawing my offer....

Your Obedient Servant,

John Rorke,

County Surveyor.¹⁸

When the surveyor refers to 'works placed in my charge' he means road repairs done directly by the council, as opposed to the more usual way of contracting them out. Because Kildare had not yet adopted a 'direct labour' method of conducting road repairs, the county surveyor would personally take charge of any sections of road work not tendered for in the normal way, and complete them using the council's own staff. For several reasons, including a shortage of workers caused by the war and the greater prosperity of the farmers who usually took on these contracts, and who during the war-time farming boom no longer needed the work, there was an increased incidence of stretches of roads not being tendered for during 1914-8.

¹⁷ 10 & 11 Geo. 5, an extension of the National Insurance Act, 1911, to cover some of the cost of a 'dole' for workers and demobbed soldiers; for an account of the working of this scheme in Ireland, see, *Evidence, interim report of the committee of inquiry into the scheme of out-of-work donation*, 1919, [Cmd, 407], vol. xxx. pp. 65-70; for a brief history of the introduction of the dole, see, H.L. Witmar, 'Unemployment Insurance in England today', in *Social Forces*, vol. 8, no. 3, Mar., 1930.

¹⁸ K.C.C. fnce. cmte. 5 Feb. 1919.

The only factor Rorke leaves out of his analysis of the reasons for these wage demands is the much increased level of trade union organisation in Kildare, most of which occurred in the latter part of 1918 and which has been dealt with in the previous chapter.¹⁹ The I.T.& G.W.U. established active branches in Newbridge, Naas, and Athy and organised labourers in towns and on farms. For most of 1919 one of the major issues concerning the county council and the farmers who made up most of its membership, was the wages and conditions of the workers.

Rorke got a settlement of the strike referred to in his report by upping his offer to 38/- per week and the council approved this.²⁰ The issue of overseers joining the union remained a contentious one in relations between the parties until the almost complete take-over of the council by labour representatives in June 1920. There was a fairly steady stream of claims for increased pay from council employees. In March the council's engine drivers (steamrollers and tractors) had a claim for an increase from 36/- to £2 per week granted by the council.²¹ In late March the workers who were taken on annually, in a part-time capacity, by the county secretary to help with the process of rate-making (a long and tedious job of literally applying the appropriate monetary rate to each holding in the county according to its poor law valuation) went on strike for better terms. The minute of a special finance committee meeting called to deal with the issue reads as follows:

The secretary [W.E.Coffey] submitted a demand from the local branch of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, for 100 per cent. increases on the scale of fees fixed in connection with the annual preparations of the rate books etc., and he explained that he had personally to meet the expense of extra clerical assistance connected with this work, which was measured at £80 per annum. He further stated that the people whom he employed to carry out this work had decided to strike pending their demand being conceded. The committee, after having discussed the matter at length directed the secretary to make the best terms he could with the rate workers,

¹⁹ See above, p. 268.

²⁰ K.C.C. mins., 12 Mar. 1919.

²¹ Ibid.

and recommend the council to recoup him the sum which may be paid in excess of that payable on the scale approved of by the council in 1911.²²

The settlement of this dispute was approved by the council finance committee at its meeting in May and involved the rate makers getting ‘100% more than pre-war rates. The full cost of the process, now finished, was £159. 1s 4d. The council gave Mr. Coffey £80 towards his expenses in this’.²³

In June the clerical staff, represented by the Local Government and Public Services Union submitted a claim on behalf of its members.²⁴ The finance committee compiled a list of the officers concerned and their current and previous salaries to assist them in their decision. An abbreviated version of the information is given below:

Table 1. Report of officials’ salaries presented to K.C.C. 4 June 1919²⁵

Office	Pre-war Salary	Date of appointment	Salary at appointment	Present Salary	Increase now approved
Secretary	£355	Nov. 1916	£255	£255	£131
Accountant	£136	May 1917	£130	£155	£91
Clerk (1)	£100	Aug. 1917	£100	£125	£57
Clerk(2)	£70	Feb. 1918	£52	£78	£28
Clerk (3)	£156	Oct. 1899		£180	£67
Clerk (4)	n/a	May 1916	£52	£130	none
Asst. Surveyor	£130	1899		£180	£38

²² K.C.C. fnce. cmte., 24 Mar. 1919.

²³ K.C. C. mins. 7 May 1919.

²⁴ For the story of the rise of the union to represent those who worked in local government in the early decades of the twentieth century, see M. Maguire, *Servants to public: a history of the local government and public services union, 1901-1990* (Dublin, 1998).

²⁵ K.C.C. fnce. cmte., 4 June 1919; a full version of this information is given in appendix 4. below.

County Surveyor	£625	Nov. 1914	£400	£600	none ²⁶
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The information demonstrates how, in five out of the eight cases involved, the officers were offered considerably less money for doing the job than the person they replaced. It also shows that increases were offered on an individual basis and were subject to individual appraisal. For instance, there was no award made to P.O'Neill (clerk 4) whose performance was considered unsatisfactory by the county surveyor. In all other cases a substantial increase is granted at this time. In September, further increases were given to other officials, including Art O'Connor, bringing the salary of an assistant county surveyor, for a part-time position, to £200 per annum.²⁷

Why was there so little opposition on the council to these increases, given that they were bound to increase the rates to be levied from all ratepayers in subsequent years? In the first place there was a general acceptance even among farmers themselves that the massive increases in agricultural income over the course of the war years had been of huge benefit to the farming class. One historian refers to these increases as a 'spectacular feature of farming',²⁸ at the time and to the farmers themselves considering it a 'boom time'.²⁹ These high prices for farm produce did not begin to fall until well after 1919, so farmers continued to prosper.³⁰ Quite simply the farmers and the council could afford the rises in 1919 and so they paid them. The council had to get its work done and there was a recognition, evident from

²⁶ The information on the county surveyor's salary was not included in this return as he was not part of this pay-claim: he was awarded an increase of £400 per annum by the finance committee in 1924 but this was not approved by the full county council: see K.C.C. mins. 27 Feb. 1924.

²⁷ K.C.C. fnce cmte., 10 Sept. 1919.

²⁸ H.D. Gribbon, 'Economic and social history' p. 344.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Dooley, 'IRA activity in Kildare', pp 648-9.

the table referred to above, that loyal officials deserved to share in some of the prosperity. It is also a fact that most of the officials of the county council were friends and/or relations of councillors or former councillors. At this time, early 1919, there was no compelling economic reason to withhold the increases, though that rosy scenario was about to change dramatically.

There was also the impact of a number of strikes in the county which proved that organised labour was becoming a powerful force and not one to be defied unless it was absolutely necessary to do so. The most significant of these was the two-month strike or lockout between the farmers and the I.T. & G. W. U. during July and August 1919. Early in the year the local press had warned that Kildare farmers were slow to organise themselves to counter the threat of the labour unions.³¹ There was a great flurry of activity during the next few months and by April the same paper was reporting that, 'branches of the County Kildare Farmers Union have now been established in every district of the county',³² and that they were affiliating to a central executive that met in Naas and which had already 'shown its power to speak on behalf of the farmers of the entire county'.³³ Many leading county councillors and former councillors were active members of the Farmers Union, including Charles Bergin, Patrick Phelan, John Healy, Stephen J. Brown and John Conlon. Among the leaders of the I.T. & G.W.U. side were Michael Smyth and Mark Carroll, who would both become prominent members of the council elected in 1920. For the moment the arena of their conflict was that of wages for agricultural labourers. One study of the nationwide conflict between the labourers and the farmers at this time comments that

³¹ *K.O.*, 25 Dec. 1919.

³² *Ibid.*, 26 Apr. 1919.

³³ *Ibid.*

‘From March 1919 onwards the farm workers wage movement achieved real momentum’,³⁴ and Kildare had its own outbreak of unrest from this source.

A contemporary estimate reckoned that only just under fifty per cent of farm labourers were members of the I.T. & G.W.U. in early 1919³⁵ but however many there were, the stage was set for a confrontation between the two sides, a confrontation which duly arrived. The Agricultural Wages Board set up under the auspices of the British Department of Agriculture had established a mechanism in 1917 to set fair wages in the industry.³⁶ In January 1919 they recommended a raise from 28/- per week to 32/-. This would not prejudice any labourers already in receipt of more than this figure but was offered as a minimum rate.

The union side immediately submitted a counter claim seeking 45/- per week, that being the current rate of wages for labourers in Dublin city. The farmers were outraged, calling it a ‘ridiculous demand’ and replying that they would only abide by the wages board recommendation.³⁷ There was no further communication between the sides as their respective positions were just too far apart. The details are murky but it seems that the labourers’ union initiated a strike on farms in the Celbridge area in an attempt to get the matter resolved on a piecemeal basis. The Farmers’ Union objected strongly to the attempt to negotiate with individual farmers behind the back of the county executive. They met at the end of June and warned that if the labourers on the Celbridge farms did not return to work by Wednesday 2 July they (the Farmers’s Union) would meet that day to declare a lock-out of all members of the I.T.& G.W.U. employed by members of the Farmers’ Union. The deadline passed but the strike continued and notice was given of a lockout of union members to begin

³⁴ Dan Bradley, *Farm labourers: Irish struggle, 1900-1976* (Belfast, 1988), p. 44

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 12 July 1919.

³⁶ 7 Geo. 5; *Act for encouraging the production of corn, and for purposes connected therewith (including provision as to agricultural wages and rents).*

³⁷ *L.L.*, 12 July 1919.

on 12 July.³⁸ The labourers' union then called all of its members out on strike throughout the county.³⁹

The strike was a long and bitter one with the usual reports of intimidation of non-union workers who continued to work and with rumours that some ex-servicemen would be drafted in to help with the coming harvest in place of the men on strike.⁴⁰ The strike seems to have been most effective in north Kildare where it was reported that, 'within four miles of Celbridge on either side, it may be said that practically every farm labourer is on strike and there is no prospect of a settlement'.⁴¹ The strike was less solid elsewhere, with a report that the number of farmers in the Athy area who were willing to agree local deals with the labourers and to offer 35/- per week, was growing.⁴²

That the strike was having a wider effect than just on the two sides involved is clear from a letter from Michael Fitzsimons (the county councillor for the Naas town area) to the local papers. He was a shopkeeper and an auctioneer. After nearly two months of the dispute he wrote as follows:

Sir, -

The unfortunate dispute which occurred some months ago between a certain section of the farmers in Kildare and their labourers still continues without any apparent prospect of a settlement. The certain consequences of such strained relations, if allowed to continue much longer are such as to give cause for alarm. I am not one directly concerned either way, but belong to that still very large section of the community whose interests are apparently being lost sight of in the bitter strife now waged between these two classes. I do not propose to offer any views on the merits of this dispute...but I claim to speak with authority when I state that if a vote of the farming community were taken on this question, a majority of four-fifths would declare for an immediate settlement....I suggest that steps be taken to ascertain the views off the large number of farmers, who from timidity or other cause, have not so far expressed any views. We are daily

³⁸ *K.O.*, 5 July 1919.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 12 July 1919.

⁴⁰ Dan Bradley, *Farm labourers: Irish struggle, 1900-1976* (Belfast, 1988), p. 45.

⁴¹ *L.L.*, 19 July 1919.

⁴² *L.L.*, 19 July 1919.

reading and hearing of farmers settling, which strengthens the view I now put forth, and yet the miserable simulacrum of a lock-out or strike drags on.
Yours etc.,
M. Fitzsimons Co. C.⁴³

It is noteworthy that the writer is clearly criticising some of his county council colleagues who were in positions of authority in the Farmers' Union and who were evidently more intransigent than many of the ordinary members of the union. That it was recognised as a class war is significant especially in the light of the labour effort to overturn the farmers' dominance of the county council at the next local elections.

One of the farmers who broke ranks with the leadership of the Farmers' Union was Major William Dease, from Celbridge, who had been a member of the county council before he went to serve in the war and who was still in France at this time. He was evidently still keeping a close eye on events back home as he telegraphed from France instructing his manager to settle with the men on his farm.⁴⁴

The dispute was eventually settled at the end of August just as the full harvest got under way. The result was a draw in that the farmers did not get the 28/- or 30/- they wanted and the labourers did not get anything near the 45/- they had claimed. A settlement in the range of 32/- to 34/- per week with £2 harvest bonus brought at least a temporary peace though the conflict between the two sides was to be a constant theme in Kildare local politics for many years to come.⁴⁵

In its summary of the dispute the *Kildare Observer* said that the strike was 'the first instance on record where so extensive a strike of agricultural workers has taken place in Ireland and the result demonstrates clearly the strength of the two

⁴³ Ibid., 23 Aug. 1919.

⁴⁴ *L.L.*, 19 July 1919.

⁴⁵ *K.O.*, 30 Aug. 1919.

sides....The struggle was followed with the greatest interest by both the Farmers' Union and the labour organisations all over Ireland'.⁴⁶

The tensions caused did inspire both sides to try to avoid a similar direct clash over wages for the following year. To that end a conference between the two parties was organised for late December but no agreement was reached and the old agreement ran out on 31 December 1919 without much prospect of a new deal being reached.⁴⁷

The tension between rural dwellers and town residents hinted at in Michael Fitzsimons's letter to the press surfaced at the county council on a number of occasions during 1919. In March a deputation of the chairmen and deputy chairmen of Naas and Athy urban district councils addressed the county council seeking an increase in the amount of money the council gave to the urban councils each year for the upkeep of the main roads in the urban areas. Since 1899 the amount had been set at £40 per annum, being the estimate of the value to the county at large of the upkeep of these roads by the urban councils. This figure was now totally inadequate given the enormous increase in the volume of motorised traffic on such roads and the increase in price and wage inflation, especially since the war. The deputation got a frosty reception from the farmers on the county council.⁴⁸ John Healy and Patrick Phelan, both prominent in the Farmers' Union, were strongly opposed to any increased contribution and argued against any concession to the UDCs. Michael Fitzsimons, who lived in Naas town tried to rescue the situation by proposing that a conference of the two urban councils and the county council should meet to discuss

⁴⁶ Ibid; *I.T.*, 31 July 1919.

⁴⁷ *K.O.*, 27 Dec. 1919.

⁴⁸ K.C.C. mins. 26 May 1919

the issue and to seek a general re-balancing of the financial relations between the rural and the urban areas. His suggestion was defeated by nine votes to seven.⁴⁹

Even the *Kildare Observer*, which generally took the farmers' line on such an issue, was surprised by this decision. It commented:

The feeling prevails even amongst many rural dwellers that the members of Kildare County Council acted harshly towards urban ratepayers in turning down the application of the two urban councils for a re-adjustment of the financial relations between them and the county council in regard to the expenditure on the maintenance of roads, without even investigating the facts of the situation. We probably have not heard the last of the matter and it is likely that the urban councils will now go to the Local Government Board with a view to having a more equitable arrangement made as between the road authorities.⁵⁰

It was not as if the county council was unfamiliar with the problem of having to maintain roads from which they themselves derived only a partial benefit. Since the increase in military traffic caused by the war they had been lobbying the LGB and the army authorities for a contribution from central funds to alleviate the cost of repairing roads primarily damaged by army vehicles, and it later became a perennial complaint against the Free State government that the maintenance of main roads, mostly used by people only passing through the county on their way to Dublin, and thus not ratepayers, should be at the expense of the ratepayers of the county.⁵¹

The LGB carried out an enquiry into the full range of financial relations between the local administrative bodies.⁵² Before it concluded and under pressure from the local press, the council offered £60 per annum to the UDCs as their contribution to maintaining the roads in the towns.⁵³ Both urban councils wrote back rejecting this offer as derisory and demanding a full re-imburement of the actual

⁴⁹ *L.L.*, 31 May 1919.

⁵⁰ *K.O.*, 31 May 1919.

⁵¹ K.C.C. mins. 20 Nov. 1916; see below p. 398

⁵² *L.L.*, 23 Aug. 1919.

⁵³ K.C.C. 29 Sept. 1919.

cost of the work. The LGB report showed the true cost of the road repairs and in the end the council was forced to offer a figure of £340 per annum.⁵⁴

During 1919 the county council had to deal with several public health issues. In February a special committee of the council drew up its final draft (based on a template issued by the LGB and under pressure from them) of the treatment of venereal disease under the Public Health (Prevention and Treatment of Disease) (Ireland) Act, 1917.⁵⁵ This was necessary to combat an increase in the incidence of such diseases as a result of infected soldiers returning from the war. The core of the scheme consisted of the following:

Patients residing in the county of Kildare desiring treatment under the scheme may apply and attend the treatment centre at Dr. Steeven's Hospital, Dublin, where there shall be available confidential treatment for all classes of the community free of cost and irrespective of the means or place of residence of the patient in the county Kildare, including hospital accommodation for cases that cannot be treated at an out patient department or dispensary.⁵⁶

The scheme also arranged laboratory facilities in Dr. Steeven's Hospital and at the pathology laboratory at UCD. The full council at its quarterly meeting in June, approved the scheme.⁵⁷

The same act allowed for changes to the rules of the TB prevention scheme to allow 'tubercular soldiers' to be treated as if they were fully paid-up members of the county insurance scheme, the cost to be borne by central funds. The council approved this at the same time as the one above.

The epidemic of influenza which struck in late 1918 was not fully over and in February the county secretary was struck down with it and had to be replaced at work for three weeks, by the accountant P.J. Field. Later in the year the virulence of the

⁵⁴ Ibid., 24 Nov. 1919.

⁵⁵ 7 & 8 Geo. 5.

⁵⁶ K.C.C. mins. of special cmte. 12 Feb.1919.

⁵⁷ K.C.C. mins. 14 June 1919.

'flu epidemic was brought home to the council members by the death of Michael Gogarty, former town clerk of Naas UDC, who died in October 1919 aged sixty seven. The report of his death says that 'in the 'flu epidemic of a year previously he had lost three children, a son and two daughters, as well as a brother and a nephew. Since then he has failed and died of grief and weakness'.⁵⁸ The county council passed a motion of condolence for Gogarty.⁵⁹

Just as private grief and illness are inextricably linked with public affairs in the experience of people at all times, so too are joys and triumphs. 1919 was not all gloom in Kildare. In January the first cinema opened in Naas, in the town hall and the first film shown was Charlie Chaplin in *Charlie in a Dog's Life*.⁶⁰

Later in the year Kildare won the All-Ireland football final, beating Galway. The council elected the following year would include the G.A.A. county board secretary J.J. FitzGerald, but thus far in its history Kildare County Council had shown no interest in the organisation. The *Leinster Leader* had to remind the council of the significance of the event. The week before the final it said:

Now that Kildare footballers have qualified for the All-Ireland final it is to be hoped that the chairmen of the public bodies will follow the example of the public representatives of the other counties in Ireland...by [being] represented at Croke Park on Sunday week next.⁶¹

I have not been able to establish if any of the county councillors attended the match, held on 28 September,⁶² but they did enter fully into the spirit of the celebrations. The day after the match the council congratulated the team on its victory and agreed on a joint committee of the council and the RDCs and the two

⁵⁸ *K.O.*, 11 Oct. 1919; Gogarty was J.T. Heffernan's informant during the latter's campaign to secure his appointment as county secretary in 1900; see above p. 97.

⁵⁹ *K.C.C. mins.* 25 Oct. 1919.

⁶⁰ *L.L.*, 25 Jan. 1919.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 20 Sept. 1919.

⁶² Eoghan Corry, *Kildare G.A.A. a centenary history* (Naas, 1984), p. 36.

UDCs to organise a tribute to the team.⁶³ This joint committee met on 4 October and included George Wolfe (Matthew Minch was still officially chairman of the council but he rarely turned up to meetings) Michael Fitzsimons, William Bourke, Patrick Phelan, P.J. Doyle and Patrick Coffey for the council. Some of the apologies sent for non-attendance at the meeting are interesting. The chairman of Celbridge No. 1 RDC, William Kirkpatrick, a unionist landlord, did not attend, nor did the chairmen of the Athy UDC and the Naas UDC, P. Doyle and D.J. Purcell, respectively. The latter two were possibly still smarting at the refusal of the council to consider their claim for extra funding for road maintenance in the towns. This was still a very live issue at the time.⁶⁴ The tribute committee went ahead and decided to take up a collection for the team with each county councillor appointed to make a collection in the district he represented. Notices were put in the local papers and in one called *Sport* to advertise the collection. The team captain, Larry Stanley, was invited to attend the next meeting of the group. The committee began well, with Wolfe contributing £5 and the rest of the attendance £3 each. Eventually £273 10s 6d was raised and commemorative watches were bought for the players.⁶⁵ A film of the match was shown in a hall in Newbridge, to a packed house and the receipts collected were given to the team as well.⁶⁶

If Kildare County Council was little enough touched by the wider political revolution going on in 1919 the same cannot be said for 1920, which saw the council, and its officials, swept up in the maelstrom of events. Looking forward to both sets of local elections, the municipal in January, and the council and rural district council

⁶³ K.C.C. mins. 29 Sept. 1919.

⁶⁴ See above p. 291.

⁶⁵ K.C.C. 19 Nov. 1919.

⁶⁶ *L.L.*, 25 Oct. 1919.

contests in June, the *Leinster Leader* made some attempt at a prediction of the outcome. It said in an editorial piece:

A change in personnel is certain for three reasons: (1) ...The altered aspect of the political situation since the last elections took place. The existing councils were in their political character the representatives of public opinion then prevailing and voiced a policy that has evaporated and given place to a changed outlook in the national life of the country. That they consistently adhered to the standards of political thought under which they were chosen is in itself commendable. ...but while the country was slowly undergoing a change in political opinion, the public bodies failed toand for some years, notably during the war, they voiced sentiments at variance with those finding popular favour....(2) The rise of labour and the rights of the working class. This social development has been worldwide and has not left Ireland untouched. Heretofore the part played by labour in the public life of the country was confined to the minor one of merely voting for candidates drawn from other walks in life. It had little or no direct representation, and its claims were advocated by those who, although sympathetic, still did not belong to its ranks. Labour today is not dependent upon outside spokesmen for advocacy of its claims. (3) The present councils have been in long enough and after getting and enjoying 'an abnormal lease' should make way for those who claim to be 'in close touch' with public feeling.⁶⁷

The writer looks back to the beginnings of the county council system as he continues:

The present elections have no parallel since the Local Government Act first came into operation twenty years ago. At that time a complete sweep was made of the grand jury system and the Tory element which consistently excluded due representation to the masses of the people. Their successors – constitutional nationalists – are now threatened with a new broom which, as far as the bristling portents indicate, will be as unsparing in its applications.⁶⁸

The piece goes on to express an extraordinary ambivalence about the change in personnel that it predicts, while giving a backhanded compliment to those it is seeking to replace:

Political considerations solely swayed the electorate in the constitution of the first public bodies elected under the Local Government Act and the business abilities of the new councils surprised friend and foe, and this notwithstanding their inexperience in public administration. May we

⁶⁷ *L.L.*, 10 Jan. 1920.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

hope for the same results from the new political tenor of the new councils.⁶⁹

In fact, in the space of a few years the same paper was regretting that those elected on a purely political ticket in 1920 did not have the interest in efficient and economical public administration it had hoped and calling on the new Free State government to replace the council with paid public administrators.⁷⁰

While the preparations were being made for the electoral contests to come, the county remained relatively quiet from a military point of view. The police remarked in February that the county was peaceful and that ‘the majority of Sinn Féin in the county are not of the advanced type and some of them have condemned attacks on police when talking to me’.⁷¹ However, the police inspector, Kerry Supple then reported that his own house, outside Naas, had been shot at. There was from then on a nightly patrol around it.⁷²

The grand jury was congratulated by the judge at the assize hearings for the calm state of the county, particularly in comparison with many other parts of the country.⁷³ The general condition of the rest of the country is one of ‘outrages, murder, attacks on police barracks, shootings and raids on private houses.... The country is in a disturbed condition politically’.⁷⁴ In fact on the day the judge was making his positive comments Maynooth RIC barracks was burned down. It had been vacated three weeks previously, along with many of the smaller outlying barracks and the men all brought to Celbridge where the barracks had a commanding

⁶⁹ Ibid; in fact ‘political considerations’ were not the sole consideration in the election of the first Kildare County Council: see above pp. 77-80.

⁷⁰ *L.L.*, 5 May 1923 and see below p. 367.

⁷¹ N.A. Sub-inspector’s report for Kildare, Feb. 1920, (CSO.904/111).

⁷² N.A. Sub-inspector’s report for Kildare, Feb. 1920, (CSO.904/111).

⁷³ *K.O.*, 27 Mar. 1920.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

position overlooking the Liffey bridge. The sergeant's wife continued to live in the Maynooth building and she was warned to leave before it was set alight.⁷⁵

There was a marked increase in army and police activity in the county which may have added to the tension. On 1 February, police and soldiers surrounded a concert in the town hall in Maynooth, organised by the G.A.A., and all the young men attending were searched.⁷⁶ In April the *Leinster Leader* noted that:

Military in full war equipment is an everyday spectacle in town and country, carrying out those inspections and searches which are dreaded so much by peaceable and even loyal people. Discrimination in these doings is growing less and the houses of persons who have no political predilections whatever have been invaded and even though nothing seditious may be found the occurrence has the effect of making the victim resent the military and the authority it represents.⁷⁷

This seems like the classic case of the alienation of potential allies by heavy-handed military presence and may possibly have contributed to the extent of the victory of Sinn Féin and their labour colleagues in the June elections. There was a blackly funny side to the situation which made itself known at a county council meeting in February. A road contractor informed the council that he had to withdraw from two jobs because of a shortage of 'blasting powder' needed for quarrying work.⁷⁸ A newspaper report commented that judging from the daily reports in the papers about attacks on police barracks and other 'kindred frolics, blasting powder would appear to be by no means a scarce or unprocurable commodity in this country'.⁷⁹ The serious side to it was that it was now necessary to carry out all

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 7 Feb., 1920.

⁷⁷ *L.L.*, 17 Apr. 1920

⁷⁸ K.C.C. mins. 23 Feb. 1920.

⁷⁹ *K.O.*, 28 Feb. 1920.

blasting work in the presence of the police, which hindered roadwork very much.

Before the elections the outgoing county council had to deal with a renewal of the labour agitation, which had taken up so much of its attention the previous year. In January they rejected a demand from the I.T. & G. W.U. for an increase of wages for roadmen to 45/- per week and a reduction of the working week from fifty-one hours to forty-seven. The county surveyor advised the council against acceding to the claim on the basis that they were already paying 9/- per week more than their counterparts in King's County and 3/6 more than the average for the five adjoining counties.⁸⁰ The workers and their leaders bided their time, probably aware that they would soon be in a position to change the attitude of the council to their demands.

The council itself became aware of the very real impact that higher wages and increased prices for materials was having on the level of rates needed to maintain its services for the coming year. The overall sum needed would be £7,244 14s 6d or just over 20% more than was needed in the current year, which itself was £7,052 more than the year before that again.⁸¹ The overall effect was to make the rates bill for most people just less than twice that of the year 1918-19, and well over twice what it was in 1915-16.⁸²

The entire staff of Naas Urban District Council went on strike in March and began picketing the business premises of several members of the council, including that of Michael Fitzsimons who was also a county councillor.⁸³ That such strikes were also politically motivated is apparent from the fact that the striking workers organised a general strike in all the Naas work places on 14 April and staged a demonstration in support of the Sinn Féin prisoners being held in Mountjoy. The

⁸⁰ K.C.C. mins. 31 Jan. 1920; *L.L.*, 7 Feb. 1920.

⁸¹ K.C.C. mins. 23 Feb. 1920.

⁸² See appendix 1, below.

⁸³ *K.O.*, 6 Mar. 1920

March closed down all businesses in Naas for the day and ended with the rosary being recited in Irish in the grounds of the church. The parish priest Rev. M. Norris spoke at the end and praised their 'prayerful protest and procession as an admirable display of public sentiment on behalf of their suffering countrymen in Mountjoy'.⁸⁴

One hopeful note on the industrial relations front was the agreement reached between the farmers and the labourers on wage rates for the year ahead. Arising out of the long dispute in 1919, a County Kildare District Wages Committee was formed with representatives of the I.T. & G.W.U. and the Farmers' Union involved. Agreement was reached for 39/- per week for a six-day week of nine hours per day in those areas covered by the north Kildare branches of the Farmers' Union, and 37/- per week in the southern area. It was agreed that union and non-union labourers would work side-by-side. The discrepancy in rates was explained by local averages and by the proximity of the northern area to the higher wage rates in Dublin. Patrick Phelan the county councillor for Timahoe was on this committee on behalf of the farmers.⁸⁵ Other county councillors who attended the meeting of the Farmers' Union, which ratified the deal, were, George Wolfe, Henry Fay and Charles Bergin.⁸⁶

At the urban council elections in January 1920 Sinn Féin and the Labour Party ran joint candidates in the Naas contest and opposing ones in Athy. Labour did very well running its own campaign in Athy, winning five of the ten seats while its gains were submerged in the general republican gains in Naas.⁸⁷ Nevertheless it was decided that the two parties would again join forces to contest the county council and rural district council elections in June. It was commented that in Kildare most labour

⁸⁴ *L.L.*, 17 Apr. 1920.

⁸⁵ *K.O.*, 8 May 1920.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *K.O.*, 24 Jan. 1920.

candidates ‘have subscribed to the republican programme’.⁸⁸ It was obviously the hope of some that a contest between the two parties might have benefited candidates of neither and allowed them to win seats but, ‘the working arrangement between labour and Sinn Féin has disposed once and for all of the possibility of a clash entertained in some quarters’.⁸⁹

The 1920 county council election was fought under changes made by the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1919⁹⁰ and was different from all the earlier contests in that it was the first to be based on proportional representation and with the original twenty-one single-seat electoral areas reduced to five multi-seat areas. There were still twenty-one members returned to the council and the four rural district council chairmen in the county continued to be entitled to membership.⁹¹ There was also an option of co-opting two additional members. The membership of the RDCs was also radically reduced, by over fifty percent in total, at this election.

Ten of the twenty-eight out-going council members did not go forward for election this time, namely; Owen Cogan, William Bourke, John Healy, John J. Lube, John Quinn, Lord Frederick Fitzgerald, John Dempsey, Joseph Connolly, James Coffey and Matthew Minch.⁹² Of these, Cogan, Minch and Fitzgerald had been councillors continuously since 1899, while Healy and Quinn were there since the second election in 1902.⁹³ The full list of nominations in the various areas is worth giving as it indicates the extent of the competition for membership of the council, not just between the classes, but between the various sections of the labour and Sinn Féin side on the one hand and the farmers on the other.

⁸⁸ *L.L.*, 15 May 1920.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ 9 & 10 Geo. V, c. 19.

⁹¹ The parts of Kildare which used to belong to the Baltinglass No. 3 RDC were henceforth subsumed into Naas No.1 RDC, and the region was no longer represented on K.C.C.

⁹² *K.O.*, 8 May 1920; Minch was nominated but withdrew before the close of nominations.

⁹³ See appendix 2 below.

In the Athy electoral area there were 13 nominations for only four seats, as follows:⁹⁴

John Conlon – outgoing (farmer)
Pat Dooley – Sinn Féin (farmer and baker)
Wm G. Doyle – Labour (national school teacher)
James Flynn – Ratepayers’ candidate (farmer)
George Harbourne – do.
Thomas Hickey – outgoing (farmer)
J.J. Kehoe – Ratepayers’ candidate (farmer)
Wm. Mahon – Sinn Féin (farmer)
M.J.Minch – outgoing (maltmaster)⁹⁵
Wm. Murray – outgoing (farmer)
Christopher Supple – Labour (Transport Union Official)
Michael Tomlinson – Labour (farmer)
Richard Wright – outgoing (farmer)

In the Clane electoral area there were three nominations for just three seats and therefore there was no contest here. The following were returned unopposed:

Joseph Cusack – Sinn Féin (farmer)
Richard McCann – Labour and Sinn Féin (labourer)
Patrick Phelan – Sinn Féin and outgoing (farmer)

Phelan was a recent convert to the Sinn Féin cause, having been strongly opposed to the Easter rising and seconding the county council’s motion condemning it in May 1916.⁹⁶

In the Kildare electoral area there were eight nominations for five seats:

Charles Bergin – outgoing (farmer)
James Cregan – Labour (engine driver)
Francis Doran – Sinn Féin – (farmer)
Nicholas Hanagan – Sinn Féin (farmer)
Christopher Kenny – Labour and Sinn Féin (cycle mechanic)
Arthur Murphy – Labour and Sinn Féin (insurance agent)
Eamonn O’ Modhrain – Sinn Féin (farmer)
James Sunderland – outgoing (farmer)

⁹⁴ These lists are taken from the *K.O.*, 8 May 1920.

⁹⁵ See note 91 above.

⁹⁶ See above p. 234.

The Newbridge electoral area also had eight nominations but in this case for four seats as follow:

Hugh Colohan – Labour (bricklayer)
Thomas Doran – Sinn Féin (farmer and merchant)
P.J. Doyle – outgoing (merchant)
Henry Fay – Sinn Féin and outgoing (farmer)
Joseph O'Connor - outgoing (farmer)
Michael Smyth – Labour (Transport Union official)
George Wolfe – outgoing (gentleman farmer)
Jack Fitzgerald – bootmaker

Finally, in the Naas electoral area there were eleven nominations for five seats:

Donal O' Buachalla TD – Sinn Féin (merchant)
James E. Butterfield – independent (merchant)
Mark Carroll – Sinn Féin (insurance agent)
Edward Farrell – independent (farmer)
Michael Fitzsimons – outgoing and independent (auctioneer and merchant)
J.J. Flanagan – Labour (engine driver)
Tom Harris – Sinn Féin (farmer)
Thomas Lacey – Independent (insurance agent)
John Lawler – Sinn Féin (farmer)
James O' Connor – Sinn Féin and outgoing (farmer)
Nicholas Travers – Sinn Féin (farmer)

Of the fourteen outgoing county council members seeking re-election all but two were farmers. Only three of the fourteen, Patrick Phelan, James O'Connor and Henry Fay declared themselves as being affiliated to Sinn Féin. All three got re-elected. Only one of the fourteen outgoing, Michael Fitzsimons, explicitly declared himself an independent. From the advertisements and letters from the candidates in the local press it is clear that the other outgoing members were standing on their records in the council heretofore and as guardians of the ratepayers' interests.⁹⁷

Of the forty-two nominees who went forward for election, twenty-four are described as farmers. Fifteen of the nominees were described as representing Sinn Féin or Sinn Féin and Labour combined. There were seven who described themselves as Labour only. A sign of the altered security situation in the country in

⁹⁷ *L.L.*, 15 May 1920; *ibid.*, 22 May 1920.

general was the fact that the polling stations and the ballot boxes were guarded, not by the RIC, but by patrols of Irish Volunteers. The director of the county and RDC elections, county secretary, William Coffey, wrote to the council saying the following:

I have been instructed to apply to the commandant in charge of the Irish Volunteers in Co. Kildare, for the services of men to keep order in and at the different polling stations on the day of the elections. I would be obliged to you for the necessary forms of applications (three men for each booth) so that their names and addresses may be given to you in time to have them supplied with forms of declaration of secrecy etc., and any instructions you consider necessary for the orderly conducting of the elections, and which may be compatible with the views of the commandant for the county. It is also intended to have volunteers guard ballot boxes during the interval between close of poll and counting of votes.⁹⁸

The council's resigned response shows how far even the conservative older order had come to accepting the new reality of civil life in Kildare. Patrick Phelan said, 'I suppose Mr. Chairman, (George Wolfe) we will have nobody else to do it this year, and I propose that we accept the offer'.⁹⁹ The offer was accepted unanimously. In effect the council was already taking its instructions from the IRA. The *Kildare Observer* commented that, 'the police in some counties have intimated that they would not be in a position to do the job for security reasons'.¹⁰⁰ It went on to point out that no such intimation was given by the police in Kildare, but the volunteer 'offer' was accepted anyway.¹⁰¹

Those calling themselves Sinn Féin, and most of those standing as labour representatives, subscribed to an explicit policy of republicanism. As one report put it, 'Sinn Féin and Labour have set forth in no ambiguous terms, that votes cast for

⁹⁸ K.C. C. mins. 25 May 1920.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ *K.O.*, 29 May 1920.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

their candidates are votes ...for a free and independent nation under a republican form of government'.¹⁰²

It is worth having a look at the election results, particularly the first preference votes cast, in detail, as it offers an interesting insight into the county at the time. The Athy electoral area produced the following:

No. of seats, 4; total number on register, 4,093; total number who voted, 1976; spoiled votes, 114; quota, 373. The first preference votes were¹⁰³:

C.J. Supple - Labour	504
W. Mahon – Sinn Féin	312
P.Dooley – Sinn Féin	205.
G. Harbourne – Ratepayers	177
J. Flynn – Ratepayers	125
M.Tomlinson – Labour	120
Wm. Murray – outgoing	115
J.J. Kehoe - Sinn Féin	103
R. Wright – outgoing	94
J. Conlon – outgoing	84
T. Hickey – outgoing	23

Following the distribution of Supple's surplus and the elimination of several of the candidates, the following were elected: Supple, Mahon, Dooley and Murray.

The total turnout of voters was only 48%. Between them Sinn Féin and Labour got 63% of the vote cast, split almost exactly 50-50. The outgoing candidates achieved only 16% of the first preference but a residual regard meant transfers got Murray elected. The total of spoiled votes was 6%.

The results in the Kildare electoral area were as follows:

No. of seats, 5; total number on register, 4321; total number who voted, 2540; spoiled votes, 145; quota, 400. The first preference votes were:

Eamonn Ó Modhrain – Sinn Féin	547
N. Hanagan – Sinn Féin	415

¹⁰² *L.L.*, 12 June 1920.

¹⁰³ The following results are compiled from *K.O.* 12 June 1920 and *L.L.*, 12 June 1920.

J. Cregan – Labour	368
A. Murphy – Labour	290
C. Bergin – outgoing	249
F. Doran – Sinn Féin	224
C. Kenny – Labour	211
J. Sunderland – outgoing	91

When O’Mordhain’s and Hannigan’s surpluses were distributed along with several eliminated candidates’ votes the following were elected: Ó Mordhain, Hannagan, Doran, Murphy and Cregan.

The total turnout here was almost 59%. Sinn Féin got 47% of the first preference votes while Labour received 34% a total of over 80% together. Outgoing candidates received only 13% of first preferences, though Charles Bergin got a creditable personal vote of 249, or almost 10%.

The results in the Newbridge electoral area were as follows:

No. of seats, 4; total number on register, 3626; total number who voted, 1857; spoiled votes, 157; quota, 372. The first preference votes were:

M. Smyth – Labour	508
T. Doran – Sinn Féin	313
J. Fitzgerald – Sinn Féin	293
H. Colohan – Labour	257
Henry Fay – Sinn Féin	152
George Wolfe – outgoing	137
P.J. Doyle – outgoing	123
J. O’Connor – outgoing	72

When Smyth’s surplus, along with the votes of the eliminated candidates, were distributed the following were declared elected: Smyth, Colohan, Doran and Fitzgerald. Jack Fitzgerald was chairman of Kildare G.A.A. county board and his election represents the first time someone with explicit G.A.A. connections won a seat on the council.

The turnout here was 51%. Sinn Féin got 40% of the first preferences and Labour 41%, making a combined 81%. Outgoing candidates got 18% of the first preferences, boosted no doubt by Fay's declaring for Sinn Féin.

In the Naas electoral area the results were as follows:

No. of seats, 5; total number on register, 4,741; total number who Voted, 2776; spoiled votes, 140; quota, 440. The first preference votes were:

D.Ó Buachalla – Sinn Féin	754
Jas. O'Connor – Sinn Féin and outgoing	396
T. Harris – Sinn Féin	360
M. Fitzsimons – independent	301
J. Lawler – Sinn Féin	210
N. Travers – Sinn Féin	198
Mark Carroll – Sinn Féin	170
J.J. Flanagan – Labour	147
E. Farrell – independent	50
T. Lacy – independent	50

When Ó Buachalla's surplus was distributed, as well as the votes of the eliminated candidates, the following were elected: Ó Buachalla, Harris, O'Connor, Carroll and Fitzsimons.

The total turnout in Naas was 58%. Sinn Féin got 75% of the first preferences. Labour only managed 5%, while the independent Michael Fitzsimons achieved nearly 11% and enough transfers to get him elected. He may have benefited in the urban areas for his outspoken stance against the Farmers' Union during the strike of the previous year.

The amalgamated turnout for the whole county was 54%. Sinn Féin got just over 48% of the first preference votes cast. Labour achieved 28%, a total of 76% between them. Outgoing candidates got 14%. Spoiled votes amounted to almost 8% of the total votes. This high figure is attributed by one commentator to two facts,

firstly that the voters were unfamiliar with the use of the proportional representation system and secondly, the confusion engendered by having the county council elections and the RDC elections on the same day, with voting in the same booth.¹⁰⁴

There was no ambiguity about the political choice made by those who voted in Kildare. The final results gave Sinn Féin fifteen seats, Labour five and there was one independent.¹⁰⁵ The chairmen of the four RDCs were described as Sinn Féin supporters and the two co-opted members were similarly inclined.¹⁰⁶ The meaning of the results was immediately obvious to the *Kildare Observer*, a paper which had for years taken a unionist and conservative line on politics. It said:

There was almost a clean sweep of the outgoing members everywhere and Sinn Féin now controls the administration of the entire county Kildare, as indeed it does of practically every county in Ireland. It is evident that things cannot continue as they have been going and we think that from the point of view of England that the only sane attitude would be to make an effort to ascertain how the national aspiration as disclosed first by the parliamentary elections eighteen months ago and now by the county council and district council elections, can be met. It is a fact that only about fifty percent of the electors of Kildare availed of their right to vote ...but still the position of majority rule must be accepted and the majority have demonstrated their views in no uncertain manner.¹⁰⁷

The new county council made no delay in publicly demonstrating where its true allegiance was when it met on 21 June 1920. The details of this first meeting give a clear indication of where the priorities of the new council lay. Since neither the outgoing chairman or vice-chairman, Matthew Minch and George Wolfe, respectively had been returned to the council, the secretary, William Coffey began

¹⁰⁴ *K.O.*, 12 June 1920.

¹⁰⁵ See Liam Kenny, 'Kildare County Council, 1919-1921' in Wm. Nolan and Thos. McGrath (eds), *Kildare history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 2006) p. 662.

¹⁰⁶ *L.L.*, 26 June 1920.

¹⁰⁷ *K.O.*, 12 June 1920.

by calling for nominations for someone to chair the meeting.¹⁰⁸ Donal Ó Buachalla was chosen and, possibly thinking he had been chosen as council chairman for the year, thanked the meeting in Irish. The Irish he spoke is mentioned in the newspaper accounts of the meeting but is not in the official minutes. The first item on the agenda was a letter from the county Kildare Gaelic League and a deputation from that group requesting permission to speak to the meeting. The delegation included Art O'Connor TD, at that time on leave of absence from the council, and working as director of agriculture for the Dáil. The outcome of the deliberations was the following list of decisions and aspirations by the council to, (a) elect an Irish speaking chairman, where possible, (b) to use all their power immediately to further the teaching of Irish and Irish history in schools, (c) that school inspectors be appointed for this purpose, (d) that cheques, headings of papers and books to be in Irish alone and minutes to be signed in Irish and (e) that the council give preference in advertising, etc. to papers that publish Irish speeches and remarks in Irish.¹⁰⁹ Of these only (a) and the part of (d) referring to the signing of the minutes in Irish were ever implemented.

After this the two co-options were made, Nicholas Travers and Henry Fay being chosen to serve on the new council. Then Ó Buachalla was formally chosen as council chairman for the year. Eamonn Ó Modhrain was selected as vice-chair. Ó Modhrain then proposed the following motion, seconded by Tom Harris:

That this council of the elected representatives of the county council of Kildare, at a duly convened meeting, hereby acknowledge the authority of Dáil Eireann, as the duly elected government of the Irish people, and undertakes to give effect to all decrees duly promulgated by the said Dáil Eireann in so far as same effect this council.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ K.K.C. mins. 21 June 1920 and *L.L.*, 26 June 1920.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21 June 1920.

Sinn Féin's wider political agenda is evident in the fact that the resolution was to be sent to the Dáil minister for foreign affairs 'for transmission to the governments of Europe and to the president and the chairman of the Senate and House of Representatives of the U.S.A'.¹¹¹

Michael Fitzsimons was the only one to speak against the motion and he struggled to make his position clear in the atmosphere of the meeting. He said that 'they were all aware that he was elected on a different ticket from the rest of the members. He knew of course that he was in a hopeless minority on the council'.¹¹²

Others tried to bring him around to the general view:

Mr. Phelan: Why don't you throw in your lot with the rest of us?

Mr. Fitzsimons said he was in a curious position.

Mr. Harris: You are a citizen of the Irish Republic as well as anybody else, and I am sure you recognise it.

Mr. Fitzsimons: I am an Irishman and I hope I have always been a good nationalist.¹¹³

The motion was passed, with Fitzsimons dissenting. This independent position did not in fact lose him favour with the other councillors and he was very often chosen as chairman of the council's meetings over the next few years when others were kept from attending by their active role in the general disturbance in the country during the war of independence.

The next item on the agenda caused some awkwardness, if not embarrassment for at least two members of the council. Michael Smyth proposed and Hugh Colohan seconded, that the resolution, passed by the old council in 1916, condemning the rebellion of Easter week should be rescinded. Patrick Phelan said he

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² *L.L.*, 26 June 1920.

¹¹³ Ibid.

did not think the council had passed any such resolution.¹¹⁴ The secretary produced the minute referred to.¹¹⁵ It had been proposed by John Healy and seconded by Phelan himself. Phelan explained himself (in terms that perhaps make sense of his attempts to get Fitzsimons to go along with the majority decision mentioned above) by saying the following:

It shows the altered times they were living in. At the time he believed the Rising in Dublin was wrong, but times had changed since and conditions were altered. Today he believed no man could remain outside the movement in view of the feeling of the country at present. He did not wish to say anything in support of his actions at the time. Since then his opinions had changed very much (applause).¹¹⁶

James O'Connor had also been present at the meeting in 1916 that condemned the Rising. He also said he was not aware that any such resolution was adopted and he suggested that perhaps he wasn't at the meeting. He was at it.¹¹⁷ He said that 'members attending meetings were in the habit of going out for refreshments and in their absence it was possible for resolutions to be passed of which they had no knowledge'.¹¹⁸

The motion to rescind the 1916 condemnation was passed. William Mahon wanted the resolution cut out and burned but Tom Harris said that he was not in favour of cutting the resolution out of the minute book. He suggested that it be cancelled in the minute book by drawing a red line through it. This was done.¹¹⁹

The council, in conjunction with the councils of most of the rest of Ireland, and co-ordinated by the Dáil Department of Local Government, maintained a steady

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ K.C.C. mins. 29 May 1916.

¹¹⁶ *L.L.*, 26 June 1920; one wonders if it was some old slight that made the secretary dig out the motion from the old minute book, to embarrass Phelan.

¹¹⁷ K.C.C. mins. 29 May 1916.

¹¹⁸ *L.L.*, 26 June 1920.

¹¹⁹ This can be seen in the 'Rough minutes' for 1916: it does not occur in the printed version in the main minute book.

campaign of refusal to co-operate with the British government agencies in Ireland. At a special meeting of the county council held immediately after the one that declared allegiance to the Dáil, the council proposed that no lists of ratepayers for information of British agents be drawn up in the council offices.¹²⁰ It was also decided that:

Every possible obstacle be placed in the way of the British government in collecting taxes and otherwise and that the council's law agents be instructed to take no further action in the matter of defending any malicious injuries in the county....and that further, that no rate be struck to meet criminal injury or malicious injury claims'.¹²¹

This latter decision was to cause some controversy later when criminal and malicious injuries claims went undefended and cost the ratepayers dearly. For now it was part of a campaign to by-pass British rule and establish a parallel Irish system instead.

One of the most dramatic examples of this process was the setting up of the Dáil or republican courts. The first of these to appear in Kildare was in Athy in the middle of 1920. Art O'Connor came personally to oversee its establishment and appoint the alternative justices to sit and hear cases in the court.¹²² In August the 'arbitration courts' as they were termed, were being held in Celbridge¹²³ and by September they were also in Prosperous and in Naas.¹²⁴ The speed with which the courts gained acceptance is evident from the report of one case in Celbridge in August 1920. The news report, in the once conservative and unionist *Kildare Observer* says:

A republican arbitration court was held in the Celbridge-Kilcock areas on Monday last when a matter of dispute over possession of a cow following the sale of a farm was disposed of. The court was composed of four volunteer officers while an equal number of legal gentlemen

¹²⁰ K.C.C. mins., special meeting, 21 June 1920.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² *L.L.*, 24 July 1920.

¹²³ *K.O.*, 21 Aug., 1920.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 25 Sept., 1920.

arrived from Dublin by motor, who had been engaged by the plaintiff and the defendant. There was a detachment of volunteers on guard during the proceedings....It may be mentioned that the plaintiff in the case is a gentleman well-known in the counties of Kildare and Dublin, whose leanings were always said to be on the conservative side but who decided in this instance to seek justice at the hands of the republican court when he had failed to get a settlement from the defendant, considering that it was the most speedy and satisfactory course open to him. The decision in favour of the plaintiff was immediately accepted by both parties.¹²⁵

The county council performed its role in the replacing of the old courts by the new by their decision, again in a co-ordinated way with other county councils, to terminate the tenancies of the various court houses for which they paid the rent, thus depriving the old system of their facilities. At the same time the council decided to no longer pay the salary of the high sheriff of Kildare, nor that of the crier of the quarter sessions of assizes, for which they had heretofore been responsible.¹²⁶

The public defiance of the authority of the LGB in the county council's declaration of allegiance to the Dáil soon brought a response. A circular dated 29 July 1920 stated that no loans or grants would be paid to any local authority without definite assurance that they would submit their accounts to audit and be prepared to conform with orders made by the board. This letter was accompanied by one in a similar vein from the under-secretary, Dublin Castle. The letters were marked as 'read' with the comment that no action would be taken in the matter.¹²⁷

Following the instructions of the Dáil Department of Local Government, Kildare County Council acted quickly to secure its funds from possible sequestration by the LGB, which was threatening to take the council's money directly from its official treasurer, specifically to meet the undefended malicious injury claims which were then due. The Hibernian Bank was in effect dismissed as the council's

¹²⁵ *K.O.*, 21 Aug. 1920

¹²⁶ *K.C.C. mins.* 24 Aug. 1920.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 24 Aug. 1920.

treasurer. The finance committee ordered the rate-collectors to send all rates collected directly to the accountant, Mr. Patrick Field. The committee gave private and confidential instructions to him with regard to the disposal of the monies involved.¹²⁸ Secret trustees were nominated who would provide a safe repository for the cash. For obvious reasons, these are not named in any document. Mr. Field was also appointed paymaster with instructions to pay all salaries and other payments due by cheque. This would indicate that whatever arrangements were made involved the use of some other bank.

Then the expected blow happened. The LGB indicated officially in a letter dated 1 October, that they were cutting off the government grants due to the council. The loss to Kildare was calculated to be in the region of £40,000. 'This would be a staggering blow to administration in the county, if something were not done to make good, otherwise than through the medium of increased rates, the deficit thus created'.¹²⁹

The financial problems of the council were exacerbated by the fact that the disturbed situation was making the collection of the rates very difficult. Many people were refusing to pay and seemed to think that they were 'not obliged to pay in the present conditions'.¹³⁰ The rate collectors asked the council for help in the matter. The council authorised them to bring rate defaulters before the republican courts. The position of the rate collectors did not improve as the year went on. Their dilemma was summed up as follows in a newspaper article headed, 'An impossible situation':

The position of rate collectors is not at the moment an enviable one. When the public bodies severed their connection with the LGB in order to prevent their funds being seized they closed their accounts with the banks, and gave instructions to their rate collectors that funds were to be

¹²⁸ K.C.C. fnce. cmte. 1 Sept. 1920.

¹²⁹ *K.O.*, 11 Sept. 1920.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 28 Aug. 1920.

dealt with otherwise than by lodging to the accounts of the several bodies affected. The LGB threatened the rate collectors that they and their sureties would be held responsible for the funds and directed them to lodge them in the name of the local authority or, alternatively, in their own names to a different account. Dáil Eireann has now issued a mandate to the collectors to obey the orders given to them by their own local bodies under pain of dismissal, or to retire. Once more the LGB comes along with a further communication to the rate collectors informing them that they will remove any suspension or dismissal that takes place in such circumstances.¹³¹

By late November the council's finances were in crisis. The rate collection was way behind target. Salaries could not be paid and all road work would soon have to stop. Payments to the boards of guardians for the maintenance of the workhouses could not be met. The council met on 22 November to try to resolve the difficulty.

There was high drama as the councillors gathered for this crisis meeting. Just as they assembled the county police sub-inspector, Kerry Supple, arrived with about ten RIC men and a contingent of military, and entered the courthouse, in which the council chamber and offices were housed. The council minute book, the rate collectors' lodgement abstracts and all correspondence from Dáil Eireann were seized.¹³²

When the council meeting finally proceeded, it decided to conduct the discussions on the finances in private. This was to allow the councillors to express their opinions in confidence. As a result the local press does not carry any account of the exchanges, which led to the decision to ask the Hibernian Bank to resume acting as treasurer and to advance a substantial overdraft against the expected rate revenues. As the minute puts it:

The council having gone into committee to consider the financial condition, and the matter having been fully discussed, it was proposed by Patrick Phelan, seconded by Mr. James O'Connor, and resolved: "That the Hibernian Bank Ltd., Naas be appointed Treasurer

¹³¹ *K.O.*, 4 Dec. 1920

¹³² *K.C.C.* 22 Nov. 1920; *K.O.*, 27 Nov. 1920.

to Kildare County Council and that all resolutions to the contrary be rescinded.”

A deputation, consisting of the Chairman (Donal Ó Buachalla), and Messrs. James O’Connor and Patrick Phelan was appointed to wait on the manager of the bank, for the purpose of ascertaining the bank’s views in the matter of making advances to the council by way of overdraft and in the chairman’s absence Mr. Harris was moved to the chair.¹³³

The bank gave no immediate reply but there was a positive response at the finance committee meeting on 27 November, when a letter stating that they were prepared to advance up to £26,000 by way of overdraft, ‘subject to the usual lodgement of the poor rate’.¹³⁴ The council was now enabled to continue to function for another while.

The decision did not please everyone and the council now found itself squeezed between two competing masters, as their rate collectors had done for some time now. On 6 December Dáil Eireann wrote, questioning the decision of the council to re-engage the Hibernian Bank as treasurer, and pointing out ‘that the council’s action was an infringement of An Dáil’s instructions, and asking for a definite statement as to the future attitude of the council towards Dáil Eireann’.¹³⁵

The council held firm to its decision and wrote to the Dáil explaining that the re-appointment of the bank as treasurer, ‘was done for financial reasons and was not in any way to be regarded as a repudiation of the authority of Dáil Eireann’.¹³⁶

The *Leinster Leader* was critical of the council’s decision as well, comparing Kildare unfavourably to two other counties, Meath and Queens’ County that, ‘have not budged from their original intention and still give their allegiance to Dáil Eireann’.¹³⁷ The writer was inclined to lay most of the blame on the performance of the rate collectors, ‘many of whom come down from the old grand jury days’ and

¹³³ K.C.C. mins., 22 Nov. 1920.

¹³⁴ K.C.C. fnce. cmte. 27 Nov. 1920.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 13 Dec., 1920.

¹³⁶ Ibid..

¹³⁷ *L.L.*, 25 Dec. 1920.

whose loyalty they question.¹³⁸ The paper does not accept that the rates cannot be collected, and describes the country as ‘simply bulging with money made during the war’.¹³⁹ The *Kildare Observer* was not critical of the council but explained the situation they and other authorities found themselves in by describing the financial predicament they were in as ‘pretty nearly hopeless at the moment’.¹⁴⁰

Another type of pressure was coming on Kildare County Council members from the police and army. IRA activity in the county had increased in the second half of the year and two policemen were killed in an ambush at Kill on 21 August 1920.¹⁴¹ There were further ambushes in November and the members of the county council who were suspected of being also members of the IRA were put under increased surveillance. Michael Smyth was arrested on his way to the council meeting of 22 November and Tom Harris was arrested after it was over¹⁴². Eamonn Ó Modhrain was arrested and tried by court martial on a charge of possession of seditious literature. He was given an eighteen-month sentence.¹⁴³

Apart from the difficulties that members of the council who were actively involved in the military campaign of the IRA had in attending to their council affairs, other more mundane realities prevented many of the members of the new county council from giving as much time to the work as they might have liked. Most of the new councillors were either small farmers or workers in jobs that were not easy to take time off from for meetings. Within a few weeks of its first meeting the council decided to hold more of its committee meetings on the same days as the council

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ *K.O.*, 4 Dec. 1920.

¹⁴¹ Dooley, ‘IRA activity in Kildare,’ pp. 626-7; *K.O.*, 28 Aug. 1920

¹⁴² *L.L.*, 27 Nov. 1920.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 11 Dec. 1920.

meetings so that members might limit the time off they needed.¹⁴⁴ The changed social make-up in the council chamber was explicitly referred to in the local press:

It was evident that the advent of so many workers to the administrative ranks in our public bodies would produce changes not alone in the spirit of administration but in the circumstances in which it takes place. One of the first matters to which the newly elected councils devoted attention was an attempt to meet the convenience of the new members.... Heretofore the council has been composed for the most part of men to whom the loss of a day in the week from their ordinary affairs did not matter a great deal, and certainly not as much as it does the workman. One of the difficulties that has been experienced is the holding of meetings at times calculated to suit the convenience of member.¹⁴⁵

The writer goes on to point out that the problem is made more difficult by the fact that there were twenty-two committees in all, between those of the council itself and those on which it was represented.¹⁴⁶

In spite of this difficulty the 'workmen' on the council managed to win big wage increases for the council's road workers and to have one of their most cherished policies, namely, the use of direct labour for road works, approved soon after their term began. Neither issue got a smooth passage through the council, and divisions emerged over them, not only between the workers and the farmers but also between the small and the larger farmers over aspects of both.

The direct labour proposal came up first, in August 1920. Pat Phelan and Henry Fay, both members of the previous council and prominent members of the Farmers' Union objected to the change because of the potential cost of the move to the ratepayers. Michael Fitzsimons had a similar objection to it.¹⁴⁷ It was eventually passed by the meeting but was not implemented right away. The county surveyor

¹⁴⁴ K.C.C. mins. 28 June 1920.

¹⁴⁵ *K.O.*, 10 July 1920.

¹⁴⁶ For a full list of these committees see appendix 4 below.

¹⁴⁷ K.C.C. mins. 24 Aug. 1920; *K.O.*, 28 Aug., 1920.

was directed to submit a report about the proposed direct labour scheme to the next quarterly meeting of the council.

The wages increase was dealt with at the meeting of 1 September. There was an I.T.& G.W.U. application for an increase from 38/- to 50/- per week.¹⁴⁸ This was eventually negotiated down to 46/- but not before a difference of opinion arose about the role of farmers in the current contract system of roadworks in the county. Jack Fitzgerald protested against the current practice that prevailed of a farmer with two horses and carts – men who were well off – working constantly on the roads. Others agreed and said that when men were idle farmers should not be working their carts. The work should be divided equally. There was a proposal passed that a farmer holding more than thirty acres of land should not be employed as a surface man or a ganger under the proposed direct labour scheme.¹⁴⁹

The surveyor's report came before the meeting of 22 November, amid the chaos of the police raid and the agonising over re-appointing the Hibernian Bank as treasurer. It is worth going into it in some detail for the issue was to be a focus of much tension between the councillors in the very near future when high unemployment put pressure on the councillors to use road works as a means of alleviating the lack of work. The surveyor accepted the council's decision on the scheme but was hesitant about the timing of its introduction. He said the following:

Acting on an order issued at last meeting I am laying before you a scheme for the maintenance of all county roads by direct labour. By the regulations governing it, if adopted, it must remain in force for three years, at the end of which the councillors will be free to re-enact it, alter it, or entirely discontinue it.... We have been maintaining a very considerable number of the principal roads of the county by it in the absence of contractors or sub-contractors for the past three or four years.... Direct labour is reported in

¹⁴⁸ See above p. 290.

¹⁴⁹ K.C.C. mins. 1 Sept. 1920; *L.L.*, 4 Sept. 1920.

other counties to have brought an eminently satisfactory change for the better throughout whole systems of roads which were notoriously bad under the former system. This, of course, was done before the great increase in the cost of labour, and owing to this cause too, the number of men we can employ in the projected scheme throughout the whole county in the projected scheme may appear to be disappointingly small.¹⁵⁰

He also mentions that far greater supervision of the road works was required under direct labour since the contractors could be held to account for this under the old system. He warned that his own staff would not be able to do all of this extra work without both extra help and increased salaries, given that ‘we have about 1,220 miles of road’.¹⁵¹ The county council provisionally approved the scheme, to come into operation on 1 April 1921. The final approval of it came, after eliciting the opinions of the RDCs, in February 1921, when it was adopted as council policy. The change was only agreed by the casting vote of the chairman, Donal Ó Buachalla. In general the labour members and the small farmers were for the change and the large farmers were against.¹⁵²

A delegation from the Kildare Farmers’ Union addressed the meeting in February 1921, naturally opposing the adoption of a scheme for direct labour in Kildare. Their first speaker explained that they represented 1,700 farmers, mostly large ratepayers. His objection revealed that there was some resentment among the farmers who formerly did the contract work on the roads and who were now to be ignored in favour of a more expensive scheme. He also rather disingenuously suggested that the reason that so many contracts had recently gone untendered for (thereby forcing the county surveyor to undertake the work by direct labour anyway)

¹⁵⁰ K.C.C. mins. 22 Nov. 1920.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., 21 Feb. 1921.

was because the contractors were only offered ‘starvation wages’ for the work.¹⁵³ He might have mentioned the possibility that the war-time prosperity of farmers meant that they did not need to look for contract road work to supplement their earnings.

The next speaker on the farmers’ behalf got more directly to the point. He had done his research and had much detail to back his case. The members he represented paid over two-thirds of the rates collected in the county. He had figures showing that the estimates before the council for the following year’s budget would cause the rates to almost double over the whole county. He showed in a table that much of this increase was caused by dearer road maintenance.¹⁵⁴ It is worth giving his figures for council expenditure for the previous decade:

Table 2. Kildare County Council Expenditure 1912-1922¹⁵⁵

Spent on road maintenance	Total spent on unions in the county
1912 - £19001	£26394
1915 - £21231	£24533
1916 - £21666	£24629
1917 - £21696	£27470
1920 - £27978	£34048
1921 - £32700	£41133
1922 - £52662	£73552 ¹⁵⁶

He concluded by saying that his members’ objection was not based on politics or class but on a belief that this was not an opportune time to add an additional £21000 to the ratepayers’ burden.

The I.T. & G.W.U. also had a delegation address the meeting. Their first speaker conceded that initially the direct labour system looked extravagant, but that it

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ K.C.C. mins. 21 Feb., 1920

¹⁵⁵ *L.L.*, 26 Feb. 1921.

¹⁵⁶ The last figures are based on the council’s own estimate for the next year.

was ultimately more economical to have a larger number of men working on direct labour and spending their wages in the area.¹⁵⁷ He then went on explain that the contract system was failing anyway:

He pointed out that for a recent period there were seventy-six defaulting contractors whose roads had to pass into the county surveyor's hands and be done by direct labour. What was likely to happen in the future with its difficulties if so much happened in the past, were they to again put their trust in the contract system?¹⁵⁸

He then expressed an opinion that neatly summed up how the landless town dwellers viewed the farmers. He said:

Some of the contractors might be in a bad way if unemployed, but they all had a bit of land between them and starvation. That was not so with the labourer, who was very much worse off, and it was the duty of the county council to give priority to consideration of the men who were faced with absolute starvation when unemployed¹⁵⁹

Two letters from council members, who were at that time in jail for their IRA activity, were then read to the meeting. They did not give much solace to the workers of Kildare. The first was from Jack Fitzgerald, who was also chairman of Kildare G.A.A. county board. He said:

We who are cut off from the outside world are not in a position of definitely saying whether this increase is really necessary, but we do believe that this is not the time to lavishly expend money. For my own part I am dead against any money being expended on certain roads, the roads leading to the Curragh camp and Newbridge railway station for instance, and I am of the opinion that roads which are used by military motor lorries and motor cars should be left untouched. Nor should there be any increase of expenditure except there is imperative necessity for it –
Yours sincerely, Jack Fitzgerald¹⁶⁰

Tom Harris also wrote, again opposing the direct labour scheme. His letter goes:

¹⁵⁷ The view that direct labour would employ more men contradicts the county surveyor's opinion expressed in his report to the K.C.C. meeting of 22 Nov. 1920.

¹⁵⁸ *L.L.*, 26 Feb. 1921.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Ballykinlar

To the chairman of Kildare County Council

A cara, - I was reminded by the daily papers recently that a scheme for direct labour would come before the council for adoption at its next meeting. Owing to the abnormal state of the country and the fact of a number of members of the council being prisoners, I think it would be advisable to make no change of a drastic nature. Owing to the setback caused by non-payment of grants by the English LGB, in order to carry on, I believe it is the duty of the council to economise as far as possible.

– Is mise le meas mór,
Tomás Ó hEharchadha¹⁶¹

Harris was a farmer and might have been expected to think this way but Fitzgerald was a bootmaker from Newbridge and might have been expected to side with the labourers.

Hugh Colohan was annoyed by these interventions. He said the county surveyor must have some money to do the roads under either scheme and the labourers should benefit. He said:

The labourers of Ireland had taken their part in the fight and were now entitled to consideration from a republican board. What was the use of an Irish republic if they were to starve? The labourers would give honest work for this money and the wages would be spent in the county. It was not the farmer who won the land act, but the labourers who won it for them, and was there to be no return from the farmers now...Labour had fought all through the national movement and made sacrifices and were willing to make more sacrifices before they would do anything to endanger the national cause, but labour should now be considered¹⁶²

The votes for and against it are interesting as they match very accurately the pattern of opinion for and against continued council expenditure on workers and their interests as against moderation of expense in the interest of the ratepayers that developed over the remaining life of this council. It is worth noting that had the two jailed members been present the direct labour scheme would not have been adopted.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

Of those present the nine who voted for the scheme were: Wm. Murray, Chris Supple, R. McCann, M. Carroll, James Cregan, A. Murphy, H. Colohan, J. Farrell, and N. Travers. Those who voted against were: J. Cusack, P. Phelan, M. Fitzsimons, J. O'Connor, L. Heffernan, Wm. Bourke, J. Traynor, H. Fay and N. Hanagan.

The labour members and the small farmers on the council voted for the scheme while the larger farmers and independents voted against it. Membership of Sinn Féin was not a factor in favouring or not favouring its adoption.

Given the parlous state of the council's finances as outlined at the same meeting the whole discussion may have had a theoretical flavour, since in reality there was no more money available. The chairman, Donal Ó Buachalla introduced the report of the finance committee by saying that he thought an order should go out from the county council to the ratepayers to pay the rates. 'One would think they were possessed of sufficient patriotism to pay their rates'.¹⁶³ The report was grim. They had £20,479 to meet immediate expenses of £30,225. Patrick Phelan stated the obvious: 'That leaves us in a very insolvent condition'.¹⁶⁴ There was only £13,000 of the rates due collected, with £36,000 outstanding. This was the real cause of their current difficulties. There was a long discussion of this, some of which went as follows:

Mr. Fay: I don't see why the rate collectors can't collect the money and I believe if the position was explained to the ratepayers they would pay the rates all right.

Mr. Carroll: I think the ratepayers and the rate collectors are taking advantage of the present unsettled state of things.

Secretary: this time last year more than half the rates had been collected.

Mr. Carroll: The wrong men are collecting the rates¹⁶⁵.

¹⁶³ *L.L.*, 26 Feb. 1920; K.C.C. mins. 21 Feb. 1920.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

The council had already tried to get a further overdraft from its treasurer, the Hibernian Bank but no more was forthcoming. The council had no choice but to postpone all payments then due until the next quarterly meeting, unless more of the outstanding rates could be collected. The county surveyor proposed no new road works, saying, 'with such an unsettled state of affairs it is probably best to conserve funds for the payment of wages'.¹⁶⁶

Defaulting ratepayers were causing a big problem and in May posters went up around the county, on the authority of the Dáil, calling on people to pay their rates. One commentator on those who wouldn't pay was of the opinion that their ability to pay 'was well-known', and he was scathing of the suggestion that the failure to pay was a political gesture. 'There is no question of political principle being involved in the non-payment of rates....Base, sordid considerations of self alone influence the defaulters'.¹⁶⁷

Meanwhile the revolution went on outside the council chamber and the councillors were asked by Dáil Eireann to help establish a fund to support the dependents of 'those shot or arrested in the present struggle'.¹⁶⁸ In January a letter from the Dáil Department of Local Government set out in dramatic terms the role that local representatives were expected to play in this and other matters. It says:

The enemy government is attempting by a campaign of frightfulness to stampede the Irish nation into an abandonment of its rightful claim. That campaign is failing and will fail but its victims are many.... The military and political organisations are harassed at the moment and in any event the prosecution of the struggle demands the concentration of all their energies. In the circumstances it is felt that there is no alternative but to ask the public representative bodies to undertake the work of relief.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ *L.L.*, 7 May 1921.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 15 Jan. 1921; K.C.C. 12 Jan. 1921.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

The letter went on to pick out the finance committees of the county councils as the ideal body to perform this task, as, ‘their members are invariably men of practical business experience, eminently suited to the task of acting in the capacity as custodians and trustees of such relief a relief fund as is contemplated.’¹⁷⁰

The finance committee was to undertake to be the committee for this purpose and to report back to the council.¹⁷¹ They did well and when later in the year they handed over the duties of the fund to the Irish White Cross, they made a return to the council of their receipts and expenses which showed they had collected £1,599 and disbursed £1,553, leaving a balance of £46 to be handed to the new trustees. It was suggested that the list of subscribers to the fund would be published in the local press, but, presumably for reasons of not wanting to make the job of the police easier, this was not done.¹⁷²

And the military campaign did continue. An RIC patrol was ambushed near the Catholic parish church in Maynooth and an officer later died from wounds received.¹⁷³ The IRA campaign may not have been as intensive or ferocious as it was in other parts of the country but in a heavily garrisoned county such as Kildare it was not easy to move without the notice of the police and military. Nevertheless there were active units of the IRA in Kildare in which several prominent county councillors were active, when they were not imprisoned. These included Tom Harris, Jack Fitzgerald, Eamon O’ Mordhain, Francis Doran and Michael Smyth.¹⁷⁴

The finances of the council continued to dominate the meetings during the first half of the year. The council struck the following rates for each of the RDCs in

¹⁷⁰ *L.L.*, 15 Jan. 1921.

¹⁷¹ K.C.C. mins. 12 Jan. 1921.

¹⁷² K.C.C. mins. County Kildare republican prisoners’ dependents’ fund committee, 31 Aug. 1921.

¹⁷³ *L.L.*, 26 Feb. 1921.

¹⁷⁴ For a description of the IRA campaign in Kildare and the reasons for its relative lack of intensity, see, Dooley, ‘IRA activity in Kildare during the war of independence’, pp. 625-56.

its control. The previous year's rates are given beside it to illustrate the extent of the increase:

Table 3. County Kildare Rates 1920-21 and 1921-22¹⁷⁵

RDC	Agricultural Land		Other Buildings	
	'20-'21	'21-'22	'20-'21	'21-'22
Athy No. 1.	6s 8d	12s 9d	8s 2d	14s 3d
Celbridge No. 1	4s 8d	11s 3d	5s 11d	12s 6d
Edenderry No. 2	5s 9d	13s 2d	6s 10d	14s 3d
Naas No. 1	5s 0d	12s 0d	6s 2d	13s 2d

Considering how difficult it was proving to collect the current rates, these figures seemed impossible to meet. Many of the ratepayers would also be liable for a variety of extra charges for local amenities, such as drainage schemes, public lighting or sewerage systems.¹⁷⁶

Unable to halt the council in the chamber the Farmers' Union issued a writ (in the high court in Dublin, not in the republican court system) which, while not claiming that the council had acted illegally, did contend that the proposals in the rates estimate were excessive and were not justified by anything that the ratepayers had been able to learn of the financial condition of the public bodies. The injunction sought to force the council to make a lower estimate.

An intervention by the Dàil to try to relieve all the county councils in the country of some of the hardship caused by the loss of the agricultural grant allowed a reduction in Kildare's rates that was enough to halt the farmers' legal proceedings.

¹⁷⁵ K.C.C. mins. 23 Feb. 1920; Ibid., 12 Feb. 1921.

¹⁷⁶ See appendix 1. below.

County secretaries were told to issue receipts for rates paid in order to alleviate fears that ratepayers would be required to pay their rates twice.¹⁷⁷ At the same time a sum of £100,000 was voted for loans to county councils that were in financial difficulties.¹⁷⁸ The Dail also ordered all county councils in the country to deduct from their estimates any amount which had been allowed to meet the cost of malicious injuries which the Dáil was now proposing to meet by way of grants from its own resources as a substitute for the agricultural grant.¹⁷⁹ This allowed a reduction in the rates estimate of between 3s 4d in the £ and 6s 1d in the £. More importantly, from a political point of view it allowed the labour representatives on the county council to save face. The Farmers' Union were claiming the credit for the reduction and Eamonn Ó Mordhain the chairman of the meeting commented that he 'would like it to go forth to the public that it was the republican government that had reduced the rate estimate'.¹⁸⁰

The *Kildare Observer* did not care 'a jot by what agency the relief of rates had come and welcomed it but warned all sides that it was facile to blame the stopping of the agricultural grant and/or the size of the malicious injury claims against the council for the inexorable rise in the rates. It made the simple point that leaving both out of the equation 'the council estimate was still £64,126 in excess of last year's'.¹⁸¹

The Dáil was considering the cost of local government throughout the country and one of the first initiatives it explored was a dismantling of the workhouse system. A study of the abolition of the workhouses concludes that the workhouses were closed 'in order to wrestle control of local government

¹⁷⁷ Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 65.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ K.C. C mins. 21 Feb. 1921; K.C.C. mins. special meeting, 13 May 1921.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 23 May 1921; *L.L.*, 28 May, 1921.

¹⁸¹ *K.O.*, 23 May 1921.

administration from the British local government',¹⁸² and that there was no discernible social programme devised by Sinn Féin to replace the help the poor had received under the old scheme.¹⁸³

The upkeep of the workhouse through the boards of guardians represented a large part of the expenditure of local authorities. The term 'workhouse' carried such negative associations for most Irish people that an attempt to abolish it or reform it radically would meet little opposition. Combined with an opportunity to do something about the rapidly rising rates, county councils were eager to implement the suggestion of the department. This first came before the council in early June and a committee representing the boards of guardians and the council was created to draw up an 'amalgamation' scheme under the minister's proposal.¹⁸⁴

By the end of June a conference of the interested local bodies had been held in Naas and a general agreement reached on the desirability of radical changes to the system. The *Kildare Observer's* editorial comments on the conference give a sense of the attitude of the time to the workhouses and to the county council's role in them. It explains that, 'The county council as such is not in close touch with the work of the poor law administration. It has in fact nothing whatsoever to do with the matter beyond raising rates to meet the demands of the various boards'.¹⁸⁵ The writer then goes on to state:

The county council has approved of the principle, and it is a striking fact that at the conference no word of protest was raised by any single representative of any of the bodies participating against the proposal to abolish the workhouse. This is not at all surprising, for the workhouse system has never been popular with the poor and afflicted, and has certainly nothing to commend it

¹⁸² Daniel, Martin Gerard, 'The politics of the poor law, 1900-1923' (M.A. thesis, NUI Maynooth, 1998) p.185.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 187

¹⁸⁴ K.C.C. mins. fnce cmte 1 June 1921.

¹⁸⁵ *K.O.*, 25 June 1921.

to the ratepayers.¹⁸⁶

The writer goes on to quote one of the members of the Naas poor law guardians, Mrs. Moore, as saying that the administration of the outdoor relief given by her board cost just ten per cent of the total spent, while a full fifty per cent of the expenditure on indoor relief went on administration charges. Clearly, the hope was that large savings could be made on these administrative costs. That this did not turn out to be the case was to be a major cause of frustration and conflict among the councillors during the first few years of the new County Board of Health scheme.¹⁸⁷

By the time the conference met, the members of several of the RDCs had already resolved to close their workhouses anyway. The conference congratulated them on this decision and recorded the progress to date in their own outline plan for the whole county.¹⁸⁸ The Athy workhouse was to be converted into a home for the old and infirm. It was hoped at this stage to retain the hospital attached but this did not survive into the final county plan. Kildare's connection with Baltinglass workhouse had already been severed under the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1919. Celbridge workhouse was to be closed 'as soon as the guardians find it expedient to board out patients or transfer them to some suitable home'.¹⁸⁹ Again it was thought possible to retain the hospital, at least in the short-term, but this was not to be either. Edenderry was also to close and again, to retain its hospital. Only the former happened. Naas was to close from 1 July 1921 and the inmates were to be transferred to homes or boarded out. The hospital was to be retained as the central

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ See below p. 346.

¹⁸⁸ Report of the conference of representatives appointed by the Kildare County Council and by the boards of guardians, in reference to the question of the amalgamation of unions in county Kildare, held at the courthouse, Naas, 31 June 1921, in K.C.C. minute book., 1920-24.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

hospital for the county.¹⁹⁰ This is in fact the only hospital to make it into the final draft plan finally adopted by the county council at the end of the year. There was much political wrangling between the major centres of Athy, Naas and Celbridge-Kilcock over where hospital facilities should be located, until economic reality forced the closure of all but Naas hospital. The conference ended with a joint statement as follows:

The conference believes that the workhouse system as at present administered is not a healthy factor in the life of the Irish nation, and the conference therefore urges upon the boards of guardians the importance, from an economic and moral standpoint, of remedying the present poor law system by the immediate abolition of the workhouses.¹⁹¹

That the whole procedure would not be as easy as deciding to do it was obvious fairly soon. In September it was reported that things were not going to plan in the Naas workhouse closure with, 'a number of inmates still remaining in the institution undisposed of, and all the officials being at work as usual'.¹⁹² Later in the month the reasons for the tardiness of the procedure are explained:

Naas workhouse as such was to have been abolished some time ago under the scheme adopted by the board of guardians. Under a resolution passed at the last meeting all the officials whose services are being dispensed with, with the exception of the master, were to have left the institution during the past week, but we understand it has not been found practicable to carry out this part of the arrangement. while the inmates remain in the institution obviously they cannot be left to their own devices, and we are afraid the scheme adopted is far from watertight, bearing in mind the number of occasions on which definite dates for closing down have been fixed.¹⁹³

The officials were not pleased to have their retiring allowances cut by the poor law board and they pointed out that some of the inmates who were to leave the workhouse would receive a pension of 30/- per week, which was in fact more than

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² *K.O.*, 3 Sept. 1921.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 24 Sept. 1921.

any of the retiring officials would get under the closure scheme.¹⁹⁴ This obviously slowed down the process of clearing the workhouse.

Eventually a county health scheme was devised and adopted by the county council in December 1921 to replace the workhouses in an orderly and co-ordinated way. The main points of the new scheme were presented as follows:

SCHEME OF UNION AMALGAMATION

Adopted at special meeting of county council held on 12 December 1921¹⁹⁵

1. That county Kildare be a unit for the purpose of the administration of the duties heretofore performed by the boards of guardians and kindred services in the county be co-ordinated under, and administered by one authority on behalf of the county council, and it shall be known as the County Board of Health. That all proceedings of the County Board of Health shall be subject to the approval of the Local Government Department of Dáil Eireann.
2. That the County Board of Health shall consist of forty-five members, fourteen of whom shall be county councillors, appointed by the county council; twenty-eight district councillors, ten of whom shall be appointed by Naas No. 1 RDC, eight by Athy DC, four by Celbridge No.1 RDC, three by Edenderry No. 2 RDC, two by Athy UDC, two by Naas UDC and one representative of the County Insurance Committee and one of the County Medical Association.
3. That a quorum of members shall be five...etc.

Section 16 referred to the setting up of the county home for the old and infirm (and expectant mothers) in the Athy workhouse, and section 17, to the establishment of the county hospital in the workhouse buildings in Naas. This section provided that 'private patients be admitted on terms to be arranged by the county Board of Health'.¹⁹⁶

The term 'outdoor relief' was to be abolished and replaced by that of 'county pension'. This new term did not catch on and it became known almost exclusively as 'home help' or 'home assistance' and was soon being condemned as an unjustifiable

¹⁹⁴ *K.O.*, 24 Sept. 1921.

¹⁹⁵ *K.C.C. mins.* 21 Dec. 1921.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

drain on the council's resources.¹⁹⁷ Section 25 of the scheme made the county council responsible for funding the activities of the health board 'on an annual estimate and demand made by the board on the council'.¹⁹⁸ This meant that the council had no direct say in the extent of the demand that could be made on it from the board.

The Kildare County Board of Health finally met for the first time on 15 March 1922. It almost immediately found itself the focus of widespread criticism for the amount of its estimated cost, which was clearly far more than had been expected.¹⁹⁹

All of the planning for the 'amalgamation' scheme took place in a more peaceful country since the truce had taken effect on 11 July 1921 and the second Dáil had met in August, the members choosing to ignore the 'farcical comedy' of the southern Ireland parliament, which had met in June.²⁰⁰ A long-serving former council member, Matthew Minch, died on 5 June and the council noted his passing.²⁰¹ The Ireland he had known was about to enter a phase in its history that would perhaps have seemed unimaginable to Minch, as to other nationalists of his generation and shade of opinion, when he was being introduced to King George V in Dublin Castle in 1911.²⁰²

For Kildare County Council the main priority was not the future constitutional status of that new Ireland, but the more immediate problem of collecting enough rates to keep the county administration from collapsing. This was actually achieved in Kildare. Thanks perhaps to the truce, the Hibernian bank was

¹⁹⁷ See below p. 346.

¹⁹⁸ K.C.C. 21 Dec. 1921.

¹⁹⁹ Kildare County Board of Health mins 15 Mar. 1922.

²⁰⁰ The description of the parliament in *L.L.*, 2 July 1921.

²⁰¹ *Irish Independent*, 6 June 1921; *K.O.* 11 June 1921; K.C. C mins. 20 June 1921.

²⁰² See above p. 174.

once more persuaded to allow the council overdraft facilities²⁰³ and by following the instructions from the Dáil minister for local government, Liam Cosgrove, the council managed to stay ahead of insolvency. In the course of a letter to the council in June the minister had said:

I am glad to know that the question of amalgamation of unions is being seriously taken up by your council and by the boards of guardians in your county. You raise the question of payments of awards for malicious injuries, which were embodied in last year's rate and duly levied. The attitude of the department is that the county councils cannot repudiate liability for paying these awards [malicious injuries from the previous year], the rate having been duly struck and levied. I am convinced that no republican court would acquit the county council of this liability in the circumstances. At the same time it must be remembered that with the financial shortness prevailing someone must wait, and it becomes a matter of judicious selection. The view of the department is that these awards should not be paid as long as any arrears exist in the salaries or wages of officials or employees of the council or any of the subsidiary bodies. When all such arrears have been cleared off, and contracts to the various public bodies have been paid to date, these awards become the first claim on the funds of your council.²⁰⁴

Minister Cosgrove was evidently trying to give the council a way of negotiating the many demands on its resources while at the same time upholding the legitimacy of the claims against it for damages caused by the war of independence. Perhaps he was looking forward to a post-truce position when the law of the land would need to be defended from the danger of being undermined by expediency and opportunism.

The administration of the county was returning to some normality. The county surveyor even began to repair the roads again, trying out the direct labour scheme for the first time all over the county. As one paper put it, 'the peace has had its healing effect on the roads which are slowly getting back to shape'.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ K.C.C. fnce. cmte. 10 Aug. 1921.

²⁰⁴ *K.O.*, 25 June 1921.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 13 Aug. 1921.

The truce also allowed some relaxation of the security situation and Eamonn Ó Modhrain, Tom Harris and Jack Fitzgerald were among the earlier prisoners released under the more settled conditions.²⁰⁶ They arrived back in time to get involved in the council's deliberations on the details that were emerging from the peace talks in London.

The Anglo-Irish treaty was signed on 6 December 1921 and the Dáil met to debate its contents over a week later. In Kildare, a hint that all was not well with the agreement emerged quite soon and the *Kildare Observer* reported that:

Some consternation was created in the public mind by the announcement of Mr. De Valera a couple of days prior to the opening meeting of Dáil Eireann on the subject of the peace treaty, that he could not recommend the ratification of it. This was the first indication that the general public had that the terms were not perfectly satisfactory to the country.²⁰⁷

The paper does not minimise the difficulties but finishes by commenting that: 'We refuse to believe that Dáil Eireann will deliberately choose a path that leads to war'.²⁰⁸

The *Leinster Leader* noted that the Christmas holiday that year was 'spent in discussing the pros and cons of the fateful issues before the country'.²⁰⁹ The editor sums up the state of the argument and the balance between the two sides quite well when he said:

As we understand it the position now is that Mr. Griffith and his supporters ask for acceptance of the treaty on its merits and not because it represents the ideal which the country aspires to. The Teachtaí who take their stand 'on the rock of the republic' do so in the conviction that the treaty is destructive of the republican ideal and therefore must be defeated at all hazards.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ *L.L.*, 26 Nov. 1921.

²⁰⁷ *K.O.*, 24 Dec. 1921.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *L.L.*, 31 Dec. 1921.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

As the debate resumed in the Dáil after a short Christmas break the local authorities were already expressing their opinion. Athy Board of Guardians was the first public body in the county to express an opinion and they were for the treaty.²¹¹ When Kildare County Council met on 30 December some members wanted to have the debate in private.²¹² Eamonn Ó Mordhain was of this opinion but he had very few backers. Jack Fitzgerald said he had no desire that anything he said should not go to the public. Henry Fay supported this view. Others didn't want to deal with the treaty at all but to wait and see what the Dáil decided before deliberating on the issue. Tom Harris was of this opinion:

This is a question I do not like to discuss at all at the present, because it is a most momentous question and the members of the council have not the full information about [the treaty].... We had to trust our representatives for the past five or six years during the most critical period of our history, and I think as yet we should not dictate anything to them.... I think we should stand by the order of Dáil Eireann and that there should be no public discussion of this matter. We might only create more misunderstandings than there are already.²¹³

The chairman, Eamonn Ó Mordhain and Jack Fitzgerald, both IRA activists, replied to the effect that the Dáil injunction about public discussion applied only to T.D.s and not to public bodies. Henry Fay made the point that the T.D.s were to go back to the people over Christmas and get their opinion: 'What opinion can they get otherwise than through the public bodies?'²¹⁴ It is worth quoting some of the exchanges at length as it gives a flavour of the tensions around the treaty and of the relationships that existed between the members of the county council and the T.D.s at the time. Michael Fitzsimons, the independent member of the council, from Naas took up the above point:

²¹¹ *K.O.*, 31 Dec. 1921.

²¹² *K.C.C. mins.* 30 Dec. 1921.

²¹³ *K.O.*, 7 Jan. 1922.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Mr Fitzsimons – I think the object of the meeting is as far as possible to make it known to the members of Dáil Eireann what the feelings of the people are on this question, and I don't see how you could go about getting the feeling of the people better than by calling a public meeting.

Mr. Fitzgerald – I was speaking to Messrs. Buckley and O'Connor²¹⁵ and Mr Buckley told me if he gets an expression of opinion from his constituents it will cause him to think over the action he intended to take. Mr O'Connor told me that if his constituents wanted him to vote a certain way he would reconsider his decision. I asked him what steps he proposed to take and he told me. Mr Harris says this is a momentous crisis, I agree, but I do not see why men, even if they are deputies, should fail to be guided by the opinions of the people. As Arthur Griffith stated, they must remember they are not our masters....

Mr Colohan – I agree. I think we, the constituents of these men should have a right to express our views in this matter. After all, we, the people of the country have to bear whatever suffering is going to take place if the treaty is rejected, and there is no need to go into all the details for or against the treaty. We all know them. As men of commonsense, we realise what is at stake. It is ridiculous to put forward the plea that the representatives should have a free hand, and that the constituents should not have a voice in deciding....

Mr Travers – I think we are kept in the dark a good bit by Dáil Eireann and we have not the facts before us, and therefore I think we ought not to have a public discussion. We have elected these men. We trusted them, and we trust them today.

Mr Fay – Different people have asked me if it was possible that the county council of Kildare were not going to pronounce on the matter. Are we going to stand like dummies. What are we ashamed of or afraid of?

Mr Fitzgerald – Are we going back to the old days? There is no reason for keeping the people in the dark. I propose that the meeting be open to the press.

Mr Colohan seconded.

Mr Travers – I propose that it be private.²¹⁶

This latter got no seconder and so the meeting continued in public. James O'Connor could not attend the meeting due to illness but he sent in his opinion in a letter to the chairman. He wanted nothing said or done at the council meeting which would in effect 'dictate to our representatives and hamper their judgement'²¹⁷ on the

²¹⁵ Donal Ó Buachalla T.D. for North Kildare and Art O'Connor T.D. for South Kildare, both of whom voted against the treaty on 7 Jan. 1922.

²¹⁶ *K.O.* 7 Jan. 1922.

²¹⁷ *K.O.* 7 Jan. 1922.

treaty. He also included a long motion to that effect, which received no seconder.

The motion that was eventually considered by the county council was proposed by

Jack Fitzgerald and seconded by Henry Fay and went as follows:

That we, the Kildare County Council, are in favour of the ratification of the treaty between Ireland and England and call upon the deputies for Kildare and Wicklow to support it. That copies of this resolution be sent to the deputies for Kildare and Wicklow, and to Messrs. Griffith, de Valera and Collins.²¹⁸

In proposing the motion Fitzgerald said that:

He had been fairly well all over Kildare, and he had no hesitation in saying that there was a vast majority for ratification. Newbridge and the surrounding districts were, he believed, unanimous and those he had heard express an opinion against ratification he could count on the thumb of his left hand.²¹⁹

Henry Fay justified his support for the motion on the same grounds, as well as on the calibre of those who were supporting Griffith and the treaty, among them the ‘great commandants of the republican army in Ireland – Michael Collins, Dick Mulcahy, Sean McKeon (sic), Fionan Lynch and Geróid O’ Sullivan (sic) ...men who had taken their lives in their hands and gone about with prices on their heads’.²²⁰

Tom Harris was ambivalent on the issue. He spoke of his own republican background and the ideal for which he fought, but, he continued:

I see the awkwardness of the situation now. I still stand by the republican principle and by de Valera. I believe de Valera is right in what he is doing, but I believe the country is not up to de Valera’s standard but I am glad that de Valera has taken this stand for the old republican ideal, for the men who sacrificed everything....I don’t want to say anything against the men in Dáil Eireann who are for the ratification. They saw nothing better before them and to prevent chaos and ruin....My idea is that I don’t

²¹⁸ K.C.C. mins. 31 Dec. 1921.

²¹⁹ *K.O.*, 7 Jan. 1922.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

want to vote against ratification, but I think I will keep myself clear by not voting at all.²²¹

The Chairman, Eamonn Ó Mordhain, said that he ‘was frankly opposed to the resolution. He had been a republican all his life and intended to remain one’.²²² The resolution was put to the meeting and declared adopted. As well as the proposer and seconder, the following members voted for it: Michael Fitzsimons, Hugh Colohan, and Nicholas Travers, making five votes for. Mark Carroll, Nicholas Hanagan and James Cregan voted against. Tom Harris abstained and Eamonn Ó Mordhain as chairman also dissented. It should be noted that less than half the council members were in attendance. Why so many of them should have stayed away is unclear. Perhaps they shared the reluctance of those who wanted the meeting held in private to speak out. Patrick Phelan and William Burke chose to attend a Farmers’ Union meeting on the same day as the council meeting which gave unanimous support to the treaty.²²³ Knowing the political opinions of those who stayed away it is certain that had they all attended the vote would have been just as close, though it is not possible to say whether it would have gone for or against the treaty. The passing of the motion can certainly not be considered a ringing endorsement of the treaty.

Kildare County Council’s vote in favour of ratification was mentioned in the national press among a list of other local bodies which supported the treaty. By 2 January 1922 Kildare, Donegal and Wexford had endorsed it while Limerick County Council had adopted a motion along the lines of what James O’Connor had tried unsuccessfully to have tabled by Kildare, which feared the serious consequences that

²²¹ *K.O.*, 7 Jan. 1922.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ *Ibid.*

disunity would have and called on the Dáil ‘to do everything possible to arrive at a unanimous decision on the question at issue’.²²⁴

In the Dail itself the opinion of the county council did not in fact influence the two Kildare T.D.s who voted against the treaty. As Art O’Connor was outlining to the Dáil his objections to the treaty a voice in the chamber shouted, ‘Where do your constituents come in?’²²⁵ His reply is interesting for the insight into his attitude to the relationship between local opinion and its national representatives. He replied:

They gave me a mandate in 1918 and renewed it again last May, and that was that I should, to the best of my ability, support republican government in this country....I will vote against the treaty, because acceptance of it would be the death-knell of Dáil Eireann and the republic. The heart and mind of the people had changed and their views are not reflected in a snowball resolution, nor in a venal press, nor in resolutions of farmers’ unions and people of that ilk – who never did an honest day’s work....I hope that none of the deputies in this assembly will be swayed by those extravagant resolutions that have been passed during the past fortnight.²²⁶

Donal Ó Buachalla spoke in the Dáil debate the day after O’Connor and he said much the same, claiming that the resolutions were not the true opinion of the people.

He said:

The people of Ireland at this juncture have been stampeded by the rotten press of Ireland. Lloyd George is rubbing the palms of his hands and laughing, I doubt not, at the spectacle which is anything but creditable to Ireland that has made such a fight up to this....The country is not thinking. It has been stampeded and it now seeks to stampede its representatives. Well there is one representative anyway that won’t be stampeded.... I shall vote against the treaty (applause).²²⁷

²²⁴ *I.T.*, 2 Jan. 1922.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ *Ibid.*; Dail Eireann Debate on treaty, vol. 3. 3 Jan. 1922.

²²⁷ Dail Eireann , Debate on treaty, Vol. 3. 4 Jan. 1922.

This then, is the ambivalent attitude that Kildare County Council took with it into the next phase of its history – its life under the Irish Free State. That history is the subject of the next chapter of this study.

Chapter 7. The council under the Free State, 1922-26

Whatever the reservations that individual councillors may have had about the treaty and the Irish Free State established under it, the council itself began immediately to engage with the new authority in its efforts to administer the county. The most immediate difficulties were the creation of the estimate of rates for the new financial year and the rising unemployment in the county. A special meeting of the council on 1 February 1922 addressed these two problems. The council decided to send a deputation to the minister for local government to lobby for the re-introduction of the agricultural grant and another to the minister for labour asking him to fund schemes of road works specifically for the relief of unemployment.¹

There was good news on both fronts. The Department of Local Government authorised the council to include the agricultural grant in the coming estimates and the minister for labour indicated that a scheme of road improvement to give work to the unemployed would soon be announced. To complete the good news, the council was able to announce a rate for the coming year that ‘will be down considerably, by nearly fifty percent, in fact, as compared with last year, and brings them back almost, but not quite, to the level of the year 1919-20’.² Because the rate books are not extant it is impossible to say what proportion of the rates went uncollected, but it is a fact that there is no mention in Kildare County Council minutes or in the local press of large-scale or sustained defaulting by ratepayers during the period 1919-22.

That relations between the new government and the council were not all positive was clear from the sharp reminder to the council that its resolution of the previous autumn, which decided to give council jobs to ‘none but republicans –

¹ K.C.C. 1 Feb. 1922; *L.L.*, 4 Feb. 1922.

² K.C.C. 20 Feb. 1922; *K.O.*, 25 Feb. 1922.

preference to be given to volunteers,' was contrary to a Dáil decree in regard to the imposition of religious and political tests, and that it must be rescinded. On the motion of Jack Fitzgerald, seconded by Michael Fitzsimons, the original council motion was withdrawn.³

Another hint of the unresolved dissent in the county council about the new political reality that was coming into being is in the minute book itself. The chairman of the following meeting, council vice-chairman Eamonn Ó Mordhain scored out references to 'the Free State government' in the printed version of the minutes and replaced them with 'Dáil Eireann' in the margin.⁴

There were clear signs in Kildare, during the early months of 1922, of the change of regime in Ireland. On 7 February the Royal Dublin Fusilliers left Naas barracks for the last time on their way to new headquarters in England. Many of their friends came to the railway station to see them off and the previous evening the company had marched through the town singing *The wearing of the green*.⁵ The withdrawal of the British army from the Curragh camp which took place in May was described in the local press as follows:

The final evacuation of the Curragh camp removes the last evidence of British occupancy of county Kildare. The Curragh has for many years been the chief military centre in Ireland, the Aldershot of Ireland, as it has been described, and its coming into the hands of the Irish people is one of the outstanding features of the transference of power to the Irish government. We understand it is the intention of the Irish army to use the Curragh as its headquarters.⁶

³ The correspondence and minuting of this item are incorrect: the original motion was passed at a finance committee meeting on 21 September 1921 but never came before a full council meeting: it arose when Mark Carroll's son failed to get a temporary appointment as a clerk and Carroll was so annoyed he had the 'political test motion' passed by the finance committee meeting.

⁴ K.C.C. mins. 20 Feb. 1922.

⁵ *K.O.*, 11 Feb. 1922.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 20 May 1922.

In March, advertisements began to appear in the local papers seeking recruits for the new civic guards and arrangements were put in place in Naas for interview and examination of those interested in joining the force. Recruits were reminded that they had to face tests in ‘reading, dictation, spelling and arithmetic’.⁷

An even more interesting sign of the changing times for Kildare people was the public endorsement by Lord Mayo of the Irish Free State. For years Lord Mayo, who lived at Palmerstown House in Kill, was the leader of Irish unionism in the House of Lords and a scathing critic of all things nationalist.⁸ In January 1922 he called a meeting of southern unionists in Dublin at which he urged them to accept the Irish Free State and to work with it for the ‘welfare of the community’.⁹ He argued that:

Those present could no longer call themselves unionists. Country gentlemen wished to live in peace in their homes in Ireland and also carry on their business. They could not remain simply to go out to hunt, course, fish and otherwise amuse themselves. Their duty was to take part in building up this country and take part in the affairs of the country with the new government now in possession. The castle had been given over in its entirety to the provisional government and there could be no falling back or shirking....[They] must realise that the past was gone, dead.¹⁰

Lord Mayo was supported in his views by three prominent members of the Kildare landed gentry, namely, George Mansfield (who had been one of the grand jury nominees on the first Kildare County Council in 1899)¹¹ Lord Walter Fitzgerald, and Mr. Arthur Aylmer. Mayo was rewarded for his efforts to win unionist support for the Free State by a seat in the senate. Lord Mayo’s loyalty to the new political

⁷ *K.O.*, 18 Mar. 1922; for the history of the civic guards see L. McNiffe, *A history of the Garda Síochána; a social history of the force 1922-52, with an overview for the years 1952-97* (Dublin, 1997)

⁸ See above, p. 224-6 for his criticism of the National Volunteers.

⁹ *I.T.*, 20 Jan. 1922; *K.O.*, 21 Jan. 1922.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ See above, p. 83.

reality in Ireland even survived the burning down of Palmerstown House, in Kill, on 29 January 1923, by irregulars, in a campaign specifically directed against senators of the Free State.¹²

The hope for a peaceful transition to the new regime was clearly expressed in the comments of the editor of the *Kildare Observer* on the ‘smooth handover of power to the Irish government’.¹³ The writer admits that the Dáil being split in half over the issue is a worry and means that ‘there has been no co-operation in the assumption of the grave burden of responsibility for government by the minority which has taken its stand with Mr. de Valera,’¹⁴ but acknowledges that at least, ‘there has been no manifestation of a desire to obstruct the new government and the situation is not without hope that in the near future the country will have the advantage of the opposition’s assistance’.¹⁵

Unfortunately this hope proved unfounded and the local press watched in horror as the armed opposition to the new Free State began. The murder of Lieutenant Wogan-Browne during a robbery outside the bank in Kildare town on 10 February seemed to signal the intention of a group of anti-treaty IRA to defy the new government. Wogan-Browne was a young local officer of the Royal Artillery regiment. The British authorities threatened to suspend the withdrawal of troops and Michael Collins had to personally reassure them that every effort would be made to bring the perpetrators to justice.¹⁶ The search for his killers involved a combination of British military, RIC and the regular pro-treaty IRA.¹⁷ There was a great outpouring of condemnation of the murder from many quarters in Kildare. Naas

¹² Dooley, *The decline of the big house* (Dublin, 2001), pp.236-7; *L.L.*, 3 Feb. 1923.

¹³ *K.O.*, 21 Jan. 1922.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Durney, *On the one road*, p. 96.

¹⁷ *K.O.*, 11 Feb. 1922.

UDC passed a resolution condemning it and offering sympathy to his father, Col. Wogan-Browne who was a former member of that body.¹⁸ There was no vote of sympathy at the next county council meeting because at its meeting on 20 February a decision was taken to disallow discussion of all controversial topics. This was proposed by Patrick Phelan and seconded by James O'Connor. Mark Carroll who had proposed Naas UDCs motion of sympathy did not object to this.¹⁹

The council had plenty to concern it in its own administrative affairs. A letter to the council from a rate collector claimed that ratepayers in the Athy area were refusing to pay the rate as a result of a resolution passed by the Athy branch of the Farmers' Union which had advised non-payment.²⁰ The county executive of the Farmers' Union condemned the move and said it intended to fight for the rights of ratepayers by constitutional means only. The *Kildare Observer* was relieved and remarked that, 'The Farmers' Union is a body of sensible men, in no way affected by the taint of bolshevism'.²¹ This may have been so, but the restraint of the farmers would be sorely tested in the year to come as their own falling incomes, combined with rapidly rising costs associated with the new County Board of Health, kept the question of rates among the foremost issues of contention in the county council chamber. Already the much-trumpeted savings to be made through the abolition of the workhouses was proving to be a chimera

The County Board of Health, chaired by Patrick Phelan, met for the first time on 15 March 1922. Immediately the problem arose of the number of former workhouse officials who had to be superannuated. Most had taken the option to retire, as the few who wished to be re-appointed had to compete with younger

¹⁸ *L.L.*, 18 Feb. 1922.

¹⁹ K.C.C. mins. 20 Feb., 1922

²⁰ *Ibid*; *L.L.*, 25 Feb. 1922.

²¹ *K.O.*, 18 Feb. 1922.

applicants who, apart from having more up-to-date qualifications also had a better chance of passing the Irish test which was now a prerequisite for appointment to local authority positions.²² There was also the appointment of a secretary to the board to be advertised at a salary of £300 per annum. The average pay offered to secretaries of other counties' boards of health was £340, but the Kildare board wished to make a point about the need for economy and agreed the lower figure, not, indeed before an even lower sum of £280 was suggested, but without a seconder.²³

In February 1922 the Farmers' Union had again demonstrated its power by forcing striking agricultural workers in Maynooth to return to work on 30/- per week after they had been on strike since the previous November. The farmers even managed to insist that Lord Frederick Fitzgerald back down from his offer to pay the Carton workers 32/-. The Farmers' Union's twin argument - that the high war-time prices were now dropping back to levels not seen since 1914 and that conversely, farmers' incomes were also falling back from previous high levels, allowing workers to live on the smaller wages that the farmers could now afford to pay - was gaining ground across the country.²⁴

Kildare County Council took advantage of this perception of the economic situation to attempt a reduction in the rates of pay to road workers. The issue was first discussed at a finance committee meeting on 1 March and put down for a special meeting two weeks later. It was the first in a long series of confrontations between the labour representatives and the farmers' representatives on the issue of wage reductions.²⁵ The interesting aspect of this new series of such debates was that heretofore the attack on labourers' wages had been led by the long-standing farmer

²² K.C.B.H., mins. Kildare County Library, Local Studies department, Newbridge.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *I.T.*, 11 Feb. 1922; *K.O.*, 11 Feb. 1922.

²⁵ K.C.C. fnce. cmte 1 Mar. 1922; K.C.C. mins. 15 Mar. 1922.

members of the council, such as Patrick Phelan, William Burke and James O'Connor, but now they were equally likely to come from those farmers who came onto the council in 1920 as Sinn Féin members, such as Tom Harris and Joseph Cusack. The apparent unity between labour and Sinn Féin interests was completely broken by this. The debate is worth giving in some detail as it throws light on basic divisions within the county council that would become more pronounced as time went by.

Tom Harris proposed and Joseph Cusack seconded, 'That the standard rate of pay for the council's workmen be 30/-, the same as agricultural workers'.²⁶ This would have brought the rate down by 12/6 per week. Harris spoke to the motion, saying that 'the 30/- that was recently agreed between the Farmers' Union and the I.T. & G.W.U. for farm labourers should be the council's best guide as to what was the standard wage'.²⁷ He also advanced the argument, alluded to by the county surveyor in his report to the previous meeting, that if the rate of wages was reduced the council could employ many more workers.²⁸ With unemployment rising in the county this was a concern of everyone on the council, particularly the labour representatives.

Cusack said he knew many workers in his district who were unemployed and they and their families were going around hungry. The council could employ seventy or eighty more men if the standard rate of 30/- were adopted. He also felt that roadmen receiving 12/6 more than farm labourers was unfair and unjust, because 'the agricultural labourer is a much more important man for the country'.²⁹

²⁶ K.C.C. mins. 15 Mar. 1922.

²⁷ *K.O.*, 18 Mar. 1922.

²⁸ K.C.C. mins. 20 Feb. 1922.

²⁹ *K.O.*, 18 Mar. 1922.

James Cregan, the engine driver from Kildare,³⁰ said that the agricultural workers were not satisfied with 30/- per week but were forced to accept it. Richard McCann, a labourer from Clane asked Tom Harris how he ever thought that 30/- a week was a decent wage. 'It only meant a miserable existence for the worker'.³¹

At this point according to the report, 'the meeting was interrupted by over 200 road workers coming into the council chamber bearing red flags and filling up the space between the barriers'.³² The rest of the meeting was conducted in this very highly charged atmosphere. Hugh Colohan proposed that the wages remain at 42/- per week and that the working week be reduced from fifty-one hours to forty-seven. He was seconded by Mark Carroll. The latter re-iterated that the farm labourers had the 30/- forced on them under protest. 'The labourers were trying even in the face of hunger, to abide by the award, but they can't do it much longer. I'm afraid 30/- was never near a living wage'.³³

Richard McCann said that Tom Harris had 'covered himself in glory in the fight of Easter week 1916, and since then he has done his best for his country, but now he was doing his best to starve his countrymen'.³⁴ A voice in the crowd said, 'And his fellow soldiers'.³⁵ Michael Fitzsimons, who was chairing the meeting, brought proceedings to a halt by putting Colohan's amended motion to the floor. It passed by eight votes to seven. The eight who voted for were, Colohan, Carroll, Travers, Smyth, Murphy, McCann, Cregan and Farrell. Farrell and Travers were farmers and the other six were town workers. Those who voted against the motion

³⁰ See above p 305.

³¹ *K.O.*, 18 Mar. 1922.

³² K.C.C. mins. 20 Feb. 1922; the council sat in the old court house in Naas and the area the men were in is the public gallery area between the seats on either side.

³³ K.C.C. mins. 20 Feb. 1922.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

were, Harris, Phelan, Cusack, O'Connor, Hanagan, Burke and Murray. These seven were all farmers.

The divisions evident here were among the bitterest ever expressed in the council chamber and the almost equal balance between labour and farmers on the council kept the tension high over the next few years.

Meanwhile outside the confines of Kildare County Council Ireland was moving towards the 'stupendous tragedy'³⁶ of the civil war. Lord Mayo had told his fellow southern unionist that 'the issue in the forthcoming election would be the Free State versus the republic,'³⁷ and in spite of the attempt by Michael Collins and Eamonn de Valera to take the steam out of the electoral contest by agreeing a panel system for the choice of candidates, that is more or less what the election of 16 June 1922 turned out to be.³⁸ Nevertheless the panel arrangement was welcomed as 'a way out of the impasse that has brought the country to the brink of civil war'.³⁹

Kildare County Council also welcomed the agreement between the parties in the Dáil, and passed a resolution to that effect.⁴⁰ Patrick Phelan who was nominated to stand for the election as a Farmers' Party candidate seconded the resolution, saying they should put the country first and sectional interests second. Hugh Colohan who had been nominated to stand by the Labour Party said that it was 'more than time for the country to settle down and get on with the practical work. The rule of the gun should give way to the rule of the spade.'⁴¹

That Phelan and Colohan, both county councillors, should be selected to represent farmers and workers respectively is a clear indication of the way the county

³⁶ *K.O.*, 8 July 1922.

³⁷ *K.O.*, 21 Jan. 1922.

³⁸ For a full discussion of the possible reasons for the pact, see Joseph Lee, *Ireland 1912-85: politics and society* (Cambridge, 1989), pp 58-9.

³⁹ *K.O.*, 27 May 1922.

⁴⁰ K.C.C. mins. 22 May 1922.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

was dividing in terms of political interest and opinion. Colohan was selected as a candidate at an I.T. & G. W.U. meeting in Newbridge at which the Labour Party's policy moved firmly behind the Free State on the national question and towards more radical proposals for the improvement of workers' conditions.⁴² Among the big issues for labour were the rise in unemployment and the systematic attempt to lower wages. Their programme included a suggestion that the land should be nationalised in the interests of all the workers of Ireland.⁴³

Patrick Phelan was selected at a meeting in Naas which formally 'merged the farmers' and the ratepayers' organisations into one common body'.⁴⁴ A second candidate, J.J. Bergin of Athy, was chosen to run alongside Phelan. The programme of the newly merged Farmers' and Ratepayers' Party also accepted the Free State government and the treaty. High on its list of policy objectives were, stability of government and maintenance of law and order, the completion of land purchase and the division of untenanted land among smallholders, opposition to the nationalisation of land, and of course, the reduction of the burden of rates on agricultural land.⁴⁵ For this election counties Kildare and Wicklow were merged into one five-seat constituency and a third farmers' and ratepayers' representative, Richard Wilson, stood in the Wicklow part of the new constituency.

Whatever about the rest of the country the election result in Kildare-Wicklow was quite decisive. Of the five seats, the anti-treaty candidates, secured only one, in the person of Robert Barton, while Christopher Byrne from Wicklow, who was the only one of the outgoing T.D.s from either county who had voted for the treaty, topped the poll. Two labour party candidates were next, namely Hugh Colohan from

⁴² *L.L.*, 3 June 1922.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *K.O.*, 3 June 1922.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Kildare and James Everett from Wicklow. Donal Ó Buachalla and Art O'Connor lost their seats in the Kildare part of the constituency and Erskine Childers lost his in Wicklow. Just over 60% of those entitled to vote did so.

The share of the first preference vote for each party was as follows:

Labour Party	12,515	35%
The Pro-Treaty Party	9,170	26%
The Anti- treaty Party	6,568	18%
Farmers' Party	6,261	17% ⁴⁶

It is valid, in the light of their policy statements, to add the totals of the Labour Party, the Pro-Treaty Party and the Farmers' Party to arrive at a figure of 78% of first preference voters opting for a party that supported the treaty and the Free State.⁴⁷ Now, at last, the local papers' assertion that Kildare was, 'For the treaty',⁴⁸ looked like it was correct. One interesting comment by the *Kildare Observer* was that while 'the Labour Party and the anti-treatyites polled evenly across all districts, those who refrained from voting were for the most part regarded as supporters of the Farmers' or Treaty Party'.⁴⁹ This reluctance of Kildare farmers to vote was to be criticised frequently over the next few years.

Unfortunately the results of the election nationally were less clear-cut and evidently some militants took this as an excuse to step up their armed resistance to the implementation of the treaty. In late June it was reported that there were pitched battles between the forces of the new executive and the dissidents in Dublin.⁵⁰ The civil war had begun in earnest. The *Kildare Observer* commented, 'What a terrible, pitiful tragedy this civil war is!'⁵¹

⁴⁶ *K.O.*, 24 June 1922.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *L.L.*, 7 Jan. 1922.

⁴⁹ *K.O.*, 24 June 1922.

⁵⁰ *L.L.*, 1 July 1922.

⁵¹ *K.O.*, 8 July 1922.

The first hostilities in Kildare occurred in early July 1922 when a contingent of national forces – as the Free State army was now called – was land-mined on the Dublin road outside Naas. No one was injured in that encounter.⁵² More serious was a raid on the police barracks in Ballymore-Eustace by the irregulars which compelled the national army to retreat to Naas. They regrouped there and went back the following day and re-took the barracks and captured twenty prisoners after a six-hour battle.⁵³

The national forces made many arrests of suspected irregulars, including Eamonn Ó Mordhain, vice-chairman of Kildare County Council. Another councillor, Thomas Doran, was also arrested, as was Art O'Connor, former T.D. and director of agriculture for the first Dáil.⁵⁴ Some county councillors actively took the opposite side. In Naas, large numbers of people joined a volunteer reserve to assist the national forces. Michael Fizzsimons was prominent at this meeting, as was George Wolfe, former organiser of the old national volunteers of 1914.⁵⁵ Another troop of reserves to support the pro-treaty forces was formed in Newbridge in August with Kildare county councillor Jack Fitzgerald described as its 'quartermaster'.⁵⁶

In early August government forces captured a group of irregulars between Kill and Straffan and took them to Kildare town army barracks.⁵⁷ Later in the month a force of irregulars was captured near Dundalk, and according to the report those captured were all from the Maynooth and Celbridge areas.⁵⁸ In September there was a battle between the national army and irregulars at Collinstown near Leixlip which resulted in the death of one army private and the capture of twenty-two irregulars

⁵² *L.L.*, 8 July 1922.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *K.O.*, 15 July 1922.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *L.L.*, 19 Aug. 1922.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 5 Aug. 1922.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 19 Aug. 1922.

after a siege at Grangewilliam House, to the east of Maynooth.⁵⁹ In October, an ambush in south Kildare, described as ‘the only really serious one that has occurred in county Kildare’, took place near Castledermot and left three national army soldiers dead.⁶⁰

In the light of these incidents it may have been a bit premature for the *Kildare Observer* to have run a headline in early September 1922 to the effect that, in Kildare things were, ‘Getting back to normal’, but the article’s overall assessment of the relative extent of the disruption of ordinary life in the county caused by the civil war is probably true to how it seemed to most people. The writer said:

Life in county Kildare has more nearly returned to normal after recent hostilities than perhaps in any other county in the area of the Irish parliament. In fact, at the worst of times we have suffered less inconvenience and damage than any other county. We had for some time become accustomed to nightly shooting in the vicinity of Naas, but for the past few weeks there has been an almost complete cessation of shooting.⁶¹

Kildare County Council marked the death of Arthur Griffith with a vote of sympathy, proposed by Jack Fitzgerald and seconded by Patrick Phelan. The chairman, Michael Fitzsimons, endorsed the resolution and ‘it was carried in silence, all the members standing’.⁶² The mixture of opinions on the council was asserted when James Behan of the labour party, proposed, and Michael Smyth seconded, a similar resolution regretting the deaths of Cathal Brugha and Harry Boland, which ended, ‘We tender our sympathy to the relatives of all those Irishmen who have fallen in the conflict’.⁶³

⁵⁹ *K.O.*, 16 Sept. 1922.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 28 Oct. 1922.

⁶¹ *K.O.*, 9 Sept. 1922.

⁶² K.C.C. mins. 21 Aug. 1922.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

A week later the council's finance committee was back marking the death of Michael Collins. This time Hugh Colohan proposed and Michael Smyth seconded the resolution of sympathy. A delegation was chosen to attend the funeral in Dublin. Neither Colohan nor Smyth was on it. Instead the council was officially represented at the event by Patrick Phelan, Nicholas Travers, Jack Fitzgerald, Henry Fay, and the secretary, William Coffey.⁶⁴

When the third Dáil finally met on 9 September, shortly after the funerals of Griffith and Collins, the government was in no mood for compromise with the irregulars. They agreed in principle to the setting up of military courts to 'deal with persons charged with interfering with the restoration of order or endangering public safety'.⁶⁵ This was rapidly hardened into a reality in October when a proclamation from the national army, signed by Richard Mulcahy, established the military courts, 'with a view to the speedy termination of the present state of armed rebellion and insurrection and the restoration of peace, order and security'.⁶⁶

The military courts began a series of executions on 17 November 1922 including that of a group of six men from Kildare town executed in the Curragh on 19 December.⁶⁷ Kildare County Council discussed the earlier executions at its meeting of 27 November 1922 and the debate shows clearly the divided views within the council over the continuance of the conflict and the justice of both sides. A resolution proposed by the Labour Party members, condemning the recent execution of Erskine Childers and calling for the release of Miss MacSweeney, stated that the

⁶⁴ *L.L.*, 2 Sept. 1922.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 30 Sept. 1922.

⁶⁶ *K.O.*, 21 Oct. 1922.

⁶⁷ See Durney, *On the one road* (Naas, 2001), p. 127; *K.O.*, 23 Dec. 1922.

people, 'who are ignored by both sides,'⁶⁸ demand peace. Michael Smyth in speaking to the motion, said the following:

At the very first meeting of that council [June 1920] they had removed from the minute book a resolution condemning the rebellion in 1916, and none of them thought then they would have executions by their own government....He was speaking for the common people that were anxious for peace and they were out against executions...which were looked upon as foreign. The English tried executions and still they did not succeed and he did not believe it was going to succeed at present. If the present war went on there would be nothing left in the country for anyone....at the recent elections the people showed they wanted peace not war.⁶⁹

Richard McCann seconded the resolution, saying that:

He was out against the two parties for the way they were carrying on. If they were fighting the old foe he would rather see their country in ruins than submit, but why should they be carrying on this war amongst themselves?No organisation, governmental or secret, should be allowed to bring destruction to their country.⁷⁰

Not everyone agreed with the spirit of the motion. Patrick Phelan felt the first part of it was, 'a direct vote of censure on the government'.⁷¹ He continued:

He wished to heaven that these executions had never taken place. He did not want the shedding of one drop of human blood. He would give a good deal to see the thing settled amicably, but he did not think it would lead to amicable settlement for them to denounce the government....He said the only way to make a lasting peace was to strengthen the hands of the government. If you weaken the hands of the government it gives the other side more strength and determination to carry on as they are. There is no doubt it is causing economic loss to the country and I do not understand at all why the men who at one time held the extreme confidence of the people, as Mr. de Valera did, would not recognise that the country should be put first. It seems to me the whole country is only a bagatelle at present. The whole idea is to carry on until the country is ruined, and then we will having nothing to fight for. I put it to you now, gentlemen, what

⁶⁸ K.C.C. 27 Nov. 1922; *K.O.*, 2 Dec. 1922.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

chance have you of peace if you encourage the minority to rebel against the will of the majority? Here we are representing the people of Kildare. The people of Kildare in no uncertain voice decided at the last election in favour of the recognition of the treaty. I myself was an independent candidate at the time but I accept the will of the people of Kildare that they were opposed to me and they gave their verdict, though while I was going as an independent candidate probably my own opinion might have been in favour of the Free State.⁷²

Nicholas Hanagan was even less tolerant of the motion and the spirit of it and his contribution raised the temperature of the debate a good deal. He said he was not going to vote a motion of censure on the government 'in their endeavours to put down the marauders and the murderers that are abroad at this time'.⁷³ He continued:

These people deserve no consideration. They have ruined the country economically and morally. There is a spirit abroad at the present time that cannot be exterminated for many a year. They have ruined the youth of the country and taught them to disobey everything in the way of law, both human and divine. I am as much opposed to bloodshed as anybody, but I am not going to pass a vote of censure on the government of the country for doing their very best. They are the government and the first duty of the government is to govern and establish peace and law and order, and any steps the government take to perform their duty I am behind them every time. I don't see the use in passing this motion.⁷⁴

Philip Grogan called on Hanagan to withdraw the word 'murderer' saying 'it was not a word we should call anyone'.⁷⁵ The latter refused to withdraw it and the insults continued. Eventually Patrick Phelan and Michael Smyth got together and the two worked together on a compromise motion which read:

That we, the Kildare County Council, regret that the political situation should make it necessary for the provisional government to carry out the recent executions. The time has come when some attempt ought to be made to restore peace in our unfortunate country. That we hope the provisional government will see its way to release Miss Mac Sweeney.⁷⁶

⁷² Ibid; Phelan of course stood as the Farmers' and Ratepayers' party candidate which was officially neutral on the treaty issue.

⁷³ *K.O.*, 2 Dec. 1922.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

This motion was passed, but by that time four members of the council, Hanagan, O'Loughlin, Travers and McCann, had walked out, some protesting that the original motion had been amended and some of the opinion that no resolution at all should be considered.⁷⁷

While Ireland was drifting towards civil war there was a sideshow unfolding which had a particular resonance for the people of Kildare. In June 1922 the sixth Duke of Leinster died and the ancestral estate of the Fitzgeralds, instead of passing to his heir, Edward, the seventh duke, passed from the family into the hands of an English financier called Harry Mallaby-Deeley through an unlikely sequence of events. Seven years earlier and needing to raise funds to service gambling debts, Lord Edward Fitzgerald, as he was then, sold his reversionary rights in the Leinster estate to the financier. One account says the rights were sold for £67,000 and £1,000 per annum, which the buyer was advised at the time was, 'perfectly ridiculous – meaning my offer was in their opinion, far too high'.⁷⁸ Since Lord Edward had two older brothers the chances of him inheriting the estate seemed remote in 1915 when the deal was done. However in 1916 Lord Desmond Fitzgerald died in an accident at the front in Belgium leaving only the delicate Duke, Maurice Fitzgerald between Mallaby-Deeley and the estate. In June 1922 Maurice died in an asylum in Edinburgh and Lord Edward inherited the title of Duke of Leinster but unfortunately his rights to the enjoyment of the estate and its massive income from rents and the invested profits of the sale of the Leinster lands under the 1903 Land Purchase Act, were no longer his. The deal provided for the duke to buy back the estate at a cost of

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ *Sunday Telegraph*, 7 Dec. 2004; *I.T.*, 12 June 1922; *F.J.*, 12 June 1922; *L.L.*, 17 June 1922.

£350,000 at any time but unfortunately this never happened and the estate never came back into the hands of the Fitzgeralds.

The local worry was that Carton would come under new management and that some workers would be let go. Some twelve or more workmen were let go to cut down expense, and 'a general disappointment and discontent are felt in consequence'.⁷⁹ Lord Frederick Fitzgerald (Marquis of Kildare, and the new Duke's uncle) who was to continue living in Carton and to run it on behalf of the new owner, gave an interview to the *Irish Times* in which he substantially confirmed the story but corrected one or two of the more lurid details which had been published in the English newspapers. He explained that the sixth duke had obtained his majority fourteen years previously, in 1908, and not four years previously as reported. He also said the sale of parts of the estate to tenants under the Wyndham Act had made just over half a million and not the one million mentioned. Finally, and most bizarrely, he denied a story published in the *Sunday Express* that a public demonstration of retainers had taken place at which it was solemnly resolved that they would hoist the red flag over the mansion and run the demesne on soviet lines.⁸⁰

The *Leinster Leader* explained the impact that the loss of the Fitzgeralds would be to Kildare as follows:

Any severance of the Fitzgerald family with the management of the Leinster property will be greatly regretted in Kildare, where despite the fact that the land has been largely sold to tenants, they still retain large interests, the ground rents, and many of the buildings and homes in practically all the towns being held from them. Very extensive employment is given on the demesne, tillage being intensive and a splendid class of livestock bred. Being a resident family a very deep interest was taken in the welfare of the employees, who are comfortably housed and well treated. In addition the Leinster estate trustees always subscribed generously to any object that tended to benefit Kildare and its people.⁸¹

⁷⁹ *L.L.*, 17 June 1922.

⁸⁰ *K.O.*, 17 June 1922: the report of the interview with the *I.T.* is in the local paper.

⁸¹ *L.L.*, 17 June 1922.

It is ironic that one of the families most intimately connected with the old social order in Ireland for so many centuries should finally lose its local seat of wealth and residence just as a new era in Irish political life was beginning.

In the new Ireland that June there was great confusion in regard to the courts of the land. North Kildare republican court was still sitting in that month, presided over by county councillor James O'Connor from Celbridge, accompanied by councillor William Burke.⁸² The next month Naas republican court failed to sit and the following notice was pinned to the court house door:

Take note that the justices of the North Kildare Republican Court have decided not to hold the ordinary sittings of same, fixed for today, as a protest against the arrest and detention of Donal Ó Buachalla a member thereof.⁸³

Soon after it met the new Dáil set about replacing the republican courts with a more structured system based on legally qualified district justices more under its own control.⁸⁴ The first of these new courts to sit in Kildare was in Naas on 21 November 1922. The new district justice began by insisting that the licensing laws be more widely respected than had been the case in more recent times. The judge said 'he was conscious that abuses had taken place which, if allowed to continue must very largely contribute to the undermining of the social laws of the state'.⁸⁵

The process of returning life to normal continued in the council chamber as well. At the height of the war of independence the county council and the Naas No. 1 RDC had passed resolutions, which effectively refused to submit information to

⁸² *L.L.*, 10 June 1922.

⁸³ *K.O.*, 8 July 1922.

⁸⁴ See Mary Kotsonouris, *Retreat from revolution* (Dublin, 1994); eadem., *The winding up of the Dáil courts, 1222-1925* (Dublin, 2004); *L.L.* 2 Sept. 1922; *ibid.* 7 Oct. 1922.

⁸⁵ *K.O.* 25 Nov. 1922.

central government about their employees earnings for income tax purposes.⁸⁶ At its meeting on 11 October the county council rescinded all such resolutions, and decided that in future, employees should pay all legitimate taxes due.⁸⁷ The report of the meeting comments that, ‘There were people who pleaded political reasons for failure to pay income tax while the British government remained the collecting authority. Many of them have continued to refuse to pay even though the collecting authority is our own Free State.’⁸⁸ There was no dissent at the council meeting which reversed the 1920 motion. Perhaps if the decision had been taken after the military courts had begun to execute anti-treaty prisoners, the attitude of the council would have been different.

In July 1922, Major William Dease rejoined the county council. He had recently returned to Ireland, having been in France since 1917. Such was the esteem in which he was held in Celbridge that he was soon co-opted on to Celbridge No. 1 RDC in place of Art O’Connor’s younger brother John, who had been arrested along with a group of other irregulars that month. Dease was then made chairman of the RDC and thus made it back to the county council in place of James Farrell.⁸⁹

The military side of the civil war was more or less over, as far as Kildare was concerned, by the end of 1922. The executions of the six irregulars from Kildare and the arrest and detention of many of the senior figures on the anti-treaty side succeeded in quietening down the situation in the region.⁹⁰ Art O’Connor, who had escaped from the Curragh in July 1922, was re-arrested in January 1923 and held in Newbridge army barracks.⁹¹ In February county councillor Christopher Supple was

⁸⁶ K.C.C. mins. 21 June 1920.

⁸⁷ K.C.C. mins. 11 Oct. 1922.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *K.O.*, 15 July 1922; K.C.C. mins. 11 Oct. 1922; *Thom’s Directory*, 1922; *ibid.* 1923.

⁹⁰ See above p. 355.

⁹¹ *L.L.*, 27 Jan. 1923.

arrested at the I.T.& G.W.U. offices in Athy where he was secretary of the branch.⁹² Two big houses were burned in a campaign specifically targeted at Free State senators. Palmerstown House in Kill, belonging to Lord Mayo was destroyed on 29 January 1923,⁹³ and Maldaban House in Ballymore-Eustace, belonging to Sir Bryan Mahon, a few weeks later.⁹⁴ For the remainder of the conflict in Kildare there were only sporadic raids for supplies on shops in Baltinglass and Athy by units of the irregulars operating out of Wicklow or Carlow.⁹⁵

The main concern of Kildare County Council in the early months of 1923 was the escalating cost of the new County Board of Health and the burden this was likely to put on the rates in the forthcoming financial year. This was starkly seen when the board of health discussed its budget for the coming year at its meeting in January.⁹⁶ The estimate was for £71,000 or nearly £30,000 more than the previous year. The implications of this for the ratepayers were immediately obvious. The health board estimate was the equivalent of a rate of 4s 1d for what used to be the old 'union' charges. The entire rate on agricultural land, comprising, union, district council and county at large charges, in the previous year, had been less than this in two of the rural districts and only slightly more in the others. The extent of the increase is evident when we look at the amount that was needed for the combined boards of guardians budgets over the previous number of years, as set out in the table below.

⁹² Ibid. 3 Feb. 1923.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 24 Feb. 1923.

⁹⁵ Ibid.. 10 Feb. 1923.

⁹⁶ K.C.B.H. mins. 15 Jan. 1923.

Table 1. Budgets for Boards of Guardians and Board of Health, 1918-24⁹⁷

	Year	Budget
Combined boards of guardians	1918-19	£30,000
do.	1919-20	£34,000
do.	1920-21	£41,000
do.	1921-22	£52,852
do.	1922-23	£41,844 ⁹⁸
County Board of Health	1923-24	£71,000

The rising wage levels and general cost of living account for the steady growth of expenditure since 1918. The extra increase involved for 1923-24 was caused by the expenses involved in the transition from the workhouse system to the new county board of health administration and by a rapid rise in the cost of what was now called 'home help' but which used to be called 'outdoor relief'. Many of the officers of the old unions retired and replacements had to be employed to run the new system. This meant that the pensions bill for officials increased. There were also once-off expenses involved in fitting out the hospitals at Naas and Athy for their new functions as county hospital and county home respectively.

The factors contributing to the heightened demand for home help included a marked increase in the number of unemployed and the rising cost of living which rendered the wages of many workers inadequate for basic survival. The pressure on the board of health's budget caused by the massive increase in home help requests also meant that it already needed to borrow £20,000 to meet the demands on it up to the end of the year 1922-23.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Ibid; *K.O.*, 20 Jan. 1923.

⁹⁸ The estimate this year was made by the various boards of guardians but spent by the new board of health in its first year.

⁹⁹ *K..C. B. H. mins.* 5 Feb. 1923.

There was a very real sense of disappointment that a scheme devised to produce economies had had the opposite effect. The *Kildare Observer* described the hopes for the new system as well as the reality:

When it was decided to substitute for the poor law system the scheme under another name – the county board of health - we were told it was with the dual object of getting rid of the taint of pauperism which was believed to attach to the poor law system, and of securing economy in its administration....The best proof of economy and efficiency in administration is provided by the budget. The budget of the Kildare County Health Board has been placed before that body and is available for the public. It will appal the ratepayers.¹⁰⁰

The writer disputes the claim by the secretary of the county health board that at least the scheme had achieved, ‘the principal object which its promoters had in view – the more humane and efficient treatment of the sick and deserving poor’.¹⁰¹ He can see no difference between receiving ‘home help’ and the old ‘outdoor relief’. The hospital at Naas is no better equipped now than it was when it was the workhouse, and crucially, there is now only one hospital to serve the whole county and many of the deserving poor, ‘particularly those in remote areas’,¹⁰² find the travel to Naas a major burden.

A special meeting of the health board met to try to ameliorate the budget demand to be made of the ratepayers through the county council, but there appeared to be no savings to be made. They decided to try to convince the government of the need to fund schemes to relieve unemployment in the county as a way of relieving pressure on the home help budget which was costing £22,000 of the total expenses.¹⁰³ Hugh Colohan T.D., who chaired this health board meeting, explained that Kildare was particularly hard hit by unemployment because of the large number

¹⁰⁰ *K.O.*, 20 Jan. 1923.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *K.C.B.H. mins.* 5 Feb. 1923.

of people who used to work for the British military at the Curragh and at Newbridge and who were now without jobs. 'Unlike other counties they had all those unemployed people thrown on their hands'.¹⁰⁴

The Labour Party members of the county council were already using the council direct labour roadwork schemes to try to alleviate the unemployment in the county. This was done unofficially by their requests of the county surveyor to take on more men. They also insisted that only union members should be employed. Most of these suggestions came through the finance committee and the labour members were very assiduous attenders at these and all council meetings. At times it seemed that the I.T. & G.W.U. was dictating policy to the county council. For instance, at the finance committee meeting on 17 January 1923, which was attended by only three councillors, Michael Fitzsimons and two labour men, Mark Carroll and Michael Smyth, a letter from the I.T. & G.W.U. asked that a council lorry working at Monastereven be stopped so that local carters, members of the union, could be employed in its place. The letter also requested that a road overseer, Mr. T. Darby should dismiss his own son who also had a job as a part-time postman, and employ a union member, Mr. Joseph O'Brien in his place. The finance committee agreed to both requests and the county surveyor was instructed to carry out the decisions.¹⁰⁵

The county surveyor hit back at this process in his report to the next meeting of the full county council on 21 February. His reports rarely strayed out of the area of road engineering and its cost, but this time he began with the following:

Formerly all engineers were expected and encouraged to save as much money in their work as possible. It can hardly be said that this holds good at present in the case of county surveyors. They are expected to find employment for almost anyone who may be out of work, and would seem to be expected to provide for this in

¹⁰⁴ Ibid; *K.O.*, 10 Feb. 1923.

¹⁰⁵ *K.C.C. fnce cmte.* 17 Jan. 1923.

the road estimate.¹⁰⁶

He then proceeded to step straight into the political arena by making the following observation, which ran directly counter to the policy of the labour members of the county council:

If the road work is to be used to alleviate unemployment it may be well to seriously consider if the present common rate of wages might not be altered so that a greater number might share the benefit and prevent a large number of men, dismissed from time to time as funds run down, having to seek from the unemployment bureaux a tardy pittance.¹⁰⁷

The council did not take up his suggestion of lowering the rates of pay of the men at this point, but later in the year and into 1924 it came under sustained pressure from a variety of sources to do so. For now the labour members' opinions held sway as they voted to accept the much inflated rates estimate for the year 1923-24. As the *Kildare Observer* put it, 'with the exception of the year before last [1921-22] – a very abnormal period – the rate for the coming year will be the highest ever struck in the county, being in fact, double the rate for the year, 1918-19, and generally more than four times as much as the pre-war rates'.¹⁰⁸

Patrick Phelan, who was chairman of the county board of health but who did not attend its last meeting, was for deferring the adoption of this rate and going back to the board, to see if the home help portion of it could be reduced in some way.¹⁰⁹ Hugh Colohan who was at the relevant meeting said that it had been considered carefully by the board. He was of the opinion that they might as well begin now and meet their obligations to the poor. Philip Grogan proposed and Mark Carroll seconded that the estimate be accepted, which it was.

¹⁰⁶ K.C.C. mins. 21 Feb. 1923.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ *K.O.*, 3 Mar. 1923.

¹⁰⁹ K.C.C. 21 Feb. 1923.

If the council thought it had finished with the deliberations over the rates for the coming year they were wrong. The Farmers' Union was incensed and had begun to mobilise its resources to try to win back control of local taxation from the hands of the Labour Party. The *Kildare Observer* gave an interesting analysis of what it thought was wrong with the county board of health and it is worth quoting:

The county council and the RDCs and UDCs by which the preponderance of the members were appointed to the board were elected on a purely political issue. Those who considered economic interests at the time of the election [1920 local elections] were compelled to preserve a meekness and a silence. They were prevented from putting up candidates who would represent their economic as distinct from their political view of things. The result is that the representatives were chosen because they were not men of substance who could be made amenable to the law as it stood, and from whom there could be no question of recovery under an auditor's surcharge. Today the effects of an election in such circumstances and for such purposes are being sorely felt.¹¹⁰

The suggestion here that candidates for the 1920 local government election were deliberately chosen because they had no property or wealth that could be sequestered by the British government in the event of a dispute between the central government and the local authorities, is not one I have seen expressed elsewhere. Even if it is not true it is at least an interesting consequence of so many of the candidates being workers with little in the way of property assets to their names.

In April, the Farmers' Union sent a delegation to the Minister for Local Government, Ernest Blythe 'in reference to the crushing increase in local taxation, with special reference to the increase in expenditure for home help and road expenditure'.¹¹¹ None of the county council members of the farmers' group was part of the delegation. Patrick Phelan, as chairman of the county health board which was

¹¹⁰ *K.O.* 26 May 1923.

¹¹¹ *L.L.* 28 Apr. 1923.

increasingly being held to blame for the high rates, seemed to be losing the confidence of his fellow farmers.

The delegation began by describing to the minister the increase in expenditure on road maintenance in the county in recent years. In 1913-14 it stood at £19,951, in 1919-20 it had risen to £27,978 and in 1920-21 it had further gone up to £32,700. At that point the council had introduced its direct labour scheme for road maintenance to the exclusion of the old contract system.¹¹² The first consequence, according to the Farmers' Union was 'a terrifying increase in the provision for road maintenance',¹¹³ the cost of which in 1921-2 was £52,662. It had remained high at a figure of £47,222 in 1922-23, while the estimate to 31 March 1924 was for £47,551. They also informed the minister, correctly, that the direct labour scheme had been approved by only one vote.¹¹⁴

The Farmers' Union presentation to the minister went on to describe the extent to which, in their opinion, the work of the council was being controlled by the representative of one party only, to the detriment of the ratepayers. It said:

The county surveyor for Kildare is an efficient officer with whom we have no fault to find, but circumstances in which he finds himself – responsible to a body controlled almost entirely by a particular trade union – makes it impossible for him to reduce expenditure . Under a resolution of the county council, to which we draw your attention, the county surveyor has lost control of the men he employs.¹¹⁵ He dare not employ them unless they belong - overseers as well as surfacemen and engine-men – to the trade union by which the council is controlled.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ K.C.C. 24 Aug. 1920; the council voted in favour of direct labour on this date and the county surveyor presented his scheme to implement it on 22 Nov. 1920 and it began on 1 Apr. 1921: the expenditure for it came from the estimate for Apr. 1921 to Mar. 31 1922.

¹¹⁵ This motion can be found in K.C.C. mins. 24 Aug. 1920.

¹¹⁶ *L.L.*, 28 Apr. 1923.

It is true that on numerous occasions between June 1921 and June 1923 the county surveyor or the roadwork overseers were asked specifically to dismiss non-union workers and to hire union members in their place.¹¹⁷

The farmers went on to explain how much of a change this was in the countryside and the effects it has on their own membership:

Small farmers who were previously road contractors were, it was promised at the inauguration of the scheme, to get a share of the work on the roads.¹¹⁸ The fact is - and we challenge contradiction - that unless they join the transport workers' union no work can be given them, and the resolution of the county council - that trade union labour is to be employed - is given as the authority for this victimisation.¹¹⁹ Small struggling farmers who formerly supplemented their meagre earnings from the land by means of road contracts, and who are members of the Farmers' Union, are deprived of the means of supporting themselves and their families unless they forsake the organisation they believe caters for their needs and join the transport union.¹²⁰

The delegation then described to the minister the rise in the amount of expenditure by the County Kildare Board of Health and questioned whether the two main causes given for this by the county board are legitimate. They claim that the cost of changing from the old system to the new is only seven percent of the gross expenditure of the board, and cannot account for such a significant part of the total increase as the board claims. On the claim that unemployment was a major cause of the increased demand for home help, the farmers simply deny that it is much of a problem at all. They say:

Much capital has been made out of alleged unemployment and an attempt has been made to explain the extension of the home help scandal by suggestions that people cannot be allowed to starve. We believe that we have done more than our part in providing employment in spite of the fact that agricultural operations for more than a year have

¹¹⁷ K.C.C. fnce cmtte 5 July 1921; *ibid.*, 12 Dec. 1921; *ibid.*, 4 Jan. 1922; *ibid.*, 17 Jan 1923.

¹¹⁸ There is no evidence in the minutes or in the reports of the meeting to back up this suggestion; see K.C.C. mins. 24 Aug 1920; *K.O.* 28 Aug. 1920.

¹¹⁹ This part of their claim is accurate.

¹²⁰ *L.L.*, 28 Apr. 1923.

not been a paying proposition. We state with a knowledge of the situation that there is little genuine unemployment in rural districts, and that in the towns it is by no means abnormal.¹²¹

The minister was also informed that some members of rural and urban district councils were being employed on direct labour schemes in breach of the legal enactments setting up the councils.¹²² They also asked that the former practice of publishing lists of recipients of outdoor relief be revived in the case of the home help.

The final request and the one which annoyed the county council most, was the request 'that paid commissioners should be appointed by you to carry on the administration of the county, particularly in the matter of road expenditure and home help'.¹²³ The government took this action against Kerry County Council in 1923 and also against Offaly County Council in 1924 but Kildare's circumstances were not considered serious enough to warrant this type of intervention.¹²⁴

It wasn't so much the threat of abolition and the appointment of an administrator, as the fact that the farmers had asked for it, that caused so much offence to some members of the council, and at the next meeting the labour members in particular, gave full vent to their anger. Michael Smyth began by remarking that it was 'strange that an application should be made to have paid commissioners sent to Kildare to take up the work of public administration out of the hands of the elected representatives of the people, and the parties concerned had not come before the council at all'.¹²⁵ Hugh Colohan chimed in with: 'There is nothing particularly strange in that. They went to the British government before that and brought us to the

¹²¹ *L.L.*, 28 Apr. 1923.

¹²² They were referring to Article 12 (3) of the enactment orders under the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1998.

¹²³ *L.L.*, 28 Apr. 1923.

¹²⁴ See Mary Daly, *The Buffer state* (Dublin, 1997), p. 120.

¹²⁵ K.C.C. mins. 22 May 1923; *L.L.*, 26 May 1923.

four courts'.¹²⁶ Smyth returned then with a description of the county council's performance which is worth quoting for how the Labour members saw what had occurred over the previous few years. He was speaking of the new council elected since 1920. He said:

He thought the members of the council had carried on very well during the terror. They had pledged their allegiance to the Dáil, and in the very troubled times which had elapsed since their election to office, they had discharged their duties well considering the circumstances. During the same period the Farmers' Union got writs served on them and attempted to do what the black and tans were not able to do – bring the whole administration to a standstill.¹²⁷

Patrick Phelan said that he would try to express the views of the Farmer's Union on this issue and, having criticised the level of roadmen's wages and the amount of money spent on home help, he asked if it was not, 'a reasonable assumption that men having very large amounts of money to pay, in times when their income was very uncertain, that they should make some attempt to protect their interests, even by their going to the minister?'¹²⁸

He went on to say that he did not agree with the small number of farmers who had decided not to pay their rates, but he could understand their point of view. He said that nine-tenths of the Farmers' Union did not approve of the issuing of the writs in 1921, but 'the majority of them approved of sending the recent delegation to the minister'.¹²⁹ He also said that, 'self-preservation was the first law of nature and it was this principle of self-preservation which was in the minds of the farmers in doing

¹²⁶ Ibid; he was referring to the threat of legal action by the Farmers' Union against the council in February 1921: see above p. 327.

¹²⁷ K.C.C. mins. 22 May 1923.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

what they had done'.¹³⁰ Hugh Colohan jumped on this phrase and turned it to the side of the workers. He said:

If self-preservation is the first law of nature why should not the workers represent the poor and preserve them from starvation? One would have thought that the farmers were the only class that had suffered in the nation. He wished to say that they as workers had suffered, and what was more, in proportion to their means, they had done more to put the country in the position it was in at present and gain the measure of freedom it was enjoying, than the farmers had done....When they went around collecting money for the railwaymen,¹³¹ they were sorry to say that they could not get farmers to donate. They, the workers had a right to live in this country and they asserted that right. Because they had passed through abnormal circumstances there was abnormal expenditure. Were they any worse off than other councils in Ireland? He thought not, and he thought they should be proud of it.¹³²

Phelan had his own version of the immediate past and articulated it now:

With regard to the action of the farmers in the past during the troubled times, he did not wish to say that the farmers stood out by themselves, or on the other hand, got a double dose of original sin. They had endeavoured to pull through and cause as little friction as they could during that time, and though it may not be admitted, a great many farmers suffered, and a great many farmers gave of the best that was in them, and it was not fair to belittle the whole class now that the thing was past, and to hold up one section of the community as the custodians of the public honour or the party responsible for the benefits that accrued.¹³³

The discussion was brought to an end by the chairman, Michael Fitzsimons, who felt that it was actually more of a matter for the district councils, against whom allegations of illegality had been made to the minister. It is interesting to see Colohan and Phelan constructing their narratives of the recent past as they try to work out in practice the reality of the new Ireland they found themselves in.

¹³⁰ K.C.C. min. 22 May 1923; *L.L.*, 26 May 1923.

¹³¹ In 1920 the railway workers had refused to handle munitions for the British army and had gone on strike for six months over the issue: see T.W. Moody et.al. *A chronology of Irish history* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 364-5.

¹³² K.C.C. min. 22 May 1923; *L.L.*, 26 May 1923.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

The surprise general election in August 1923 found Kildare county councillors involved in the canvas on behalf of the full range of political choice open to the electorate. Kildare reverted to a three-seat constituency separate from Wicklow for this election. A newly organised pro-treaty and pro-government party called Cumann na nGaedheal was launched in March 1923 by William T. Cosgrove.¹³⁴ A branch was set up in Naas in July and the inaugural meeting was chaired by county councillor Nicholas Travers and attended by Michael Fitzsimons and as well as former county councillor George Wolfe.¹³⁵ The party chose to run three candidates in the coming election, George Wolfe, Thomas Lawler and Simon Malone.

The Labour Party chose to run two candidates, both county councillors, namely Hugh Colohan, one of the sitting T.D.s and Michael Smyth.¹³⁶ The Farmers' and Ratepayers Party chose former county councillor John Conlon as their only candidate and he was proposed for the nomination by Patrick Phelan who had stood for the party in 1922. The republicans ran three candidates, Art O'Connor, Donal Ó Buachalla, both sitting T.D.s and Tom Harris, all of whom were interned at that time. The results of the general election in Kildare are as follows:

Table 2. General Election results Kildare 1923.¹³⁷

Hugh Colohan	Labour	4,300
John Conlon	Farmers'	3,650
Art O'Connor	Republican	2,276
George Wolfe	C. na nG.	2,186
Thomas Lawler	C. na nG	1,920
Michael Smyth	Labour	1,712
Donal Ó Buachalla	Republican	1,492
Simon Malone	C. na nG	950
Thomas Harris	Republican	206

¹³⁴ J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 94.

¹³⁵ *K.O.* 21 July 1923.

¹³⁶ *L.L.* 4 Aug. 1923.

¹³⁷ Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland 1918-92* (Dublin, 1992), p. 112

Hugh Colohan, John Conlon and George Wolfe were elected. Since the republicans or Sinn Féin members refused to take their seats in the new Dáil, the Labour Party and the Farmer' and Ratepayers' Party were now the effective opposition in the Dáil.

Over the next few years Kildare County Council also found itself frequently in direct opposition to the government over a number of important issues. The first of these concerned the government's attempt to control appointments to positions on the council's staff and it involved long-running disputes between the council and the Department of Local Government over the positions of Patrick Carroll, son of councillor Mark Carroll, as clerk in the council office and of Art O'Connor as assistant county surveyor for the Celbridge No. I. RDC.

The clerical post was originally held by William Tyndall, whose father had been an official in the same office for many years and whose retirement in 1918 led to the appointment of the son.¹³⁸ In September 1921 William Tyndall took leave of absence to test a vocation to the religious life. Patrick Carroll, an active member of the IRA in Kildare,¹³⁹ had gone for the temporary position at that time. He had not succeeded and instead the council gave the temporary post to Gavin Tyndall, younger brother of the permanent incumbent. Mark Carroll was very annoyed about the decision and in a fit of pique had the 'political test' motion passed at the finance committee meeting.¹⁴⁰

In January 1923 William Tyndall senior wrote to the council on his son's behalf, tendering the latter's resignation and explaining that, 'William Tyndall junior, [who] having entered the novitiate of the Carmelite Order is at present precluded from writing'.¹⁴¹ Mark Carroll proposed and Philip Grogan seconded that, 'Gavin

¹³⁸ K.C.C. 27 May 1918.

¹³⁹ Durney, *On the one road* (Naas, 2001), p. 87.

¹⁴⁰ K.C.C. fnce cmte 21 Sept. 1921; see above p. 342-3.

¹⁴¹ K.C.C. fnce cmte 3 Jan. 1923.

Tyndall be temporarily engaged at a salary of £3 per week, pending the appointment of a successor to Mr. William Tyndall'.¹⁴²

The post was duly advertised and it was specified that the candidates should be of good character and possess certificates of proficiency in book-keeping and general education and also that they should have a good knowledge of Irish.¹⁴³ The appointment was made by the council at its meeting on 22 May. Patrick Carroll was appointed from a field of five candidates, one of whom was Gavin Tyndall. The vote of the council was ten to six in favour of Carroll. Mark Carroll was at this meeting but did not participate in the voting.. The rest of the trade union members of the council were for Carroll, while those who voted for Tyndall were the farmers, Fay, Cusack, Phelan, Hanagan, Dease, as well as Michael Fitzsimons.

Patrick Carroll never got to take up his appointment. In June he applied to the council for leave of absence, backed up by a doctor's certificate stating that 'owing to unforeseen circumstances he cannot take up his duties on 8th instant'.¹⁴⁴ In fact he had been arrested and was interned in the Curragh military prison. On his suggestion Pat O'Callaghan took his place on a temporary basis. The doctor's certificate was renewed the next month.¹⁴⁵

In August the Department of Local Government sent a letter in the form of a sealed order dismissing Patrick Carroll on the grounds that he was not in a position to undertake the duties. The council decided to ignore the department's instruction and continued Carroll's leave of absence. Michael Smyth got straight to the heart of the matter from the point of view of the Labour members of the council when he said that the government's action was, 'only spite against a political

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 7 Feb. 1923.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 6 June 1923.

¹⁴⁵ K.C.C. fnce. cmte 4 July 1923.

opponent'.¹⁴⁶ He also said it was undemocratic and that it struck at the roots of representative government'.¹⁴⁷

Later the same month the department countered with an instruction to appoint the temporary clerk, O'Callaghan, in a full-time capacity. Again the council defied the department.¹⁴⁸ In November the council gave up the pretence of the doctor's certificate and specifically requested that the government release Patrick Carroll, 'with a view to his taking up his duties – Mr O'Callaghan to be continued in office until the next quarterly meeting'.¹⁴⁹ The stalemate over Carroll's job continued until well into the next year when it was resolved in tandem with another major conflict with the government over Art O'Connor's position as assistant county surveyor.

Art O'Connor had held his position with the council since 1912. He had continued in office until early 1920 when he became director of agriculture with Dáil Eireann in place of Robert Childers Barton who had been arrested. O'Connor had been on continuous leave of absence since then with the council routinely granting him extensions of the leave in view of his involvement, first with the pre-treaty Dáil and then with the republican opponents of the treaty.¹⁵⁰ The council's attitude to granting the leave was the same whether that council was the old pre-1920 group first elected in 1914, the immediate post 1920 body co-operating with the Dáil, or the post-treaty council, split between supporters of the Free State and opponents of any compromise on republican ideals.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 1 Aug. 1923.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 20 Aug. 1923.

¹⁴⁹ K.C.C. mins. 26 Nov. 1923.

¹⁵⁰ See above p. 281; K.C.C. mins. 24 Feb. 1920; *ibid.*, 20 Feb. 1922; *ibid.*, 27 Nov. 1922; *ibid.*, 22 May 1923.

In October 1923 the county council received another 'sealed order' removing Art O'Connor from his position as assistant surveyor. The council again voted to ignore the instruction and to continue to employ Henry Hackett in a temporary capacity in O'Connor's absence. Michael Smyth proposed and Hugh Colohan seconded, 'That we, the Kildare County Council, protest against the sealed order removing Mr. O'Connor from office and we demand his immediate release in order that he may resume his duties'.¹⁵¹ All the councillors present, even government supporters such as Nicholas Travers and Patrick Phelan voted in favour of this resolution, though there was some dissent from them on the follow-on resolution on the general question of political prisoners, which read:

That this council demand the immediate release of all the political prisoners, including the 500 at present on hunger strike in Mountjoy, to prevent further loss of life. That we fail to see why they should be still held as the country is at peace, unless it be that the Free State government is afraid to meet them constitutionally, and wish to provoke further conflict....That we condemn the brutal murder of Noel Lemass, whose decomposed body was found on the hillside in Wicklow...¹⁵²

The matter rested until the following spring when O'Connor was released from prison and the council discussed the issue again.¹⁵³ The exchanges over the issue at the county council meeting indicate that people at local level were in advance of the government in wishing to put the disagreements of the civil war behind them. Mark Carroll, whose own son Patrick was in the exact same predicament, brought up the matter by reminding the council that there was a sealed order for O'Connor's dismissal, and he [speaker] was of the opinion that no one could be dismissed except on the grounds of misconduct. 'Mr. O'Connor had been an

¹⁵¹ K.C.C. mins. 17 Oct. 1923.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ K.C.C. 25 Feb. 1924.

untried political prisoner and no misconduct had been proved against him'.¹⁵⁴ Carroll asked the council for an expression of opinion on the matter. Patrick Phelan, normally a staunch supporter of the government, was first to speak. He said:

My opinion is that if this country is going to settle down we will have to forget the bitterness and trouble of the past, and as little friction as possible should be introduced in the working of the country, and matters of this kind should certainly not be brought to extremes.¹⁵⁵

Phelan went on to say that now that O'Connor was free to take up his duties they should, 'request the ministry to withdraw their sealed order and allow Mr. O'Connor to discharge his duties'.¹⁵⁶ Hugh Colohan proposed such a motion and Phelan asked that the phrase, 'in order to give the country an opportunity of settling down and removing all cause of friction' be added to it.¹⁵⁷ Colohan agreed and said that he didn't think they would 'ever get back to smooth conduct of the country's affairs if we persist in little pinpricks of this kind'.¹⁵⁸ The exchange continued:

Mr. Phelan - We want peace and quietness in the country at present, and let the past bury its dead, so far as that is concerned. Let every man willing to serve his country serve it as best he can.

Mr. Carroll - I don't think anybody served their country as well as Mr. Art O'Connor.

Mr. Phelan - We are old friends though we hold different political opinions. We were dealing with abnormal times when this occurred, and I think it would be a terrible mistake to persist in such a course. I second the resolution.¹⁵⁹

The motion was passed unanimously. The council also asked its solicitor to investigate the legal standing of the ministerial sealed orders in the cases of O'Connor and Patrick Carroll.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid; *K.O.*, 1 Mar. 1924; *L.L.*, 1 Mar. 1924.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

The opinion of the solicitor, Mr Osborne, was put before the council at its meeting in May and it did not please the members. Quoting laws dating back to the Poor Law Relief (Ireland) Act, 1838 and culminating in the Local Government (Temporary Provisions) Act, 1923, he stated bluntly that, 'The minister can dismiss an officer of a local authority'.¹⁶⁰ He went further and said that, 'In my opinion, the council should give effect to the minister's order of 1 October 1923'.¹⁶¹ He advised that both O'Connor and Carroll were the ones with the grievance against the minister and that it was they who should take legal action to test the validity of their dismissals. He warned, though, that a similar case had been taken in the high court and that the decision had been in favour of the minister.¹⁶²

Patrick Phelan insisted that they throw the onus back on the government to show cause for the dismissal of the two men. Tom Harris felt there was no point in the council meeting and making decisions at all. He went further and suggested adjourning the council indefinitely as a protest:

Mr. Harris - It is useless for us to be coming here transacting business.

Mr. Cregan – It is only a sham.

Mr. Harris – They can send down their commissioners with their orders and do the business all right. They will not allow us to carry out the work of the county. I propose that, in consequence of undue interference from the so-called local government department we adjourn this council indefinitely.

Chairman – Would you not propose that we consider their decision first?

Mr. Harris – It is really foolishness to be coming here. We are making it appear that we are supporting them and that they have our backing, which is an erroneous idea. If we continue to come here and take these orders from them and cannot do anything ourselves, we are to all appearances in agreement with their policies and methods.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ K.C.C. mins. 24 May 1924.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

Patrick Phelan was alarmed by the talk of the council dissolving itself. He spoke against, saying:

Personally I would be very glad to see all these officers appointed. I would very much rather that the local government department did not interfere with these appointments at all, because I think myself it is a mistake for any government to interfere with a constituted authority such as ours. This council is acting constitutionally, and is carrying on the public services as well as any other county council in Ireland. I do not however, agree with the statements or views expressed by Mr. Harris. The government is a constituted authority. They are the government of the country by the will of the people, as constitutionally expressed at the last parliamentary elections, and that being so, we must work under that government. I hold no brief for the government. I hold no brief for anybody, but as a constitutionalist I hold a brief for all constitutional government, whatever form or name it assumes, providing it works under the constitution. I would not go so far as Mr. Harris, but I think we should bring all the pressure we can to bear on the local government department, adopting constitutional methods, to obtain sanction to these appointments, but I entirely disapprove of dissolving the council in opposition to the government. I certainly do not agree to that, nor do I think would the people outside, with all due respect to Mr. Harris's judgement in the matter. The people do not want to revert to unconstitutional methods.¹⁶⁴

Tom Harris was not inclined to agree that the current government was a properly elected one. He reminded the meeting that many of the government's opponents, including Eamonn de Valera, the political leader of the republican opposition, had been interned just before the last election. Harris himself had 'been taken off a platform in Naas when I tried to put my views before the public'.¹⁶⁵ He concluded: 'You could not call a government elected under such circumstances a lawfully constituted authority'.¹⁶⁶

Phelan was trying to articulate his sense of the necessity of upholding the legitimacy of the elected government's authority. He asked Harris to imagine if a republican government were in power. Would Harris then say it was right if Free

¹⁶⁴ K.C.C. mins. 25 Feb. 1924; *K.O.*, 1 Mar. 1924; *L.L.*, 1 Mar. 1924.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

State supporters were to say that the laws of that government should not be obeyed?

Harris was clear in his view:

If there was a republican government in the morning and the officials held the opposite views, and if a republican minister for local government sent down a sealed order for their removal from office, I would stand against it and say it was an injustice.

Phelan – So would I, but there is this much to be said: every government will have a party in opposition to it ready to say things are not done justly, and probably they are not always, but you will have to put up with these things until you can convince the people that you are right.

Mr. Harris- What creates a tyranny is acquiescence in what is unjust, and what creates good government is opposition to what is wrong.

Mr. Phelan – I do not believe there has been an injustice.

Mr R.McCann – Do you believe there is any injustice in the sealed orders?

Mr. Phelan – I say the appointments should be made. I am with you in that, but I don't agree with Mr. Harris that we should not function.

Mr. Harris – We are not functioning at all. We are only coming here to listen to sealed orders.

Mr. Cregan – In the Dáil debates they state that they are not prejudiced against anybody, no matter what they have done in the past.

Mr. Phelan – Let us request the local government department to give sufficient reason for withholding their sanction to the appointments.

Mr. Fay – Or otherwise dissolve.

Mr. Smyth – Send them back the two cases.

Mr. Phelan – If you do all you can to get them sanctioned by constitutional methods you have me with you.

Chairman – The council's decision then is to ask the reasons for withholding sanction.

Mr. Smyth – The reasons are as plain as a pikestaff – it is because of their political opinions.¹⁶⁷

By this stage the whole saga must have been viewed by the department as an issue of principle that their sealed order be obeyed, because, quite unexpectedly it was reported that Athy Urban District Council had recently appointed Art O'Connor as their engineer and that this appointment had been sanctioned.¹⁶⁸ At the same time O'Connor himself wrote to the council offering a possible solution. He said that he would not be taking the council solicitor's advice and going to court. He felt he would probably win but would be unlikely to get costs and damages from a Free

¹⁶⁷ K.C.C. mins. 25 Feb. 1924; *K.O.*, 1 Mar. 1924; *L.L.*, 1 Mar. 1924.

¹⁶⁸ K.C.C. mins. 20 June 1924; *L.L.*, 28 June 1924.

State minister.¹⁶⁹ He went on to suggest that the current impasse was unsatisfactory to both himself and to Mr. Hackett and he felt it would be better to re-advertise the position again and see how he would fare. He ended his letter in this way:

Need I say that I am deeply obliged for the kindly consideration the members of the council have always shown me and that I admire the manly stand they have taken for the vindication of their right to appoint and to dismiss (for proper cause) those whom they pay. With kind regards to you and to all my old friends on the staff. –

Very Sincerely
Arthur O'Connor¹⁷⁰

Not everybody got the hint. The chairman, Michael Fitzsimons, asked: ‘What is to be done now?’ Patrick Phelan saw immediately what was involved and said:

The best thing to do is to declare the position vacant and let Mr. O'Connor apply for the job. So far as the council is concerned, I think he may safely leave himself in their hands.¹⁷¹

In fact the council advertised both positions, O'Connor's and Carroll's clerkship. The two came up for decision on the same day.¹⁷² O'Connor's application for his post was defiant:

I beg to apply for the position, though I regard this more as a re-instatement than fresh appointment, since I do not admit that I was rightfully dismissed. I assume that copies of testimonials etc. evidence of age, etc., which were lodged with application in 1912, will suffice. I have advanced in years since then; acquired possibly a wider knowledge of men and things, and I feel the usual type of misleading testimonials could convey to the membership of your council very little – for or against me – that they do not already know.¹⁷³

Both O'Connor and Carroll were duly appointed to their respective posts and this time their appointments were sanctioned by the government, without demur. The council had won a point of principle and were pleased with the outcome. They were

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² K.C.C. mins. 25 Aug. 1924.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

not surprised when Art O' Connor resigned from his post in October 1924, just a few days after the formal sanction arrived at the county offices. His long-time substitute, Henry Hackett was then given a permanent position.¹⁷⁴

The struggle with the department over these two jobs was one area where the councillors could bury their considerable political differences in the face of outside interference. Such unity in the face of the problem of rising unemployment and the issue of wages reductions was unfortunately not possible.

Early in 1923 the government had promised schemes to help alleviate unemployment.¹⁷⁵ The government had appointed a commission on reconstruction and development to devise ways of stimulating improvement in the economic conditions of the country. It reported in June and one of the recommendations was a national road improvement scheme for 'reconditioning and improving the roads in the Saorstat as a first step to relieve unemployment'.¹⁷⁶ When this scheme was eventually announced to the county councils, it had a third purpose added to its first two, namely that of forcing down wages. Grants were offered to the county councils for major improvements to newly designated 'trunk roads' to be carried out in addition to the councils' own routine road maintenance, then getting back to normal after the disturbance of the previous few years.

Kildare County Council got its first notice of this grant in November 1923 when it was offered £2,730 on condition that the wages paid to the roadmen would be no more than 28/- per week.¹⁷⁷ The Labour Party members on the council immediately rejected this and voted to accept the offer only if their standard rate of

¹⁷⁴ K.C.C. fnce cmte 8 Oct. 1924.

¹⁷⁵ *L.L.*, 20 Jan. 1923.

¹⁷⁶ *K.O.*, 16 June 1923.

¹⁷⁷ See Brian Donnelly, 'Local government in Kildare, 1920-70' in Wm. Nolan and Thos. McGrath (eds), *Kildare history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 2006) p. 679.

pay, 42/6 per week, be given to the men.¹⁷⁸ There was pressure put on the councillors by the Farmers' Union and by the Department of Local Government to accept the reduced pay rates but a very poorly attended meeting of the finance committee re-stated its opposition to the scheme on 5 December.¹⁷⁹ Only four councillors turned up at this meeting, the independent, Michael Fitzsimons and three labour members, Michael Smyth, Mark Carroll and Philip Grogan. Both local papers questioned the decision and a campaign was mounted to get the council to relent.¹⁸⁰ A special meeting of the council met on 19 December and re-iterated its refusal to accept the terms of the grant, and protesting against the statement in the scheme that, 'the time is now opportune for a reduction in wages of road workers'.¹⁸¹

In early January 1924 the Department of Local Government came back with a slightly improved offer, raising the weekly rate to 30/-. An editorial in the *Leinster Leader*, which was normally neutral or even favourable to the labour side, put the case for accepting:

The wages prescribed by the government are infinitely better than the unemployment benefit and the Kildare County Council ought not to allow the amount available for the relief of unemployment in this county to be diverted elsewhere....Acceptance of the offer would mean relief for the unemployed in this county as well as for the ratepayers. The high rates are responsible to some extent for unemployment, for the farmer is unable to employ many hands as he is burdened with heavy rates. Conversely, a reduction in unemployment would mean a decrease in the amount expended on home assistance resulting in a reduction of the rates.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ K.C.C. mins. 26 Nov. 1923.

¹⁷⁹ K.C.C. fnce. cmte. 5 Dec. 1923.

¹⁸⁰ *K.O.*, 12 Dec. 1923; *L.L.*, 12 Dec. 1923.

¹⁸¹ K.C.C. mins. 19 Dec. 1923.

¹⁸² *L.L.*, 19 Jan. 1924.

The *Kildare Observer* saw the whole issue of high wages and rates as arising from the failure of farmers to engage in local administration. It commented on the situation in the country in general first:

Men of that class [farmers] cannot be found to undertake civic responsibilities. They plead that they have no time to spare from their private affairs, with the result that men have sometimes been elected on public boards utterly unqualified for the position. Men who do not themselves feel the pinch of high rates are sometimes inclined to ignore the ratepayers when home help allowances, salaries or wages are being considered, the result being that those who pay the piper do not have the privilege of calling the tune.¹⁸³

The finance committee hoped they could fudge the issue by instructing the county surveyor to devise a plan of work under the scheme but to make up the difference in pay rates between their own standard and the government's offer from the council's own funds.¹⁸⁴ The pressure on the county council mounted when it was reported that Dublin Corporation had recently accepted the terms of the grant offered under the scheme.¹⁸⁵ In February, the county-surveyor was told by the department that no special grant would be given for any road works if the wages paid were higher than the 30/-.¹⁸⁶ The council decided to send a deputation to meet the minister on the issue. A politically balanced group of Smyth and Colohan for Labour, Travers for Cumann na nGaedheal, and Phelan and Dease for the Farmers' Party went to meet the new minister for local government, Mr. Burke to see if there was any hope of a compromise on the matter. They reported back to the next meeting of the finance committee that the ministry was adamant.¹⁸⁷

The labour members, who were themselves coming under pressure from unemployed workers at I.T. & G.W.U. meetings in Newbridge and Naas to accept

¹⁸³ *K.O.*, 12 Jan. 1924.

¹⁸⁴ *K.C.C. fnce cmte* 30 Jan. 1924.

¹⁸⁵ *L.L.*, 19 Jan. 1924.

¹⁸⁶ *K.C.C. fnce cmte* 6 Feb. 1924.

¹⁸⁷ *K.C.C. fnce cmte* 20 Feb. 1924.

the grant ,¹⁸⁸ tried for a compromise of their own by resolving to reduce the wages to 35/- per week and at the same time to ask the council's solicitor to advise if the minister could legally veto an agreement of the council to pay certain wages to their men.¹⁸⁹

By now the government, realising that the unemployment situation in the country in general was reaching crisis levels, dramatically increased the amount of grants available under the scheme. Kildare's share would now amount to £24,000 over the next year. The council finance committee met and Pat Phelan proposed and Nicholas Hanagan seconded, 'That the grant be accepted on the terms laid down by the ministry'. There were only four votes for acceptance; Phelan, Hanagan, Fay and Dease. Thirteen voted against; O'Connor, Behan, Dooley, Harris, Cusack, Smyth, Carroll, O' Loughlin, Travers, Cregan, Grogan, Supple and Colohan.¹⁹⁰ There was widespread dismay that the grant, particularly one for such an amount, had been turned down, and that the vote had been so decisive. The result was reported as follows:

By a large majority the Kildare County Council has refused to accept the government grant of £24,000 for the improvement of trunk roads in the county because of the conditions attached to it. One of the conditions was that the maximum rate of wages to be paid to the roadmen was 30/- per week and another was that a proportion of the employment was to be given to demobilised men of the national army. The first condition was strongly opposed by the labour representatives on the council and the second condition was made a pretext for the opposition by members other than labour.¹⁹¹

This explains the way all the councillors voted, except in the cases of Nicholas Travers who was a farmer and a founding member of the Cumann na nGaedheal party in Kildare and James O'Loughlin also a farmer and supporter of the treaty (and on the council by virtue of being chairman of Edenderry No. 2. RDC).

¹⁸⁸ *L.L.*, 26 Jan. 1924; *K.O.*, 2 Feb. 1924.

¹⁸⁹ *K.C.C.* 20 Feb. 1924.

¹⁹⁰ *K.C.C. fnce cmte* 26 Mar. 1924.

¹⁹¹ *K.O.*, 29 Mar. 1924.

Neither of them spoke on the motion and so it is impossible to know why they went against the government scheme. It puzzled the *Kildare Observer* as well which said, 'We would like to know what possible objection some of the farmer members of the council have to demobilised soldiers of the national army getting employment on the roads. Are these members' constituents satisfied with the way they are being represented on the council?'¹⁹²

In April the county surveyor received a letter from the chief engineer of the roads section of the department of local government stating that the grant had been formally withdrawn and was no longer available to the council. The letter also said that every county in the country except Westmeath and Kildare had accepted the maximum rate of 30/- per week under the grant. It also said that the wage rates across the country ranged from 30/- in some Leinster counties to 26/- in Mayo. The highest rate paid to road labourers in the northern counties was also said to be 30/- and that was paid only in the rural districts near Belfast.¹⁹³

In the end the labour members had to back down and accept the inevitable. Motions from Athy and Naas urban and rural district councils, were sent to the council urging acceptance. At its meeting on 23 April the resistance gave way and on the proposal of Patrick Phelan seconded by Major Dease, the government's grant was accepted, 'subject to its being still available'.¹⁹⁴ Only Hugh Colohan dissented. The labour members said very little at the meeting, clearly defeated by the reality of mass unemployment and the desperation of union members for work. As the reports stated:

Kildare County Council has at last decided to accept the road grant offered by the government unconditionally, with only Mr. Colohan dissenting. Mr. Cregan told the meeting that the Labour Party could no

¹⁹² *K.O.*, 29 Mar. 1924.

¹⁹³ K.C.C. mins. 9 Apr. 1924; *K.O.*, 12 Apr. 1924.

¹⁹⁴ K.C.C. mins. 23 Apr. 1924.

longer accept responsibility for refusing the grant, and having consulted the unemployed workers, his party now decided to vote for its acceptance.¹⁹⁵

In retaliation for the campaign to reduce the wages of the road workers the labour members of the council tried to have the salaries of the clerical and professional officials reduced as well. The now overdue local elections played their part in this dispute. They had been due in 1923 but were postponed repeatedly. At the time of the August 1923 general election they were confidently expected the following November and then again in January 1924.¹⁹⁶ In the end the government decided to bring in its major reform of the entire local government system before holding fresh elections.

The protagonists more or less changed sides for the tussle over the reduction of the salaries of the officials, with labour advocating the cuts and Phelan and Dease resisting. Mark Carroll proposed cutting 20% off salaries over £500 and 10% off those over £300 per year. He explicitly stated that it would not be fair to reduce the wages of the workers while leaving the officials' untouched. The reduction proposed in the roadmen's wages was about 37%, 'and he can ill afford to lose that'.¹⁹⁷ Hugh Colohan seconded the reduction, saying, 'there should be an equality of sacrifice all round'.¹⁹⁸

The majority of the councillors were persuaded by the arguments put forward by the county surveyor, John Rorke and the county accountant, P.J. Field that while the wages of the roadmen had increased by 150% over pre-war rates the officials' salaries had not increased at all in the same period. Indeed in the cases of both these men they had been appointed at a salary lower than their predecessors in their

¹⁹⁵ *K.O.*, 26 Apr. 1924.

¹⁹⁶ *L.L.*, 18 Aug. 1923; *K.O.*, 22 Sept., 1923.

¹⁹⁷ *K.C.C. mins.* 25 Feb. 1924.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

respective jobs.¹⁹⁹ They were further persuaded by the description of the huge increase in workload involved for all officials since the introduction of the direct labour scheme when the administration and supervision of all road workers in the county now became their responsibility. In the end the matter was referred to the finance committee for further investigation, and that body repeatedly postponed a decision on it saying that it should be the responsibility of a new council.²⁰⁰

In fact during this period the Kildare County Council was getting its finances back into order. Early in the year it was noted that the county health board had presented an estimate for the financial year 1924-25 which was well down on that of the previous year. As the report noted, ‘the ratepayers will expect every other public body in the county, including the county council to follow its example’.²⁰¹ The reduction had been achieved primarily by limiting home help to the sick and to the able-bodied over the age of fifty. There were also significant decreases in prices for many of the supplies that the board used, thanks mainly to a group-purchasing scheme for local authorities organised and co-ordinated by the Department of Local Government.²⁰² Some of these price reductions were published in the local press. A few examples are given below:

Table 4. Price reductions for some basic items of Health Board expense²⁰³

	1921	1924
Beef & mutton	1s 4d lb	8d lb
Butter	2s 9d lb	1s 9d lb
Coal	80s per ton	48s per ton
Potatoes	1s 6d per stone	9d per stone
Tobacco	10s 0d lb	9s 0d lb

¹⁹⁹ See K.C.C. mins 4 July, 1914 ; *ibid.* 21 Aug. 1916.

²⁰⁰ K.C.C. fnce. cmte. 26 Mar. 1924; *ibid.*, 2 July 1924.

²⁰¹ *L.L.*, 19 Jan. 1924.

²⁰² Daly, *The buffer state*, pp. 134-5.

²⁰³ *K.O.*, 26 Jan. 1924.

As the report concludes, ‘consequently institutions can now be maintained at a much lower cost.’²⁰⁴

The county council was able to announce a total reduction in estimated expenditure for the following year of £42,140. The result was a drop in the rates charged of nearly 3/- in £ across the county, bringing the levels back down to those of 1919-20. As the estimate was presented to the same meeting that approved the compromise reduction of the road workers wages from 42/6 per week to 35/- (not the final capitulation to the grant scheme’s 30/-, which came a month later) Patrick Phelan calculated that this would allow for a further cut of 6d. in the £, but others argued that the money saved by reduced wages should be used to improve the state of the bye-roads of the county which had been much neglected. An amicable compromise was reached for a further reduction of 3d in the £ all round.²⁰⁵

The county council seemed pleased enough with itself on the financial side but was not in the mood to listen to any fresh appeals for funds. The annual report of the tuberculosis officer was usually a routine list of those people in the county who had been diagnosed and treated for TB in the previous year. This year’s report broke with the norm. To begin with there were thirty new cases of the disease treated. This was up considerably from the pre-war level of ten or eleven. Dr. Daly’s report said:

Since your last quarterly meeting the cases of thirty applicants for sanatorium benefit were considered and dealt with by the County Insurance Committee and the general tuberculosis committee. Of the insured applicants, five were recommended for treatment at Peamount sanatorium. Of the uninsured applicants, eight were recommended for treatment at Peamount, seven were recommended for domiciliary treatment at their homes, and ten were

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ K.C.C. mins. 27 Feb. 1924.

recommended for treatment at the various Tuberculosis dispensaries in the county.²⁰⁶

This was usually the extent of the report. But this time there was an extra paragraph which throws light on the living conditions of some of the poor in Kildare:

With regard to the patients undergoing domiciliary treatment, I must draw attention to the fact that from several causes – amongst which are bad environment, insufficient and unsuitable food, the presence of children etc., this form of treatment is far from satisfactory. In connection with this it would be well for the council to make proper provision for the cases of advanced pulmonary tuberculosis in some institution. As far as I can ascertain this county is one of the very few in Ireland where arrangements have not been made for the institutional treatment of these cases.²⁰⁷

The councillors did not take the hint and no action was taken. The TB officer did not make a similar comment in any of his subsequent reports in the time-span covered by this study.

There was an incident in 1924 in connection with the granting of university scholarships which reflected quite badly on the county council. The scheme they had operated every year since its inception in 1912,²⁰⁸ with only minor variations as to the number and value of the scholarships, had always been based on the candidates sitting a special examination run by UCD. The scholarships scheme had always included the following statement: ‘Scholarships will be awarded in the order of merit in which candidates stand in the results of the special examination to be conducted by the authorities of University College Dublin and which will be held on...etc’.²⁰⁹

In the 1924-25 scholarship scheme that item was left out and the following replaced it: ‘Scholarships will be awarded in the order of merit in which the

²⁰⁶ K.C.C. mins. 19 May 1924; the dispensaries were at Athy, Newbridge, Kildare, Celbridge and Monasterevan.; see K.C.C. mins. 19 Apr. 1913.

²⁰⁷ K.C.C. mins. 19 May 1924

²⁰⁸ K.C.C. mins. 4 Dec. 1911.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

candidates stand in the senior grade Intermediate Examination'.²¹⁰ Since 1921 when they first devised a scheme, the new worker dominated council had also included a proviso that applications would not be accepted from children whose parents had a poor law valuation of £100 or an annual income or salary of £300 and upwards. An attempt by Hugh Colohan at the same meeting to reserve one of the scholarships for children of trade unionists was defeated.²¹¹ The means test was unexceptional since it had been generally felt since the start that the university grants should not be for the children of rich people.²¹² What was at issue in 1924 was neither of the latter points but the use of the Intermediate results as the criteria for the scholarships.

No real notice was taken of the changed conditions until the scholarships were awarded at the council meeting on 25 August. At that meeting an order of merit was given on the basis of the exam results and was as follows: M. Purcell, 1789 marks; J.P. Tyrell 1788 marks; P.J. Daly, 1650 marks; V .Noone, 1647 marks; J. Jennings, 1612 marks; E. Behan, 1520 marks; Mgt. Horan, 1494 marks; J. Dooley, 1098 marks; Mary Rowan, 998 marks; K. Mulhall, 961 marks; and K. Kearns, 651 marks.

The councillors voted to give the scholarships to Tyrell and Daly, by-passing the one with the top marks, Michael Purcell who had been nominated by Patrick Phelan and seconded by R. Malone.²¹³ Purcell was the son of the Naas town clerk. He naturally appealed the decision and the next finance committee meeting agreed to allow two extra scholarships that year, one for Purcell and one for Noone.²¹⁴ Unfortunately for the council this was the least of their worries.

²¹⁰ K.C.C. mins. 19 May 1924.

²¹¹ K.C.C. mins. 28 May 1921.

²¹² See above p. 184.

²¹³ K.C.C. 25 Aug. 1924.

²¹⁴ K.C.C. fnce cmte 27 Sept. 1924.

Mary Rowan appeared to finish third last in the order of merit and her father, Dr. Rowan from Kildare town, was not pleased. He asked to address the next meeting of the council and explained that the order of merit as published by the council was incorrect as it made no allowance in the marks for the fact that of all the candidates only his daughter and Margaret Horan sat honours papers while the others took pass papers. He contended that the honours marks were worth twice the marks of a pass exam. He felt that his daughter had been wronged by the publication of an incorrect order of merit. He also felt that the council had acted illegally in what they had done. He claimed that the only scheme published, stated that the examination was to be honours. The council stuck by their guns and asked him to show them in the published scheme for that year the reference to honours exams. The secretary produced the amended scheme, 'as published in the press on 18 May'.²¹⁵ Rowan was flustered as he had obviously not read the new one. The meeting continued:

Dr. Rowan – It is a very remarkable document and there is no mention of honours in it, while every other council in Ireland presented honours.

The council had not only stood against all previous regulations this year, but were out alone by themselves. Every council in Ireland presented.

Chairman – The university authorities are satisfied with the pass marks.

Mr. Phelan – I think you should ask Dr. Rowan to confine himself to this year's scheme. I think he is criticising it. If we made the scheme we ought to abide by the scheme, and then there would be no necessity for Dr. Rowan or anybody else to come here and lecture us.

Dr. Rowan – I am not lecturing.

Mr. Phelan – Our scheme was duly published and available to everybody who wanted to see it. If people did not take the trouble of examining the scheme then I don't see what grievance they have....

Dr. Rowan – My daughter was an honours candidate. It is absolutely incorrect according to the order of merit, to place her 9th on the list. You have acted illegally, and I will expose this case fully in the press. The secretary has made no distinction [between the value of pass marks and honours mark]. It is a gross error, of which no educational man would be capable....In making out an honours student to be the same as a pass student, you might as well ask how many cart horses would make a race horse.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ K.C.C. mins. 10 Sept. 1924; *K.O.*, 13 Sept. 1924.

²¹⁶ *Ibid*

Some of the councillors were anxious to bring Dr. Rowan's criticism to a halt and proposed that, 'we proceed with the business of the meeting'.²¹⁷ Dr. Rowan made a final comment, as follows:

I think you are in a serious position, and, owing to the way in which I have been met by one or two, I shall go to the very extreme on this matter. I think you have acted illegally. It is misappropriation of public funds.

Mr. Phelan – In view of these threats of legal proceedings I second Mr. Travers' proposal [to go on with the other business]²¹⁸

The meeting finally agreed to allow the extra scholarships, to Purcell and to Noone, but to make no change to the order of merit of the applicants.

Dr. Rowan had a long letter published in the next edition of the *Kildare Observer* outlining his objections to the way the scholarship scheme was run and with evidence from eight neighbouring county secretaries, none of whom could even understand why he was asking about pass papers in the Intermediate as only honours students would even think of going for the usual UCD scholarship examination. He also claimed that the whole fiasco was done to secure the scholarships for the pupils of a Mr. O'Neill in the 'secondary-top' class in the Christian Brothers' national school in Naas, who was anxious to show that his pupils could compete for the scholarships with the secondary schools in the area.²¹⁹ Dr. Rowan is quite scathing, saying he hopes what happened does not 'reflect the spirit and aims of the work of the whole order'.²²⁰

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Mr. O'Neill had previous connections with the council. When Patrick Carroll was appointed to the post as clerk in the council office, O'Neill had given evidence of having examined him in basic subjects and found him proficient: see K.C.C. 25 Aug. 1924; *K.O.* 30 Aug. 1924.

²²⁰ *K.O.* 20 Sept. 1924.

Dr. Rowan did not proceed with legal action and the matter ended. He did obviously complain to the Department of Local Government because the council reverted to the old scholarship scheme of previous years, without demur and a letter is noted in the minutes, ‘from the local government department re. changes in the scholarship scheme under the University (Ireland) Act, 1908’.²²¹ The council was forced to make a further change to its scheme in early 1925, when the president of UCD wrote saying that, since the senate of the National University of Ireland had recently approved the Leaving Certificate examination, which had recently replaced the Senior Grade Intermediate, as an examination which would be accepted for recommendation in respect of the awards of county council scholarships, the ‘special examination’ previously held for county councils would no longer take place.²²² The council decided to make the order of merit of Leaving Certificate results at honours standard, its criterion for its subsequent scholarship scheme.²²³

As 1924 came to an end the much postponed and dreaded day came closer when the bill for damage caused in the county during the war of independence and the civil war had to be met. The government had postponed the hearing of malicious injury cases until its new professional court system was functioning, and indeed until the system of rate collecting had recovered from the trials of the revolutionary period.²²⁴ The claims, large and small flooded in. On the day Lord Mayo’s claim for compensation of over £50,000 for the burning of Palmerstown House was heard, Margaret Barry of Castledermot claimed, and was granted, £7 for the loss of a donkey, shot during a battle between Free State forces and republicans.²²⁵ While he

²²¹ K.C.C. mins. 24 Nov. 1924.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ *L.L.*, 29 Nov. 1924.

²²⁵ *K.O.*, 29 Nov. 1924; Lord Mayo’s claim was finally adjudicated on the following year: see *K.O.*, 12 Dec. 1925.

was waiting for his claim to progress through the court, Lord Mayo refused to pay his rates, on legal advice. This was already causing some concern to the rate collector in his region, who wrote to the county council asking that he not be required to lodge the not inconsiderable sum of £196, which was Lord Mayo's half-yearly rates bill, until the money had been collected. The council referred the matter to the Department of Local Government and the collector was exempted from liability in the case.²²⁶

There was some unease as the extent of the awards was revealed in court. As one report put it:

The bill for wanton destruction of the people's property is steadily mounting up as will be seen on reference to our reports of the inquiry at present proceeding before Judge Doyle at Naas court. Day after day the claims are coming, sometimes for large amounts, sometimes for small, but the aggregate will total a very considerable sum, running, its believed, well into six figures. If this is the case in Kildare, where things were comparatively quiet during the revolutionary period, what must it be in other counties, where the destruction is much greater?Surely the lesson cannot be lost upon those of our fellow countrymen who have it still in the back of their minds that force is the only remedy for achieving their ideals.²²⁷

The consequence of all these claims for Kildare County Council was a sharp rise in the rates estimate for the following year, to meet the expected bill.²²⁸ When the rates question came up for decision there was some relief from the full impact of the malicious injuries bill by the announcement that the agricultural grant was to be doubled. This helped reduce the required rise of 1/6 in £ to 11d.²²⁹

In spite of this, and the reported rise in claims from the Kildare County Health Board for home assistance, the mood in the county was hopeful. An editorial marking the end of the year summed up this feeling:

A year of trial and struggle is nearing an end, and there are signs that

²²⁶ K.C.C. mins. 7 May 1924; *L.L.*, 10 May 1924.

²²⁷ *K.O.*, 6 Dec. 1924.

²²⁸ *K.O.*, 20 Dec. 1924; K.C.C. mins. 18 Mar. 1925.

²²⁹ *L.L.*, 29 Apr. 1925.

the future holds in store for this country a brighter and better prospect than we have experienced in the past few years. Our country has passed through a period of turmoil...but it has pulled through in a remarkable manner. Our government has established conditions of peace and observance of law few could have foreseen. The sacredness of life and the rights of property are at length acknowledged throughout the land and the reign of gun-law has ceased, never again, we trust, to be resurrected in Ireland.

Many projects are being inaugurated for the betterment of the country and though money may be short and taxation high, we have Irish brains at work to seek out the ways and means that may be available to improve conditions and alleviate distress wherever it exists, to find employment for those able and willing to work, to establish industries and foster those already in existence.²³⁰

One of the signs of change in economic activity referred to above was a plan to build an electricity generator on the Liffey, to supply power for Dublin city. This project was first mooted in 1921 and since then four competing schemes had submitted plans to the Dáil for approval.²³¹ Unfortunately Kildare County Council was not convinced of the merits of the scheme, persuaded as they were by complaints of residents and their representatives in Celbridge and Leixlip that interfering with the water levels in the river Liffey would cause damage to their properties. Some councillors objected to the idea of Dublin using a Kildare resource for a project with little apparent benefit outside the city.²³² The council first asked its solicitor and county surveyor to prepare and present its case against the scheme to an Oireachtas joint committee then processing the plan as a private members bill.²³³ The county council was joined in this objection by Celbridge No.1 Rural District Council. This presentation was made in December 1924. Kildare's objections to the Liffey scheme, were put to the joint committee by their solicitor, Mr. Osborne, as follows:

²³⁰ *K.O.*, 27 Dec. 1924.

²³¹ *F.J.*, 21 Apr. 1921; *K.O.*, 22 Mar. 1924.

²³² *K.C.C. mins.* 27 Feb. 1924

²³³ *Ibid.*

The authorities he represented were forced to the conclusion that in two vital aspects the scheme was not satisfactory. They did not think that this undertaking could give an adequate supply of power so as to benefit Kildare, and they did not think the financial position was sufficiently strong.²³⁴

The project was lost to the region for the immediate future, only finally getting government approval in 1945.²³⁵ Work began on a similar scheme on the river Shannon in 1927.

The council took a similarly negative approach to another sign of the changes happening in the Ireland of the time. The county surveyor reported to the council in early 1925 about the increase of heavy traffic on some of the roads in the county. He said:

Illustrating the revolution in traffic which has rather suddenly taken place I have to report that a large mileage of several roads are now served with passenger omnibuses of the heavier type. Even in America where there is money to build the roads of concrete and steel, certain precautions are being taken against this type of traffic, but not so in Kildare.

The road from Clane to Dublin had, after long sustained effort, been brought up to first rate condition by the ordinary method of steamrolling which had been the summit of our ambition, and looked upon as final up to a year or two ago. A passenger bus is now traversing it four times daily and rapidly making it impossible for all kinds of traffic. Not content with keeping to the main road it traverses the bye-road to and from the little village of Straffan.²³⁶

The council's reaction was to introduce proceedings against the Tower Bus Company for damage to the Clane-Celbridge road and to take steps to have 'this type of traffic prohibited from the road under the Road Act, 1920'.²³⁷ The council succeeded in the first but not in the second of these efforts, receiving £20 damages

²³⁴ *K.O.*, 6 Dec. 1924

²³⁵ Dail debates, S.I. no. 154/1945 – River Liffey (Leixlip) Hydro-electric scheme approval order, 1945.

²³⁶ *K.C.C.* 23 Feb. 1925.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

from the bus company.²³⁸ The power to remove the buses from the main roads in the county was removed, along with a long-running grievance of all the local authorities in the county when the department of local government formally took over the financing of the maintenance of the designated main roads.²³⁹ This was an immediate financial boost to all the local authorities in the country when it was implemented.²⁴⁰

Another of the signs of modernity coming before the county council at this stage was an increase in the application to the county surveyor for permission to install petrol pumps. These applications came before successive meetings of the finance committee in 1924 and 1925.²⁴¹

The passing of the Local Government Act, 1925 introduced the first major reform of the structures of local administration in Ireland since the setting up of the county councils in 1899. The rural district councils, whose function since the abolition of the poor law unions was increasingly difficult to justify were themselves abolished under the new act. The threat to abolish them was met with a hail of rather unconvincing criticism. The promise of a reduction in the cost of local administration with a consequent reduction in the rates meant that the objections got no further than the usual resolutions. When the details of this part of the act became known the *Leinster Leader* commented on the reason for this rather half-hearted defence of the RDCs. It said:

The complete abolition of the RDCs under the new bill has been criticised both in and out of the Dáil. At one time such a proposal would have raised a storm of indignation throughout the whole country. In latter years however, the work done by the RDCs has not given satisfaction to the ratepayers with the result that a great deal of apathy exists on the question of whether they should be abolished or retained. There are some matters with which small, if efficient local bodies could deal more expeditiously and economically. Unfortunately the ratepayers' representatives on the RDCs have not shown as

²³⁸ K.C.C. fnce cmte, 20 Jan. 1926.

²³⁹ Under the Local Government Act, 1925.

²⁴⁰ K.C.C.mins. 4 Nov.1925.

²⁴¹ K.C.C. fnce cmte, 24 Aug. 1924; *ibid.* 1 Apr. 1925; *ibid.* 13 May 1925; *ibid.*, 30 Sept. 1925.

quick an interest in the ratepayers' affairs as they might and it is true also that the business of the RDCs has been delayed in the past through a quorum of members not being available at meetings.²⁴²

The *Kildare Observer* had no great love for the RDCs either, but wondered if, 'this drastic step',²⁴³ of abolishing them will effect any improvement in local administration. It doubts it, given that all of the responsibility that the RDCs used to have will, 'devolve on the county councils, and having regard to the amount of work already imposed on the councils, we think an unreasonable demand is being made on members, a great deal of whose time will be taken from their own business in order to attend to public duties'.²⁴⁴

The eventual passing of the Local Government Act, in March 1925 cleared the way for the holding of the much-delayed local government elections. The elections had been anticipated for a number of years now, as a means of correcting what was seen as an excessive influence of the labour interest on the councils. The *Kildare Observer*, which was no supporter of that labour influence, at least acknowledged the skill and dedication with which the workers' representatives went about the business of looking after their constituents. While expecting local elections earlier in the year, which were postponed again, it criticised the farmers for not representing their own interests on the council and said:

It may be said, so far as Kildare is concerned, that the labour representative carried on the whole work of local administration. It must also be said with truth that those representatives display considerable aptitude in the discharge of their duties. They looked after the interests of their class, as they had a right to do, with vigilance and great intelligence. And those who supply the sinews of the war would do well to take a leaf out of their book. The whole of local administration should not be left in the hands of one class and it is the bounden duty of the farmers to be adequately represented on

²⁴² *L.L.*, 7 June 1924.

²⁴³ *K.O.*, 24 May 1924.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

the local councils and insist on keeping taxation within reasonable boundaries.²⁴⁵

The farmer representatives on the council had already improved their attendance and their vigilance during 1924 and early 1925 and the labour influence was challenged at many junctures. In early 1925 an attempt to raise the wage rates of the permanent roadmen to 40/- per week was resisted by the farmers.²⁴⁶ Around the same time there was a major push put on by the farmers, through the county health board chairman Patrick Phelan, to insist that any able-bodied men should have to work for the unemployment benefit they received, ostensibly because it was demoralising to give them 'dole' without asking for work in return.²⁴⁷

A conference on unemployment was called for 28 January 1925, attended by representatives of the county council, the county board of health, the Naas and Athy UDCs, Newbridge Town Commission and the I.T. & G. W. U. The labour representatives tried to explain that the men paid for the benefit themselves through their national insurance contributions but they got very little hearing. The meeting never got beyond creating a list of work projects that could be undertaken but ran out of steam before anything concrete could be done about them. A comment on the plans suggests a reason why it did not come to anything:

A valiant effort was made and many useful projects put forward to provide employment, but there does not seem to be sufficient local energy to get past the suggestion stage. The local government department, when appealed to could only make further suggestions and so things remain as they were.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ *K.O.*, 12 Jan. 1924

²⁴⁶ K.C.C. mins. 18 Mar. 1925.

²⁴⁷ *K.O.*, 17 Jan. 1925.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 28 Feb. 1925.

When the elections were finally declared for the 23 June 1925 it was a straight contest between trade union interests and farmers. Cumann na nGaedheal decided not to run any candidates under their party name while Sinn Féin only half-heartedly entered the fray.²⁴⁹ This agreement was honoured in Kildare and a few days before the contest it was commented that, ‘National politics should not enter into elections to local councils and we are pleased to note that no effort has been made in this county to introduce national politics into the present elections’.²⁵⁰

At the final meeting of the old outgoing council Patrick Phelan led a round of tributes to the officials of the county council, especially to William Coffey, the county secretary, saying, ‘When the officials were efficient, the council was efficient and he could say that their efforts had gained an enviable reputation throughout the country for their outstanding ability’.²⁵¹ Henry Fay recalled the manner in which the officials had conducted themselves ‘during troublesome times’.²⁵² He continued:

He remembered one day coming there and finding the whole place filled with police and an army outside. On that day he saw Mr. Coffey marching down between two files of policemen, books and all. At one time they were between the two fires of the old English LGB and the council on the one hand and they never hesitated as to what side they would take. Through thick and thin they stood by the council.... He thought that Kildare County Council could take great pride in the fact that they had been an example to every county council in Ireland. They had balanced their books, paid their way and he believed it was in great measure due to the officials who worked under them (applause).²⁵³

There were now twenty-nine seats to be filled on the county council. In place of the chairman of the now defunct RDCs there were an extra eight seats in the

²⁴⁹ *L.L.*, 11 Apr. 1925.

²⁵⁰ *L.L.*, 20 June 1925.

²⁵¹ K.C.C. mins. 17 June 1925.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ *Ibid.*; he is referring to the 22 Nov. 1920 when the office was raided by the police just before a meeting of the council.

county, two for each of the four RDCs now abolished. Sixty-three candidates competed for the seats, twenty-three each for labour and the farmers, seven republicans and the remainder independents. The results returned 14 farmers, 13, labour, one republican and one independent.

The balance of power had now shifted away from labour and it wasn't just a matter of the one seat more than labour the farmers now had. In the Naas electoral area Mr. Bertram Barton, chairman of the Kildare Farmers' Union topped the poll with almost two quotas. In Clane, Patrick Phelan, vice-chairman of the Farmers' Union headed the poll. The new county councillors in order of their first preference votes were as follows:

Table 4. Kildare County Council elected 23 June 1925.²⁵⁴

Athy electoral area:	J. Fennell - Farmer T. Corcoran – Labour J. Foley – Labour J.W. Greene – Farmer G. Henderson – Farmer
Clane electoral area:	P. Phelan - Farmer A. McNally – Farmer R. McCann – Labour D. Weld – Labour W.E. Fawcett – Farmer
Kildare electoral area:	T.J. Murphy – Farmer J. Cregan – Labour J. Behan – Republican M. Lennox – Farmer J. Bergin – Farmer E. O'Reilly – Labour N. Hanagan – Farmer P.J.Dunne – Labour

²⁵⁴ *L.L.*, 27 June 1925; *K.O.*, 27 June 1925.

Naas electoral Area: B. Barton – Farmer
 M.Carroll – Labour
 E. Coonan – Farmer
 M. Fitzsimons – Independent
 W. Sauls – Labour
 N.Travers – Labour

Newbridge electoral area M.Smyth – Labour
 H. Colohan TD - Labour
 J. Conlon TD – Farmer
 R. Gannon – Farmer
 R. Keenan - Labour

Tom Harris, Chris Supple and James O’Connor lost their seats. Henry Fay did not stand again.

There was a polite enough start to the first meeting of the new county council in July 1925. By agreement Michael Fitzsimons was elected chairman. Patrick Phelan said it was a happy omen to find both parties agreeing to the one chairman. This mood continued with the selection of James Behan, the only republican councillor, as vice-chair.²⁵⁵

The spirit of co-operation persisted but a few contentious issues showed that in the new era the council was firmly in the control of the farmers and government supporters. The first involved a provision in the Local Government Act, 1925 that required local authority officials to declare their allegiance to the Free State if they wished to be hired or promoted. The republican vice-chairman James Behan proposed a motion critical of this ‘political test’ but found no one to second it.²⁵⁶

The balance between farmers and labour was very tight but soon however, the farmers began to undo the labour policies on the council. In February 1926, the long-standing resolution of the council preventing the hiring of non-unionised workers was rescinded. The context in which the rescission occurred is an interesting

²⁵⁵ K.C.C. mins. 6 July 1925.

²⁵⁶ Ibid. fnce cmte. 22 July 1925.

throwback to a different Ireland. A deputation from the legion of British ex-servicemen asked the council that its members be granted work on the roads without having to become members of a trade union. The deputation included Baron de Robeck, Colonel Tynan and Colonel Harrison. George Henderson and James Greene, both large farmers from Athy proposed and seconded the motion, 'That all and any resolutions of the council restricting employment on the roads, or in any capacity, to members of any trade union, be rescinded'.²⁵⁷ Hugh Colohan, seconded by Michael Smyth put an amendment to it, saying that:

The motion in Mr. Henderson's name is a direct attack on trade unionism and the hard-won rights of the Irish worker to combine in order to better their working conditions, and that, if passed, will undoubtedly engender class-hatred between employers and employees throughout the county and this council rejects the motion, firmly believing that it is the duty of all public bodies to foster good will and co-operation in the interests of Christian charity, progress and the common good of the people.²⁵⁸

This amendment was put first and got fourteen votes for and fourteen against. The chairman's casting vote was against. Henderson's original motion was then put and was carried by the same voting. As expected the labour members were all opposed to the change and the farmers all for it.

The next month the farmers made their grip on the controls of the council a bit more secure. Mark Carroll the labour member for Naas, died and a replacement was co-opted. The Labour Party wanted Patrick Nestor from Naas, but a farmer, William Ronaldson, from Barnhall, who had been on the first council with S.J. Brown and Matthew Minch, in 1899, was chosen ahead of him by twelve votes to eleven.²⁵⁹ Now the farmers had a working majority which did not depend on the chairman's casting vote. And they soon put it to use.

²⁵⁷ K.C.C. 22 Feb. 1926.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid. 16 Mar. 1926.

At the next meeting the wages of the permanent road workers were reduced from 38/- per week to 32/-.²⁶⁰ It was not a popular decision with the labour side. A packed public gallery watched the meeting and one report of the event is headed, 'Disorderly Proceedings'.²⁶¹ A noisy, unruly meeting, with the chairman shouting for order and the council members being abused from the public gallery, which spilled over into the hall and stairway of the courthouse, ended in near chaos, but with a victory for the farmers. The wages were reduced. A new era had indeed begun for Kildare County Council.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. 31 Mar. 1926.

²⁶¹ *K.O.*, 3 Apr. 1926.

Conclusion

The following are the main conclusions to be drawn from this study of the first decades of Kildare County Council. Some of these conclusions are in line with expectations and others are more surprising or subtler than the stereotypical views of county councils at the time and since.

The political make up of the first county council and its successors down to 1920 was indeed broadly nationalist as one might expect. To a large extent, the Protestant landed gentry who were unionists in politics, and who had dominated local government under the grand jury system, were replaced on the county council by Catholic nationalist tenants. In this way what happened in the first election was a revolution but only in the narrowest sense. In Kildare of course some influential unionist landlords did get elected to the council and one, Lord Frederick Fitzgerald of Carton, managed to hold his position there until 1920. To confound the stereotype, two of the most vociferous unionists elected were Catholics, namely Ambrose More O' Ferrall (1899-1911) and Sir Gerald Dease (1899-1903), while one of the most prominent nationalists was a Protestant landlord, George Wolfe (1899-1920).

Similarly, there were some substantial owner-occupiers elected to the first council and many more of the councillors acquired this status under the 1903 Wyndham land act. Indeed county councillors were prominent in the negotiations of the deal under that act whereby the vast estates of the Duke of Leinster in the county was sold to the tenants. Others elected to the first council were prominent local businessmen such as Edmund Cassidy, the distiller from Monasterevan (1899-1902) and Matthew Minch, anti-parnellite M.P. for the south Kildare constituency and owner of a successful malting business in Athy (1899-1920). The council's first chairman and the man who guided its fortunes until 1911 was Stephen J. Brown,

originally from Dundalk, who, by the early 1900s was a very successful and well regarded solicitor in Naas, who also had a large farm near the town. The first Kildare County Council was comprised of men with a stake in the economy of the county and they were far from the feckless, irresponsible and propertyless rabble that some had predicted would seize the reins of local government control.

The political make-up of the council is significant, because to a very large extent, after the vigorous electoral contests for council seats in 1899, there were hardly any more contested elections for seats on the council until 1920. Out of twenty-one seats there were only four contests in 1902, three in 1905, one in 1908, two in 1911 and one in 1914. All the other seats were filled by uncontested nominees or by the council's own co-option of members to replace those who resigned or died. In this way the first council became practically a self-perpetuating oligarchy that stayed in power until 1920. This was fine and may even have been representative of the vast majority of the electorate as long as there was a broad consensus in the county about political issues, but it was hardly democratic in the strict sense of the word. This lack of electoral contest at local level reflected a similar situation at parliamentary level, where from 1900 to 1918 there were relatively few contests for seats in many constituencies.

Among the questions this study has not answered is why there were so few contests for the county council seats. At the time it was claimed that contests cost money and thus avoiding them saved the ratepayers' money, but the county secretary, John T. Heffernan himself discounted this in 1902. Perhaps the deference once shown to the landed gentry had been partially transferred to the new Catholic political elite in the county. A glimpse into the thinking of those who gave such deference would perhaps require many more personal letters and documents of the

type preserved by John T. Heffernan which provide a rare insight into the personal lives out of which the political loyalties of his class emerged.

A surprising discovery of the early part of this thesis is the fluidity of the concepts of unionism and nationalism as those claiming to hold these political allegiances in Kildare at the elections to the first county council in 1899 expressed them. Subsequent events may have hardened the meanings of both into rigid orthodoxies, but it is instructive to see how flexible either could be given a different set of circumstances. Had there been more electoral contests for the county council seats during the period 1902 to 1920 it would have given those on both sides further opportunities to articulate their sense of what their unionism or nationalism meant as each new election took place.

Closer study shows just how moderate the nationalism of the new county councillors was. Most had been involved in the land war and had been, to a greater or lesser extent, active in the Irish National Land League and its successor, the Irish National League. They were almost universally supporters of John Redmond's Irish Parliamentary Party. The United Irish League had no impact on the election of the first county council in 1899 and thereafter was of only very marginal significance in nationalist politics in the county.

When home rule became an imaginable reality in 1911 the county councillors were firm supporters of it, but they clearly understood the concept to mean that Ireland would still be part of the British Empire under the monarch of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. While the council did not officially endorse the visits of Edward VII in 1903 and George V in 1911 to the county, councillors were part of the official Irish reception of both. Many councillors clearly identified with the monarchy and saw no conflict between nationalism and loyalty to the

crown. In this they seem to have been reflecting the views of most of the people of Kildare who warmly and exuberantly welcomed the monarchs on both occasions.

When the Great War broke out Kildare County Council had no hesitation in backing John Redmond's call to Irish men to enlist and fight for the empire. This was more than merely lip service. One councillor and the sons and nephews of others enlisted. County councillors were prominent throughout the war on recruitment committees and platforms urging as many of the able-bodied young as could be spared to join up.

The 1916 rising was firmly condemned by the council as a deplorable action that threatened the much-delayed implementation of home rule. Their political sensitivities were sufficiently alert for them to include with this condemnation a call for leniency towards those who had been led astray by a few dangerous radicals. At the same meeting that condemned the rising, a warm and genuine vote of sympathy was extended to Lord Frederick Fitzgerald on the death of his nephew Lord Desmond Fitzgerald, at the front in France. The councillors referred in their comments to the service Lord Desmond had done Ireland by his death in France. Again, there was no conflict in their nationalism between service with the army in France and Ireland's aspiration to home rule under the same imperial flag.

As the tide of political sympathy flowed towards the rebels and their Sinn Fein leaders and towards a more radical and less accommodating view of the meaning of nationalism, the members of Kildare County Council stuck to their allegiance to the Irish Party. From the general election of 1918 when Sinn Fein swept the Irish Party into oblivion, the councillors, with one notable exception, maintained their active support for constitutional politics. Apart from the one councillor, Patrick Phelan who moved across to support Sinn Fein, the phenomenon of 'continuance' was not a feature of politics in Kildare in the period. From the 1918 parliamentary

election until the 1920 county council election, Kildare County Council found itself largely out of line with the political sentiments and wishes of the majority of people in Kildare who had lost faith in the constitutionalism that most of the councillors still adhered to.

The 1920 council election was a real revolution. The large farmers and businessmen who had ruled since 1899 were replaced by Labour Party representatives of workers and Sinn Fein members supported by small farmers and others who had much less of a property stake in the county, and who supported the Sinn Fein political and revolutionary agenda. Several active members of the IRA were also elected to the new council, such as Tom Harris, Eamonn Ó Modhrain and Jack Fitzgerald. The latter was also chairman of the Kildare county board of the G.A.A., the first council member with any active involvement in that organisation. Almost immediately the new council itself became a weapon in the revolution as the Dáil Department of Local Government opened a new front in the war of independence through the attempted takeover of local government from the British authorities.

The new council declared its allegiance to the Dáil but also very soon showed that it was not an unquestioning follower of that body's every wish. When financial reality and the necessity to pay the day-to-day expenses of the council dictated, they reverted to the use of their original treasurer even though this was seen as a repudiation of the council's loyalty to the Dáil. They held the line on this and the Department of Local Government in the Dáil did not force the issue as it saw some of the other councils who were less pragmatic in even worse financial straits than Kildare.

On the issue of the treaty a somewhat ambiguous conclusion must be drawn from the evidence. Kildare County Council did vote to accept the treaty, but

narrowly and at a poorly attended meeting. This approval almost certainly reflected the wishes of the majority of the people of Kildare, but some of the county councillors who failed to attend the meeting might have been expected to vote against had they been in attendance. The county's two T.D.s, one of whom, Donal Ó Buachalla, was chairman of the county council and the other, Art O'Connor who was a council engineer on leave of absence, both voted against the treaty in direct and stated opposition to the council's official position.

In spite of this ambivalence, when the treaty was accepted the council in practice gave its allegiance to the Free State government, with only occasional references to its perhaps not being a legitimate authority, and these from the same one or two diehards still on the council. Indeed when the Free State government took the drastic step of executing anti-treaty prisoners at the end of 1923, Kildare County Council refused to back a motion condemning the policy and instead passed one regretting that the executions had been necessary.

One of the most important discoveries of this thesis is the Labour Party control of Kildare County Council from 1920 to 1925, and the extent to which that party's members were prepared to use the council to further the interest of the workers they represented. This intervention on behalf of the workers was direct and practical and included employing many of them as road workers, voting them increases in wages whenever possible and support for the poor through the home assistance scheme that replaced the outdoor relief from the workhouses in 1923. The only restraints on this Labour Party use of the county council were the fact that their majority was always quite small and the farmers still had some representation on the council to at least challenge any excesses, and the Dáil Department of Local Government which used its disbursement of funds through special schemes of road works to bring about wage reductions.

The Labour Party's control of the council was broken, narrowly at first, in the 1925 local government election, and then more decisively in later months, by the representatives of the farmers who proceeded to undo much of the 'welfarist' initiatives of the previous council and when this study ends the interests of the workers and the poor were very much in second place to that of the farmers and the ratepayers.

Apart from the conclusions as to the political complexion of Kildare County Council another clear conclusion from this study is that the council ran the affairs of the county administration in a very efficient manner. There is no evidence of mal-administration or extravagance in the affairs of the council at any time, especially from 1899 to 1920. The temporary panic about the deduction from the agricultural grant in 1907 due to difficulties in the value of the land stock used to finance the Wyndham land purchase scheme was the only occasion before the war of independence when anything remotely like a financial crisis threatened the council, and the crisis was over very quickly.

The care the councillors took not to be extravagant may have come from mere parsimony but may also have reflected the sense that nationalist Ireland had of being on trial in its handling of local government and of wanting to prove to itself and its critics that it could do as good a job as those they replaced. This was certainly part of the motivation in Kildare. It did cause a tension on the council, certainly in the years when Stephen J. Brown was chairman (1899 to 1911), between those who wished to use their powers under the Local Government (Ireland) Act, and other legislation to modernise and develop the county, and those who were reluctant to spend money and to increase the rates. This at times slowed down developments that might have improved the quality of life of the people of the county. The treatment of sufferers from TB was severely hampered by the council's failure to provide for a

sanatorium in the county under the Tuberculosis Prevention (Ireland) Act, 1908. The county surveyor began asking for the money to buy steamrollers as early as 1900 but it was 1911 before the council sanctioned them and then only on a limited basis. This undoubtedly impaired the quality of the roads in the county. Similarly the idea of using direct labour was first suggested in 1900 but was resisted in Kildare on the grounds of cost until 1920 when the Labour Party got control of the council. Direct labour would undoubtedly have improved the working conditions of the labourers involved much earlier had it been introduced.

On the other hand, Kildare County Council did provide a very well run and enlightened university scholarship scheme under the Irish Universities Act and set up a successful county insurance society to make use of the National Insurance Act. The scholarship scheme reflected very well on the council because it included a provision that allowed the children of Protestant parents who won scholarships to use the bursary to attend Trinity College if they wished. The council resisted strenuous attempts by the Gaelic League to impose a condition relative to the study of Irish that would have made this provision for non-Catholics, however theoretical it might have been, impossible to adhere to. The Kildare County Insurance Society thrived and the friendly societies such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians did not feature on the insurance scene in the county.

From 1920 to 1925, Kildare County Council under the Labour Party and Sinn Fein still managed to conduct its affairs efficiently given the pressures of the time. The workers' representatives were undoubtedly prepared to increase the rates and spend the income with less consideration for the major ratepayers who had to stump up than the councillors in earlier days but the essential work of the council did continue. Throughout the war of independence and the civil war the council managed to collect almost all of the rates and to pay all its most pressing bills even if it sailed

close to insolvency on occasions. Many other county councils were not able to claim as much at the time. When one of the longest serving members of the council, Patrick Phelan, spoke of those years at the last meeting of the council before the 1925 elections, he gave the credit for this achievement to the salaried officials, such as the county secretary and his staff. When one looks at the minutes much credit must also go to the small number of intrepid councillors who turned up week after week when there were real dangers to be faced, for finance committee meetings and proposal committee meetings, which gave the officials the authority to continue the administration of the county.

Another conclusion to be drawn from this study is that Joe Lee's description of the county councils of the period as 'Augean stables of corruption' does not fit Kildare County Council. Undoubtedly the council made its appointments after the manner of the time, giving jobs to friends and political associates and contriving things so that agreed favourites would get posts that arose. In spite of this there is no evidence in the sources I have studied of anyone being appointed to a position for which they did not have at least minimal qualifications. No doubt applicants for such jobs who did not have the political connections of the winners felt aggrieved, but that was the way of the time. By modern standards it was undoubtedly unethical but Kildare County Council does not seem to have worked the system in a way that could be called corrupt for the time. During the period of time covered by this study the conservative *Kildare Observer* reported the doings of the council in great detail. It did not have contracts for printing with the council and only occasionally carried advertisements from that body, so it would not have had an interest in covering up incidents of gross jobbery or corruption and yet there is no evidence from that quarter of any such pattern.

A recurring theme of this study has been the propensity of Kildare County Council to close ranks against outside interference and criticism, sometimes in direct contradiction of the political or other differences that may have characterised its own internal debates. This was noticed as early as 1900 when the council defied the LGB over the appointment of a new county secretary. In 1913 the council was again united against the interference of both the Gaelic League and the General Council of County Councils (which, it may be mentioned in passing, had almost no impact on the working or thinking of Kildare County Council at any time during the period covered by this study) in defending its own non-discriminatory university scholarship scheme and resisting a nationwide campaign to insist that the new secondary school scholarships system should be confined only to those who had knowledge of Irish. This spirit of resistance to outside interference continued under the underground Dáil, when the council ignored that body's criticism of its re-appointment of its treasurer. Under the Free State the council, divided as it was between labour and farmer interests still showed a united front against the Department of Local Government's attempts to control appointments to council jobs. This defensiveness even manifested itself against individuals who criticised the council, as in the case of the attack on its idiosyncratic university scholarship awards in 1924.

Another interesting theme to emerge in this study is the extent to which those involved in the story drew on their various versions of the past to help define their current political positions. Those nationalists standing for election in 1899 explicitly drew on their land league involvement to establish their credentials with the voters. More subtly, George Wolfe, the Protestant nationalist landlord conceived of his involvement in the National Volunteers from 1914 as being in the tradition of Henry Grattan's volunteers of the 1780s. Later, Hugh Colohan the Labour Party T.D. and councillor, and Patrick Phelan, the farmers' representative, articulated opposing

interpretations of the more recent history of the war of independence and the civil war and used them to support their respective positions on county council affairs.

This study of Kildare County Council begins in nineteenth century Ireland and ends over a quarter of a century later in an Ireland that had changed in ways that those who lived through the period could never have imagined possible at its outset. One of the major themes to emerge from this thesis is the unpredictability and indeed contingency of events from the perspective of those who experienced them. It would have been unimaginable to those who attended the first meeting of Kildare County Council in 1899 that within such a short space of time the country they lived in would be partitioned into two separate states that would manage to avoid all real contact with each other for the next seventy years. Historians may be able to reveal the fault-lines in the body politic of the time that allowed what happened to happen but a very real part of the events in this period is the amazement and shock of those who witnessed and lived through them.

Appendix 1. The poor rate in Kildare, 1899 to 1927

Below is a table showing the rates paid in county Kildare during the years covered by this study. The rate given is the sum of three parts, namely, county charges, which are common across all five of the RDCs, union charges, and district charges, both particular to the relevant areas. The rate on agricultural land ('L') is always the full rate less the fixed amount deducted from the rate charged to 'other hereditaments', that is, houses and buildings ('B') In the case of Athy No. 1 the deduction is roughly 18d; in Baltinglass No. 2, it is 17d; in Celbridge No. 2, it is 14d; in Edenderry No. 2, it is 13d, and in Naas No. 1, it is 14d. This fixed deduction was re-imbursed to the county council in the form of the 'agricultural grant', and was half of the combined poor rate and county cess in that district in the standard year, 1896-7.¹

Table 1. Rates in the rural district councils in Kildare, 1899-1927.²

Year	Athy		Baltinglass		Celbridge		Edenderry		Naas	
	L	B	L	B	L	B	L	B	L	B
1899-1900	2s 4d	4s 0d	1s 10d	3s 4d	2s 0d	3s 2d	2s 4d	3s 4d	1s 8d	2s 10d
1900-01	2s 1d	3s 8d	2s 0d	3s 6d	2s 2d	3s 4d	2s 2d	3s 2d	1s 10d	2s 10d
1901-2	2s 4d	3s 10d	1s 10d	3s 4d	1s 10d	3s 1d	1s 11d	3s 0d	1s 7d	2s 9d
1902-3	2s 3d	3s 10d	2s 2d	3s 7d	1s 11d	3s 2d	1s 6d	2s 7d	1s 6d	2s 8d
1903-4	2s 3d	3s 9d	1s 10d	3s 3d	1s 8d	2s 11d	1s 7d	2s 8d	1s 5d	2s 6d
1904-5	2s 4d	3s 10d	2s 1d	3s 6d	1s 9d	3s 0d	1s 11d	3s 0d	1s 7d	2s 9d
1905-6	2s 3d	3s 9d	1s 10d	3s 3d	1s 6d	2s 8d	1s 4d	2s 5d	1s 6d	2s 8d
1906-7	2s 1d	3s 7d	1s 10d	3s 3d	1s 8d	2s 11d	1s 4d	2s 5d	1s 3d	2s 5d
1907-8	2s 3d	3s 9d	1s 10d	3s 3d	1s 10d	3d 1d	1s 5d	2s 6d	1s 5d	2s 7d
1908-9	2s 7d	4s 0d	2s 0d	3s 4d	2s 3d	3s 6d	1s 11d	3s 0d	1s 9d	2s 11d
1909-10	3s 4d	4s 4d	2s 8d	3s 7d	2s 2d	3s 4d	2s 5d	3s 1d	2s 4d	3s 1d
1910-11	2s 6d	4s 1d	1s 9d	3s 2d	1s 11d	3s 2d	1s 10d	2s 11d	1s 8d	2s 10d
1911-2	2s 6d	4s 1d	1s 6d	2s 11d	2s 3d	3s 6d	2s 2d	3s 3d	1s 8d	2s 10d

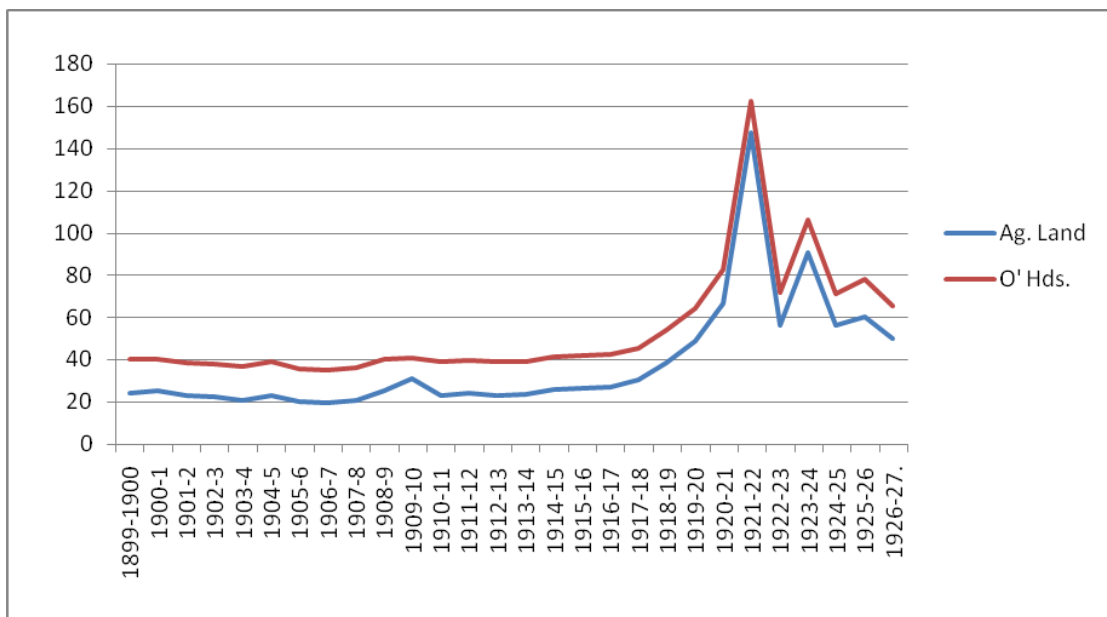
¹ 61 & 62 Vict., ch. 37, sec. 48, sub-sec. 1.

² The figures are taken from K.C.C. mins for the relevant years, in almost all cases from the quarterly meeting in late February.

1912-3	2s 5d 4s 0d	1s 4d 2s 9d	2s 5d 3s 8d	1s 11d 3s 0d	1s 7d 2s 9d
1913-4	2s 6d 4s 1d	1s 8d 3s 1d	2s 2d 3s 5d	2s 0d 3s 1d	1s 6d 2s 8d
1914-5	2s 8d 4s 2d	1s 10 3s 3d	2s 5d 3s 8d	2s 3d 3s 4d	1s 8d 2s 9d
1915-6	2s 9d 4s 3d	2s 0d 3s 5d	2s 5d 3s 8d	2s 0d 3s 2d	1s 10d 2s 11d
1916-7	2s 10d 4s 4d	2s 2d 3s 7d	2s 5d 3s 7d	1s 11d 3s 0d	2s 0d 3s 2d
1917-8	3s 4d 4s 10d	2s 5d 3s 10d	2s 8d 3s 10d	2s 4d 3s 5d	1s 11d 3s 1d
1918-9	3s 11d 5s 5d	3s 1d 4s 6d	3s 3d 4s 6d	3s 3d 4s 4d	2s 7d 3s 9d
1919-20	5s 4d 6s 11d	4s 0d 5s 5d	3s 10d 5s 1d	3s 7d 4s 8d	3s 6d 4s 8d
1920-1	6s 8d 8s 2d	5s 8d 7s 3d	4s 8d 5s 11d	5d 9d 6s 10d	5s 0d 6s 2d
1921-2	12s 9d 14s 3d		11s 3d 12s 6d	13s 2d 14s 3d	12 0d 13s 2d
1922-3	5s 10d 7s 4d		5s 0d 6s 3d	4s 0d 5s 1d	4s 0d 5s 2d
1923-4	8s 4d 9s 9d		7s 11d 9s 2d	7s 1d 8s 2d	7s 1d 8s 3d
1924-5	5s 5d 6s 10d		4s 9d 6s 0d	4s 5d 5s 6d	4s 3d 5s 5d
1925-6	5s 11d 6s 9d		4s 1d 6s 7d	5s 3d 6s 5d	5s 0d 6s 3d
1926-7	5s 4d 6s 11d		3s 11d 5s 2d	3s 9d 4s 10d	3s 8d 4s 10d

When these figures are converted to pence and the average paid across the five RDCs is calculated they can be illustrated by a graph as follows:

Table 2. Kildare County Council Rates, 1899-1927.³



³ In this table the figures in Table1 have been amalgamated to give the average rates across all RDCs.

For some ratepayers these were not the only charges they had to pay, as rates for specific services in some districts had also to be added to their overall charge. The following example of how the rates struck for one of the RDCs were presented to the county council meetings that approved them each year, give a good idea of some of these extra charges:

Table 3. Rates estimate presented to Kildare County Council for year ending 31 Mar. 1914.⁴

Rural District of Athy No. 1.

	To be levied on Agricultural Land	Sums to be deducted in respect of the Agricultural Grant	To be levied on other Hereditaments
In respect of County Charges	Pence 7.270	Pence 2.748	Pence 10.018
„ of Union Charges	9.392	8.393	17.785
„ of District Charges	13.690	7.409	21.099
Total rate agree to	30.352 (2s 6d)	18.550	48.902 (4s 1d)

And whereas certain separate charges are chargeable on the areas or contributory places hereunder mentioned, the following Special Poundage Rates have been added to the poor rates above mentioned for the payment of such separate charges, and the same form part of, and will be collected with the above general Poor Rate: -

No.	Name of special area or contributory place	Purpose or name of charge	Special Poundage Rate
114	County at Large	Compensation for Criminal Injuries	0.25d in the £
A 1	Athy No. 1 Rural District	Special Sanitary Expenses	0.50d in the £
A 2	Townlands of Monasterevan and Moore Abbey Demesne	Monasterevan Lighting	1.50d in the £

⁴ K.C.C. mins. 24 Feb. 1913; this is the format in which the rates were presented every year; capitilisation etc., has been reproduced as per the mins.

A similar situation existed in all of the RDCs with a greater or lesser number of extra charges, depending on circumstances. Celbridge No 1. RDC had no extra charges except occasionally for malicious injury claims, but Naas No.1 had eleven separate permanent special charges, the most expensive of which was for 1s 7d in the £ in the townlands in Kildare town which enjoyed the benefits of the town lighting system installed in 1904.⁵

What did these rates mean in money terms to those who had to pay them?

The following are a few examples from around the county.

1. A farmer in Straffan with 134 acres valued under Griffiths Valuation at £113 and with a house valued at £23, making a total of £136, would have paid rates to Kildare County Council in 1899 of £11 6s on his land and £3 12s on his house, bringing his total rates payable to £14 18s in that year. In 1905-06, he would have paid just £8 10s on the land and £3 on the house, a total of £11 10s for the year. By the end of the war, in 1918-19 his rates bill would have been £18 8s for the land and £5 4s for the house, a total of £23 12s. At its worst in 1921-22 his rates bill was £63 10s for the land and £14 8s for the house, a total of £77 18s.
2. A farmer in Athy with land valued at £50 under Griffith's valuation and a house valued at £7 paid £5 16s for his land and £1 8s for his house in 1899-1900. In 1905-06 this was £5 12s and £1 6s for land and house respectively. In 1918-19 the figures were £9 16s for land and £1 18 s for the house, while in 1921-22 he paid £31 18s for the land and £ and £5 for the house.⁶
3. The occupier of a house with a yard and a small garden on the main street in Maynooth valued at £8 under Griffith, paid £1 6s rates in 1899-1900, £1 2s in

⁵ Ibid; see above p.131-2.

⁶ Dr. Terence Dooley points out that in 1921 a farmer in Kildare with a valuation of £50 or under was considered to be 'a comparatively small farmer'; see Dooley, IRA activity in Kildare', p. 648.

1905-06, £1 16s in 1918-19 and in the worst year, 1921-22 this rose to £5 14s.

4. The occupier of a small house, with garden and yard on Parson St. Maynooth, similar to the one occupied by William Saults who was elected to Kildare County Council as a Labour Party representative in 1925 paid about 10s 6d in 1899-1900, 9s 10d in 1905-06, 16s in 1918-19 and £2 10s in 1921-22.⁷

A number of points of interest emerge from these tables and graphs. The first is that the rates in Kildare stayed at much the same level for so many years. Ratepayers got used to paying more or less the same rates every year and even had expectations of occasional reductions in the charges. There was a general increase in the rate in 1908-09 and in 1909-10, in response to the withholding of the agricultural grant in 1907 and 1908 due to the fall in the value of the land stock used to finance the purchase of the Leinster estate.⁸ These increases were not evenly spread over the entire county, with some rural district councils and boards of guardians able to make savings in other areas of expenditure to compensate for the increases resulting from the land purchase issue. The rates quickly fell back to their more usual level and remained there until quite late in the war (1917-18) when the next significant increase occurred. The most significant reason for the increase in that year was the higher wages being paid by the council to its manual workers and the higher prices for the foodstuffs purchased by the poor law unions for the workhouses and hospitals in their care. It is a measure of the economic prosperity in the county during the war, particularly on the part of the farmers, that this fairly significant rise in the rates to be paid went without any of the outrage and comment one might have expected. One

⁷ All of these calculations are derived from the table at p. 419 above and from *Griffith's Valuation of rateable property in Ireland, County Kildare*, 1851.

⁸ See above pp 146-8.

historian speaks of the prosperity of the farmers at this time as ‘agricultural euphoria’.⁹ Only when even higher rates coincided with a very sharp drop in farmers’ incomes in 1921-22 did those who had to pay most of the rates begin to protest.¹⁰

There is some evidence in the sources that at the height of the war of independence and the civil war collecting the rates became more difficult but there is no evidence that there was widespread or long-lasting defaulting by ratepayers. In February 1921 rate collector Dempsey reported that he could not collect in all of his district, ‘because of unusual activity of military’¹¹ in the area. He was given an extension of time to ‘close his collection’ as the procedure was termed. In August of the same year rate collector F.J. Field reported that a Philip Larkin of Leixlip who was employed by the council on road works had refused to pay his rates. The finance committee ordered that he be dismissed from his employment if he continued to refuse to pay.¹²

In September the same collector Dempsey wrote to say that he could not attend to his collection owing to his absence on ‘national duties’. There was little sympathy for him and he was ordered to appoint a deputy to proceed with the collection.¹³

The same month all the collectors were given an extension of one month to close their collections.¹⁴ They were later allowed to hire assistants to help them execute warrants against defaulters at a rate of 10/- per day, the money to be recovered from the defaulters and in the case of non-recovery of the outstanding

⁹ David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish life, 1913-21: provincial experience of war and revolution* (Dublin, 1977), p. 58.

¹⁰ See above pp 320-2.

¹¹ K.C.C. fnce. cmte. 2 Feb. 1921.

¹² K.C.C. fnce. cmte. 3 Aug. 1921.

¹³ K.C.C. fnce. cmte. 14 Sept. 1921.

¹⁴ K.C.C. fnce. cmte. 28 Sept. 1921.

rates, the costs were to be submitted to the county council for consideration and payment if approved.¹⁵ The issuing of legal proceedings against the defaulters must have worked for there is no evidence of the payment to the assistants having to be paid by the council.

Throughout the entire period only one rate collector in Kildare, P.J. Murphy, had to be threatened with legal proceedings to recover the rates he was due to collect and hand in, but his failure seem to have been as much due to old age and infirmity on his part as to any extraordinary difficulty in collecting the rates from the people. Murphy's account was chronically behind from early 1921¹⁶ but the council was patient with him until they received a letter from Lord Frederick Fitzgerald in March 1923 to say that he had paid his rates in full for the previous two half-yearly instalments but that Murphy had not yet lodged them to the council's account.¹⁷ At that stage the council began legal proceedings against Murphy and he promptly paid up the full backlog of rates due.¹⁸ When Murphy resigned from his post as rate collector in August 1923 the council wanted to grant him a pension for his forty four years' service but the Department of Local Government blocked the move on the basis that Murphy had only ever been a part-time employee of the council.¹⁹

There is no other case of serious delay in collecting the rates recorded in the minutes of Kildare County Council for the period of this study. The council was, as a result, able to weather the economic storm of the period and continue to operate at a minimal level at least.

¹⁵ K.C.C. fnce. cmte. 26 Oct. 1921.

¹⁶ K.C.C. fnce. cmte. 6 Apr. 1921.

¹⁷ K.C.C. fnce. cmte. 26 Mar. 1923.

¹⁸ K.C.C. fnce. cmte. 22 May 1923; K.C.C. fnce. cmte. 1 Aug. 1923.

¹⁹ K.C.C. fnce. cmte. 19 Dec. 1923.

Appendix 2. The origin of the poor rate

The Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898, not only replaced the old grand jury and poor law systems but also revised the method by which these older systems had been financed. Prior to the act, there had been two local taxes, the grand jury cess, paid to the county grand jury for its functions and the poor law rate paid to the appropriate poor law union. The basic change wrought to this system was the amalgamation of these two local taxes into one, called the poor rate.

A full explanation of the origin and functions of the grand jury cess and poor law rate are found in a memorandum presented by the Local Government Board of Ireland to the royal commission on local taxation in 1899¹ and an abbreviated form of the same information is found in the commission's final report.² The following description of the two taxes is taken largely from these sources.

The county cess or 'grand jury cess' can be traced back to 1635 (10 Car. I., Cap. 26) which gave to justices of assizes and justices of the peace, with the agreement of the grand jury, the power to levy sums of money from the inhabitants of counties and baronies for the carrying out of certain public works, mostly to do with roads and bridges.³ This process was continued by 'a long series of road acts passed by the Irish parliament, [and these] were finally consolidated and amended by the Grand Jury Act of 1836.'⁴

The purposes for which the cess was used were summarised in the annual returns of local taxation to parliament under the following headings:

¹ 'Memorandum on direct local taxation by Local Government Board for Ireland' in *Royal Commission to inquire into local taxation: minutes of evidence, appendices, index*, 1898 (C. 8763, C. 8764, C. 8765) vol. xli.417, xlii, pp 123-281 (henceforth cited as , 'Memorandum on direct taxation').

² *Final report of his majesty's commissioners appointed to inquire into the subject of local taxation*, 1902, Cd. 1068, vol. xxxix pp 5-12 (henceforth cited as, 'Final report on local taxation').

³ 'Memorandum on local taxation', p. 143.

⁴ *Ibid.*

1. Roads, bridges, and footpaths – construction of new and repair of old.
2. Court or sessions' houses – erection, repairs, and maintenance.
3. County officers' salaries.
4. Minor prison expenses, such as the cost of police conveyance of prisoners to and from court and witness expenses.⁵
5. County infirmaries and fever hospital, lunatic asylums, reformatories and industrial schools.⁶

The expenditure of the grand juries and the presentments to meet them were generally divided into three categories, 'Imperative', 'Ratifying' and 'Initiatory'. The

'Imperative' expenditure, included some of the following:

Salary of surgeon of the county infirmary
Salaries of county officers
Support and maintenance of lunatic asylums
Valuation expenses
Costs for parliamentary registration books and lists of voters etc.
Expenses under the Juries Act, 1871-1894.
Costs of Sheriffs and clerks of the peace
Expenses under Weights and Measures acts

The imperative presentments constituted 'at least one-third of the whole expenditure.'⁷

The 'Ratifying' category involved the approving or rejection of expenditure for the making and repair of roads and bridges in the various baronies and made up over one half of all of the total expenditure of the grand jury cess.⁸ Malicious injury claims presented by the baronial sessions or indeed the county-at-large presentment sessions could be also be approved or disallowed, but in this case the grand jury had the power to itself present, or vote for a malicious injury claim already rejected by a baronial or county presentment session.⁹

⁵ Since the General Prisons (Ireland) Act, 1869, the grand juries were no longer responsible for the cost of maintaining prisons.

⁶ Memorandum on local taxation, p. 146.

⁷ Ibid. p. 147.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

The 'Initiatory' category consisted of expense which the grand jury could itself present or vote without reference to any previous presentment session and included emergency repairs to roads or bridges damaged by storms etc., and the allowance to be paid to the cess collectors. This category was only a small portion of the total expenditure.

The actual procedure was that the expenses needed for the coming half-year (April to September and October to March) were estimated and voted on at the baronial presentment session or at the county-at-large presentment sessions and then these were levied on the authority of the grand jury and confirmed or ratified by the lords justices at the spring and summer assizes.

By the time the royal commission issued its final report this system had been superseded by the poor rate, and so it was now spoken of in the past tense. In spite of this it was usefully summarised in the report as follows:

The grand jury cess was levied by the grand juries and was roughly analogous to the county rate in England. The amount to be raised for general county purposes was levied as an equal poundage rate over the whole county, but some charges were levied separately off baronies and half-baronies, and for special expenses, off parishes or townlands. The rate was made twice a year on the net annual value of the rateable property in the area, and was payable by the occupier.¹⁰

The report goes on to note that although the Landlord and Tenant act of 1870 authorised the occupier under future tenancies to deduct from his rent one –half of the rate in the £ in respect of each pound of rent paid by him, in fact, landlords were able to contract out of their liability in this and, 'This provision remained, therefore, almost inoperative, and the cess was paid in nearly all cases wholly by the tenant.'¹¹ This was a situation that was not allowed to recur under the Local government

¹⁰ *Final report on local taxation*, p.5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

(Ireland) Act, 1898. The *Memorandum on local taxation* was clear that the ‘grand jury cess is a rate struck on the rateable hereditaments – it is a charge on land or premises, and is not a personal tax like poor rate.’¹²

There was no uniform method of assessing the amount of cess to be paid by the occupiers of land in any of the counties in Ireland until the Valuation (Ireland) Act, 1852. Prior to that the system differed from county to county according, ‘either to the Down Survey of Sir William Petty, or to county or baronial surveys carried out locally by grand juries under the various road acts of the Irish parliament.’¹³ One modern commentator describes the result of this as follows:

Each grand jury’s unique system of determining the acreage of a townland and the proportional share of the county cess to be imposed upon each occupier caused problems. There were frequent complaints that a townland’s acreage and taxable value were subject to prejudiced and inequitable practices by the local assessors who were suspected of basing their valuation on their friendship with landlords or under social pressure exerted on them.¹⁴

To try to eliminate these inequities a country-wide system was sought to measure and value land and property and the first step in this process was taken when Richard Griffith began his general townland valuation in 1830. Again a long, complex process is clearly summarised in the *Memorandum on local taxation* showing the stages from the first surveys of townlands through to the requirement of the Poor Law Act of 1838 for a valuation right down to individual properties or tenements which eventually emerged under the Valuation (Ireland) act, 1852,¹⁵ with

¹² *Memorandum on local taxation*, p. 144.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹⁴ James, R. Reilly, *Richard Griffith and his valuations of Ireland with an inventory of the books of the general valuation of rateable property in Ireland, conducted under 9 & 10 Vict. C. 110 of 1846 and 15 & 16 Vic. C. 63 of 1852* (Baltimore, 2001), p. 1 (henceforth, *Griffith and his valuation of Ireland*).

¹⁵ 15 & 16 Vict. , cap. 63.

various amendments down to 1874, as the standard 'under which the valuation of Ireland is at present carried out.'¹⁶

The grand jury cess was only one of two local taxes in Irish counties prior to the advent of the county councils in 1899. The other was the poor rate, introduced to finance the poor law system set up in 1838. 'This rate, as its name implies, was originally raised for the purpose of poor relief, although since it was first authorised, the cost of administration of many other local services had been thrown upon it.'¹⁷

The *Memorandum on local taxation* gives a full account of the earlier legislative efforts to relieve poverty in Ireland, dating back to the reign of Queen Anne,¹⁸ culminating in the Poor Relief (Ireland) act of 1838.¹⁹ The act divided the country up into 130 poor law unions each administered by a board of guardians. The unions did not take account of county boundaries and many unions were in two or even three different counties.²⁰ The boards of guardians of each union agreed an annual budget to cover its expenses for the next year and decided on a certain rate to be levied on each of the electoral divisions within the union. The actual rate paid by each person liable (poor rate was a personal tax, payable by the occupiers of rateable properties) was according to the valuation of the property as outlined in the primary or Griffiths valuation for the area.²¹ The occupier or tenant was liable for the poor rate but he was authorised to deduct from his rent one-half of the poundage rate for each pound of rent paid by him, provided that the deductions should not exceed one half of the

¹⁶ *Memorandum on local taxation*, p. 30; John Lee, 'Richard Griffith's land valuation as a basis for farm taxation,' in G.L. Herries Davies and R. Caharles Mollan,(eds.) *Richard Griffith, 1784-1878: papers presented at the centenary symposium organised by the Royal Dublin Society*, 21 and 22 September 1978, pp 77-101.

¹⁷ *Final report on local taxation*, p. 5.

¹⁸ *Memorandum on local taxation*, pp. 148-9;

¹⁹ 1 & 2 Vict., c. 56, 1838.

²⁰ R.B. McDowell, 'Administration and the public services, 1800-70' in W.E.Vaughan, ed. *A new history of Ireland V. Ireland under the union, 1, 1801-70* (Oxford, 1989) pp 557-8.

²¹ *Memorandum on local taxation*, p. 149.

total amount of the rate. Unlike in the case of the grand jury cess, any contracts to the contrary were expressly forbidden.²²

These then were the two local taxes levied off the counties before the coming of the county councils in 1899. Officers called barony constables, or simply cess collectors, collected the grand jury cess while the poor rate collectors collected the poor rate.²³

The changes to local taxation brought about by the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898, were summarised by the *Final report on local taxation*, as follows:

County Cess has been abolished and the rates existing under the system established in 1898 fall under two heads only: -

- I. – the new poor rate.
- II. – Municipal rates.

From the latter rates the charges for paving, lighting, sewerage and municipal administration in towns are defrayed...[which] are of comparatively small importance in Ireland. From the new poor rate all other local charges are defrayed, not merely the expenses of poor relief, but also all county and rural district expenditure.²⁴

With a few minor exceptions the poor rate was wholly payable by the occupier, though provisions were made through the introduction of the ‘agricultural grant’ to ensure that the occupiers should not suffer financially as a result of this. The agricultural grant was an exchequer subsidy paid to each county council to remit roughly half the rates due to be paid to it on agricultural land. It was not applied to non-agricultural property. In England and Wales much the same effect was obtained by having agricultural land rated at a half of the general charge, but in Ireland it was a bit more complex. The *Final report on local taxation* explains it best:

It will be observed that agricultural land in Ireland is not rated at a half but it is rated in full, subject to deduction of the amount of the agricultural grant. That grant is a fixed sum amounting to half the rates raised off agricultural land (not including buildings)

²² *Final report on local taxation*, p. 6: see above p. 425.

²³ John J. Clancy, *A handbook of local government in Ireland* (Dublin, 1899) p.90; *ibid.*, p. 179.

²⁴ *Final report on local taxation*, p. 6.

in the standard year 1896-7; and consequently so long as in any district the rate in the £ remains the same as the standard year, land will in fact be rated at half. If, however, the rate in the £ comes to exceed the rate in the standard year, the land will contribute towards such excess in proportion to its full rateable valuation. On the other hand, if in any place the rate in the £ falls below the rate in the standard year, land will then, in effect, pay on less than half its value.²⁵

What this meant in practice was that when a general rate for a county was struck, the fixed amount of the agricultural grant allowed to a particular rural district within that county (half the combined cess and poor rate paid on agricultural land in 1896-7) was deducted from what the occupier of agricultural land was expected to pay.

The benefit of the agricultural grant was shared equally between the landlord and the tenant in the following way. Owners who were not occupiers no longer had any liability for rates on a property. The landlord gained from his exemption from the half of the old poor rate he used to have to pay, while the tenant gained by having half the charge he used to have to pay for county cess subsidised. Thus everyone gained something from the change to the new poor rate.²⁶

Rate collectors collected the new poor rate for the county councils. Each collector was assigned a district and 'as a matter of practice there are about two collectors for a rural district.'²⁷ All of the new county councils were obliged by the orders in council which gave effect to the Local Government (Ireland) Act, to have established within six weeks of their first meeting, a scheme for the collection of the poor rate and to submit it for approval to the LGB along with the names of the collectors and a list of those who had transferred from service as grand jury cess collectors (high constable and deputy collectors) or from the service of boards of

²⁵ *Final report on local taxation*, p. 8.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

poor law unions as poor rate collectors.²⁸ The modus operandi of the new rate collectors was described as follows:

The collectors must keep offices for collection purposes within their districts, at which they attend on market days and other specified times; a good many payments are also made by post. Every fortnight the collectors must lodge the amount collected to the credit of the county fund and they must either attend at the county council to have their books examined or, if the council so direct, at the office of the rural district in which they collect. In such cases the county council pay the clerk of the rural district a fee for checking the books. Collectors are paid by poundage fees and are not bound to devote their whole²⁹ time to their work.

Both of the older taxes, the cess and the poor law rate had been estimated and struck at half-yearly intervals. This continued for a very short time under the county councils but in 1902 they were allowed to make estimates and strike a rate only once a year. The rates continued to be collected in two moieties, the deadlines being the end of September for the first and the end of March the following year for the second instalment.

²⁸ John J. Clancy, *A handbook of local government in Ireland* (Dublin, 1899) p. 179.

²⁹ *Final report on local taxation*, p. 7.

Appendix 3. Kildare County Council Elections, 1899-1925

The Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898 made provision for triennial elections of the members of the new county councils,¹ but a remarkable feature of the history of Kildare County Council from 1899 to 1920 was the rarity of contested elections in the county. It was much more common for there to be only one nomination to each electoral division and for the nominee to be returned ‘unopposed’. Below are the election results for the each of the years when elections did take place:

Table 1. Results in contested electoral divisions, 1899.

Ballitore:	Owen Cogan (elected)	339 votes
	Thomas Greene	30
Ballymore-Eustace:	George Wolfe (elected)	381 votes
	Baron de Robeck	69
Carbury :	Ambrose More O’Ferrall (elected)	219 votes
	Charles Burke	146
	Wm. Smith	49
Castledermot:	Edward Hayden (elected)	323 votes
	Thomas Greene ²	32
	C.J. Engledow M.P.	18
Clane:	Peter Crosbie (elected)	230 votes
	Thomas Cooke-Trench	127
Kilcock:	John Field (elected)	286 votes
	James Cummins	80
Kilcullen:	Edward Fenelon (elected)	334 votes
	M.C. Cramer-Roberts	101
Kildare:	Charles Bergin (elected)	243 votes
	John Moore	182
Kilmeague:	John Cribben (elected)	247 votes
	Edward Delany	41

¹ 61 & 62 Vict. ch. 37 part 1. section 2 reads, ‘The councillors shall hold office for a term of three years, and then shall retire together, and their places shall be filled by a new election’.

² Greene was entitled to stand in any or all divisions if he wished: see 61 & 62 Vict. ch. 37 sec. 2, subsec. 5; Clancy, *A handbook of Local Government in Ireland*, p. 8.

Kilteel:	Lawrence Malone (elected)	222 votes
	T.H. Campion	183
	Lord Mayo	19
Maynooth:	Lord Frederick Fitzgerald (elected)	235 votes
	Wm. Ronaldson	163
Monasterevan:	Edmund Cassidy (elected)	247 votes
	Michael Dowling	208
Morristown-Biller:	James Kelly (elected)	210 votes
	Gerald Hurley	173
	Wm. Pallin	20
Naas:	Stephen J. Brown (elected)	320 votes
	Thomas de Burgh	166

The other seven electoral divisions, namely, Athy, Celbridge, Churchtown, Harristown, Newbridge, Rathangan and Timahoe, returned nominated councillors without a contest.

Table 2. Results in contested electoral divisions, 1902.

Castledermot:	Richard Lawler (elected)	162 votes
	Edward Hayden (outgoing)	94
Kilcock:	John Field (elected)	250 votes
	Wm. Hanway	152
	Ed. Farrelly	5
	Bernard Fagan	5
Kilmaegue:	John Quinn (elected)	151 votes
	John Cribben (outgoing)	113
Monasterevan:	Peter Timmons (elected)	253 votes
	Luke Finlay	207

These were the only contest out of the twenty-one electoral divisions. Edward Fenelon did not stand in Kilcullen and was replaced by James Darby, and in Harristown, James Sunderland replaced John Kelly, again without an election.

There were even fewer electoral contest in the 1905 council elections in county Kildare. The results are below:

Table 3. Results in contested electoral divisions, 1905.

Celbridge:	Edward Farrell (elected)	167 votes
	Wm. Ronaldson (outgoing) ³	124
Kilcock:	John Field (elected)	269 votes
	Wm. Hanway	111
Kilcullen:	Thomas Keatley (elected)	243 votes
	Denis Brennan	160

In 1908 there was a contest in only one of the twenty-one electoral divisions in the county, as follows:

Table 4. Results in contested electoral divisions, 1908.

Athy:	Matthew J. Minch (elected)	250 votes
	Peter Doyle	142

In 1911 there were two contests as follows:

Table 5. Results in contested electoral divisions, 1911.

Celbridge:	Wm. Gerald Dease	126 votes
	James O'Connor	123
	Edward Farrell (outgoing)	47
Naas:	Michael Fitzsimons (elected)	337 votes
	Michael Gogarty	137

In 1914 there was again only one contested division, as follows:

Table 6. Results in contested electoral divisions, 1914.

Celbridge:	James O'Connor	163 votes
	Wm. Gerald Dease	145
	Edward Farrell	26

³ Ronaldson was co-opted in 1903 to replace Sir Gerald Dease who died in October of that year; see *K.O.* 24 Oct., 1903

The next triennial election, due in 1917, was postponed because of the European war and subsequently on account of the disturbed state of Ireland in 1918 and 1919 and the next council elections did not take place until 1920. By then the members of Kildare County Council who had been nominated to office without facing an electoral contest in 1914 had continued in charge of local government in the county for six years without ever testing the extent to which they truly represented the political will of the people of Kildare. The council elections of 1920 effectively removed them from office and showed just how little they represented the county by then. It must be said however that they did in fact reflect the political opinion of the county in 1914, it is just that they did not change their own outlook to anything like the extent that most people did during the years 1916 to 1920. As a result those of them who chose to stand again for election in 1920 were, with one or two notable exceptions, roundly defeated. The 1920 county council election was fought under changes made by the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1919⁴ and was different from all the earlier contests in that it was the first to be based on proportional representation, with the original twenty-one single-seat electoral areas reduced to four multi-seat areas. There were still twenty-one members returned to the council and the four Rural District Council chairmen in the county were also entitled to membership. There were contests in four of the five new enlarged electoral areas, the exception being Clane where there were three nominees for the three seats available, so no contest took place. Joseph Cusack, Richard McCann and Patrick Phelan, all professing allegiance to Sinn Féin (with McCann also described as a Labour Party candidate) were the three returned to the council in this way. Below are the results of the electoral contests in the other four enlarged electoral areas.

⁴ 9 & 10 Geo. V, c. 19.

Table 7. Results in contested electoral divisions, 1920.

Athy:	C.J. Supple - Labour	504 (elected)
	W. Mahon – Sinn Féin	312 (elected)
	P. Dooley – Sinn Féin	205. (elected)
	G. Harbourne – Ratepayers	177
	J. Flynn – Ratepayers	125
	M. Tomlinson – Labour	120
	Wm. Murray – outgoing	115 (elected)
	J.J. Kehoe - Sinn Féin	103
	R. Wright – outgoing	94
	J. Conlon – outgoing	84
T. Hickey – outgoing	23	
Kildare:	Eamonn Ó Modhrain – Sinn Féin	547 (elected)
	N. Hanagan – Sinn Féin	415 (elected)
	J. Cregan – Labour	368 (elected)
	A. Murphy – Labour	290 (elected)
	C. Bergin – outgoing	249
	F. Doran – Sinn Féin	224 (elected)
	C. Kenny – Labour	211
	J. Sunderland – outgoing	91
Newbridge:	M. Smyth – Labour	508 (elected)
	T. Doran – Sinn Féin	313 (elected)
	J. Fitzgerald – Sinn Féin	293 (elected)
	H. Colohan – Labour	257 (elected)
	Henry Fay – Sinn Féin	152
	George Wolfe – outgoing	137
	P.J. Doyle – outgoing	123
	J. O'Connor – outgoing	72
Naas:	D.Ó Buachalla – Sinn Féin	754 (elected)
	Jas. O'Connor – Sinn Féin and outgoing	396 (elected)
	T. Harris – Sinn Féin	360 (elected)
	M. Fitzsimons – independent	301 (elected)
	J. Lawler – Sinn Féin	210
	N. Travers – Sinn Féin	198
	Mark Carroll – Sinn Féin	170 (elected)
	J.J. Flanagan – Labour	147
	E. Farrell – independent	50
	T. Lacy – independent	50

The 1925 county council elections were held under the Local Government Act, 1925, which abolished the rural district councils and enlarged the representation of each electoral area by two to make up for the loss of the chairmen of the RDCs on the council. The following are those elected in order of their first preference votes:

Table 8. Names of those elected to Kildare County Council, 1925.⁵

Athy electoral area:	J. Fennell - Farmer T. Corcoran – Labour J. Foley – Labour J.W. Greene – Farmer G. Henderson – Farmer
Clane electoral area:	P. Phelan - Farmer A. McNally – Farmer R. McCann – Labour D. Weld – Labour W.E. Fawcett – Farmer
Kildare electoral area:	T.J. Murphy – Farmer J. Cregan – Labour J. Behan – Republican M. Lennox – Farmer J. Bergin – Farmer E. O’Reilly – Labour N. Hanagan – Farmer P.J.Dunne – Labour
Naas electoral Area:	B. Barton – Farmer M.Carroll – Labour E. Coonan – Farmer M. Fitzsimons – Independent J. Saults – Labour N.Travers – Labour
Newbridge electoral area	M.Smyth – Labour H. Colohan TD - Labour J. Conlon TD – Farmer R. Gannon – Farmer R. Keenan - Labour

⁵ Full details of all the counts, down to the fifteenth in some instances, are in *K.O.*, 27 June 1925

Appendix 4. List of the committees of Kildare County Council and of the committees on which it was represented, June 1920, totalling 22 in all¹

Committees of the council: Finance Committee
Proposal Committee
Rates Committee
Diseases of Animals Act Committee
Roads Committee

Committees on which the council was represented:

County Infirmary Committee
Agricultural Committee
Old age pension Committee
Technical Instruction Committee
Afforestation Committee
Tuberculosis Committee
County Insurance Committee
Venereal Diseases Committee
Carlow Asylum Joint Committee

Drainage District Committees for:

Baltreacy
Connell
Foranwell
Gorteen
Kildare
Rathangan
Blackwater
Lerr

¹ K.C.C. mins. 21 June 1920.

Appendix 5. Table of Officials Salaries presented to K.C.C finance committee, June 1919.¹

Pre-war salary of office	Present Officer	Office	Date of appointment	Salary at appointment	Increases granted	Present Salary	Award on present salary	Award on pre-war salary	Amount of award less increases already granted on Pre-war salary
£355	W.E. Coffey	Secretary	Nov. 1916	£255	Nil.	£255	£110	£131	£131 0s
£156	P.J. Field	Accountant	May 1917	£130	£25 May 1918	£155	£93 8s	£91 4s	£91 4s
£100	Myles Quinn	Clerk	Aug. 1917	£100	£25 May 1918	£125	£87 8s	£82	£57 8s
£70	W. Tyndall	Clerk	Feb. 1918	£52	£26 Feb. 1919	£78	£59 16s	£54 12s	£28 12 s
£156	L.J.Fulham	Clerk to Co.Surveyor	Oct. 1899	-	£24 Feb. 1919	£180	£96	£91 4s	£67 4s
-	J.O'Neill	Do.	May 1916	£52	£26 May 1917	£130	£86	£70 8s	none
£130	P.Domican	Asst. Surveyor	1899	-	£50 Aug. 1917	£180	£96	£88 8s	£38 8s

¹ K.C.C. fnce. cmte. 4 June 1919.

Appendix 6. Kildare county councillors, 1899-1926

Electoral Division	1899-1900* ¹	1900-1901	1901- 02
Athy	M.J.Minch	M.J.Minch	M.J.Minch
Ballitore	Owen Cogan	Owen Cogan	Owen Cogan
Ballymore-Eustace	George Wolfe	George Wolfe	George Wolfe
Carbury	A.More O'Ferrall	A.More O'Ferrall	A.More O'Ferrall
Castledermot	Edward Hayden	Edward Hayden	Edward Hayden
Celbridge	Sir Gerald Dease	Sir Gerald Dease	Sir Gerald Dease
Churchtown	Stephen Hayden	Stephen Hayden	Stephen Hayden
Clane	Peter Crosbie	Peter Crosbie	Peter Crosbie
Harristown	James Kelly	James Kelly	James Kelly
Kilcock	John Field	John Field	John Field
Kilcullen	Edward Fenelon	Edward Fenelon	Edward Fenelon
Kildare	Charles Bergin	Charles Bergin	Charles Bergin
Kilmeague	John Cribben	John Cribben	John Cribben
Kilteel	Laurence Malone	Laurence Malone	Laurence Malone
Maynooth	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald
Monasterevan	Edmund Casidy	Edmund Casidy	Edmund Casidy
Morrinstown-biller	James Kelly	James Kelly	James Kelly
Naas	Stephen J. Brown	Stephen J. Brown	Stephen J. Brown
Newbridge	Joseph Dowling	Dr. L.F. Rowan	Dr. L.F. Rowan
Rathangan	Stephen Murphy	Patrick J. Doyle	Patrick J. Doyle
Timahoe	Francis Colgan	Francis Colgan	Francis Colgan
Ex-Officio members	Ex-Officio members	Ex-Officio members	Ex-Officio members
Athy No. 1 RDC	Thomas Orford	Thomas Orford	Thomas Orford
Baltinglass No. 3. RDC	John Kelly	John Kelly	John Kelly
Celbridge No. 1 RDC	Wm. Ronaldson	Wm. Ronaldson	Wm. Ronaldson
Edenderry No. 2 RDC	Joseph O'Loughlin	Joseph O'Loughlin	Joseph O'Loughlin
Naas No. 1 RDC	John T. Heffernan	John Healy	John Healy
Grand Jury Nominees	Grand Jury Nominees	Grand Jury Nominees	Grand Jury Nominees
	James Medicott	James Medicott	James Medicott
	George Mansfield	George Mansfield	George Mansfield
	Wm. T. Kirkpatrick	Wm. T. Kirkpatrick	Wm. T. Kirkpatrick

¹ Years in which a new council was formed are marked with an asterisk.

Electoral Division	1902- 03*	1903- 04	1904 - 05
Athy	M.J.Minch	M.J.Minch	M.J.Minch
Ballitore	Owen Cogan	Owen Cogan	Owen Cogan
Ballymore-Eustace	George Wolfe	George Wolfe	George Wolfe
Carbury	A.More O'Ferrall	A.More O'Ferrall	A.More O'Ferrall
Castledermot	Richard Lalor	Richard Lalor	Richard Lalor
Celbridge	Sir Gerald Dease	Wm. Ronaldson	Wm. Ronaldson
Churchtown	Stephen Heyden	Stephen Heyden	Stephen Heyden
Clane	Peter Crosbie	Peter Crosbie	Peter Crosbie
Harristown	James Sunderland	James Sunderland	James Sunderland
Kilcock	John Field	John Field	John Field
Kilcullen	John Darby	John Darby	Thomas Keatley
Kildare	Charles Bergin	Charles Bergin	Charles Bergin
Kilmeague	John Quinn	John Quinn	John Quinn
Kilteel	Laurence Malone	Laurence Malone	Laurence Malone
Maynooth	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald
Monasterevan	Peter Timmons	Peter Timmons	Peter Timmons
Morrinstown-biller	James Kelly	James Kelly	James Kelly
Naas	S.J.Brown	S.J.Brown	S.J.Brown
Newbridge	P.J. Doyle	P.J. Doyle	P.J. Doyle
Rathangan	James Coffey	James Coffey	James Coffey
Timahoe	Francis Colgan	Francis Colgan	Francis Colgan

Ex-Officio members	Ex-Officio members	Ex-Officio members	Ex-Officio members
Athy No. 1 RDC	Thomas Orford	Thomas Orford	Thomas Orford
Baltinglass No. 3. RDC	John Kelly	John Kelly	John Kelly
Celbridge No. 1 RDC	Richard McKenna	Richard McKenna	Richard McKenna
Edenderry No. 2 RDC	Joseph O'Loughlin	Joseph O'Loughlin	Joseph O'Loughlin
Naas No. 1 RDC	John Shiel O'Grady	John Shiel O'Grady	John Shiel O'Grady

Co-opted	Co-opted	Co-opted
John Healy	John Healy	John Healy
Edward Hayden	Edward Hayden	Edward Hayden

Electoral Division	1905 - 06*	1906 - 07	1907 - 08
Athy	M.J.Minch	M.J.Minch	M.J. Minch
Ballitore	Owen Cogan	Owen Cogan	Owen Cogan
Ballymore-Eustace	George Wolfe	George Wolfe	George Wolfe
Carbury	A.More O'Ferrall	A.More O'Ferrall	A.More O' Ferrall
Castledermot	Richard Lalor	Richard Lalor	Richard Lalor
Celbridge	Edward Farrell	Edward Farrell	Edward Farrell
Churchtown	Stephen Heyden	Stephen Heyden	Stephen Hayden
Clane	Peter Crosbie	Peter Crosbie	John Healy
Harristown	James Sunderland	James Sunderland	James Sunderland
Kilcock	John Field	John Field	John Field
Kilcullen	Thomas Keatley	Thomas Keatley	Thomas Keatley
Kildare	Charles Bergin	Charles Bergin	Charles Bergin
Kilmeague	John Quinn	John Quinn	John Quinn
Kilteel	Laurence Malone	Laurence Malone	Laurence Malone
Maynooth	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald
Monasterevan	Peter Timmons	Peter Timmons	Peter Timmons
Morristown-biller	James Kelly	James Kelly	Joseph Connolly
Naas	S.J.Brown	S.J.Brown	S.J.Brown
Newbridge	P.J. Doyle	P.J. Doyle	Peter Kelly
Rathangan	James Coffey	James Coffey	James Coffey
Timahoe	Francis Colgan	Francis Colgan	Patrick Phelan

Ex-Officio members	Ex-Officio members	Ex-Officio members	Ex-Officio members
Athy No. 1 RDC	Thomas Orford	Thomas Orford	Thomas Orford
Baltinglass No. 3. RDC	John Kelly	John Kelly	John Kelly
Celbridge No. 1 RDC	Richard McKenna	Richard McKenna	Richard McKenna
Edenderry No. 2 RDC	Joseph O'Loughlin	Joseph O'Loughlin	J.O'Loughlin
Naas No. 1 RDC	John Shiel O'Grady	John Shiel O'Grady	John Shiel O'Grady

Co-opted	Co-opted	Co-opted
Peter Crosbie	Peter Crosbie	Peter Crosbie Clane
Edward Hayden	Edward Hayden	Edward Hayden

Electoral Division	1908 - 09*	1909 - 10	1910 - 11
Athy	M.J. Minch	M.J. Minch	M.J. Minch
Ballitore	Owen Cogan	Owen Cogan	Owen Cogan
Ballymore-Eustace	George Wolfe	George Wolfe	George Wolfe
Carbury	A.More O' Ferrall	A.More O' Ferrall	A.More O' Ferrall
Castledermot	Richard Lalor	Richard Lalor	Richard Lalor
Celbridge	Edward Farrell	Edward Farrell	Edward Farrell
Churchtown	Stephen Hayden	Stephen Hayden	Stephen Hayden
Clane	John Healy	John Healy	John Healy
Harristown	James Sunderland	James Sunderland	James Sunderland
Kilcock	John Field	John Field	John Field
Kilcullen	Thomas Keatley	Thomas Keatley	Thomas Keatley
Kildare	Charles Bergin	Charles Bergin	Charles Bergin
Kilmeague	John Quinn	John Quinn	John Quinn
Kilteel	Laurence Malone	Laurence Malone	Laurence Malone
Maynooth	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald
Monasterevan	John Dempsey	John Dempsey	John Dempsey
Morristown-biller	Joseph Connolly	Joseph Connolly	Joseph Connolly
Naas	S.J.Brown	S.J.Brown	S.J.Brown
Newbridge	Peter Kelly	Peter Kelly	Peter Kelly
Rathangan	James Coffey	James Coffey	James Coffey
Timahoe	Patrick Phelan	Patrick Phelan	Patrick Phelan

Ex-Officio members	Ex-Officio members	Ex-Officio members	Ex-Officio members
Athy No. 1 RDC	Thomas Orford	Thomas Orford	Thomas Orford
Baltinglass No. 3. RDC	John Kelly	John Kelly	John Kelly
Celbridge No. 1 RDC	Richard McKenna	Richard McKenna	Richard McKenna
Edenderry No. 2 RDC	J. O'Loughlin	J. O'Loughlin	J. O'Loughlin
Naas No. 1 RDC	John Shiel O'Grady	Patrick Monaghan	Patrick Monaghan

Co-opted	Co-opted	Co-opted
Francis Colgan	Francis Colgan	Francis Colgan
Edward Hayden	Edward Hayden	Edward Hayden

Electoral Division	1911 - 12*	1912 - 13	1913 - 14
Athy	M.J.Minch	M.J.Minch	M.J.Minch
Ballitore	Owen Cogan	Owen Cogan	Owen Cogan
Ballymore-Eustace	George Wolfe	George Wolfe	George Wolfe
Carbury	Wm Burke	Wm Burke	Wm Burke
Castledermot	Richard Lalor	Richard Lalor	Richard Wright
Celbridge	Wm.Gerald Dease	Wm.Gerald Dease	Wm.Gerald Dease
Churchtown	Stephen Heyden	Stephen Heyden	Stephen Heyden
Clane	John Healy	John Healy	John Healy
Harristown	James Sunderland	James Sunderland	James Sunderland
Kilcock	John Field	John Field	John Field
Kilcullen	Thomas Keatley	Thomas Keatley	Thomas Keatley
Kildare	Charles Bergin	Charles Bergin	Charles Bergin
Kilmeague	John Quinn	John Quinn	John Quinn
Kilteel	Laurence Malone	Laurence Malone	J.B. Malone
Maynooth	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald
Monasterevan	John Dempsey	John Dempsey	John Dempsey
Morristown-biller	Joseph Connolly	Joseph Connolly	Joseph Connolly
Naas	Michael Fitzsimons	Michael Fitzsimons	Michael Fitzsimons
Newbridge	P.J. Doyle	P.J. Doyle	P.J. Doyle
Rathangan	James Coffey	James Coffey	James Coffey
Timahoe	Patrick Phelan	Patrick Phelan	Patrick Phelan

Ex-Officio members

Athy No. 1 RDC	John Conlon	John Conlon	John Conlon
Baltinglass No. 3. RDC	John Kelly	John Kelly	John Kelly
Celbridge No. 1 RDC	R. McKenna	R. McKenna	R. McKenna
Edenderry No. 2 RDC	J. O'Loughlin	J. O'Loughlin	J. O'Loughlin
Naas No. 1 RDC	Patrick Monaghan	Patrick Monaghan	Patrick Monaghan

Co-opted	Co-opted	Co-opted
S.J.Brown	S.J.Brown	Joseph O'Connor
Edward Hayden	Edward Hayden	Edward Hayden

Electoral Division	1914 -15*	1915 - 16	1916 -17
Athy	M.J.Minch	M.J.Minch	M.J.Minch
Ballitore	Owen Cogan	Owen Cogan	Owen Cogan
Ballymore-Eustace	George Wolfe	George Wolfe	George Wolfe
Carbury	Wm Burke	Wm Burke	Wm Burke
Castledermot	Richard Wright	Richard Wright	Richard Wright
Celbridge	James O'Connor	James O'Connor	James O'Connor
Churchtown	Thomas Hickey	Thomas Hickey	Thomas Hickey
Clane	John Healy	John Healy	John Healy
Harristown	James Sunderland	James Sunderland	James Sunderland
Kilcock	John Field	John Field	James Lube
Kilcullen	Thomas Keatley	Thomas Keatley	Thomas Keatley
Kildare	Charles Bergin	Charles Bergin	Charles Bergin
Kilmeague	John Quinn	John Quinn	John Quinn
Kilteel	J.B. Malone	J.B. Malone	J.B. Malone
Maynooth	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald
Monasterevan	John Dempsey	John Dempsey	John Dempsey
Morristown-biller	Joseph Connolly	Joseph Connolly	Joseph Connolly
Naas	Michael Fitzsimons	Michael Fitzsimons	Michael Fitzsimons
Newbridge	P.J. Doyle	P.J. Doyle	P.J. Doyle
Rathangan	James Coffey	James Coffey	James Coffey
Timahoe	Patrick Phelan	Patrick Phelan	Patrick Phelan

Ex-Officio members

Athy No. 1 RDC	John Conlon	John Conlon	John Conlon
Baltinglass No. 3. RDC	John Kelly	John Kelly	John Kelly
Celbridge No. 1 RDC	Wm. Ronaldson	Wm. Ronaldson	Wm. T. Kirkpatrick
Edenderry No. 2 RDC	J' O'Loughlin	J'O'Loughlin	John Hall
Naas No. 1 RDC	John Shiel O'Grady	John Shiel O'Grady	Patrick Coffey

Co-opted

Joseph O'Connor
Edward Hayden

Co-opted

Joseph O'Connor
Edward Hayden

Joseph O'Connor
Edward Hayden

Electoral Division

1917 - 18

1918 - 19

1919 -1920

Athy	M.J.Minch	M.J.Minch	M.J.Minch
Ballitore	Owen Cogan	Owen Cogan	Owen Cogan
Ballymore-Eustace	George Wolfe	George Wolfe	George Wolfe
Carbury	Wm Burke	Wm Burke	Wm Burke
Castledermot	Richard Wright	Richard Wright	Richard Wright
Celbridge	James O'Connor	James O'Connor	James O'Connor
Churchtown	Thomas Hickey	Thomas Hickey	Thomas Hickey
Clane	John Healy	John Healy	John Healy
Harristown	James Sunderland	James Sunderland	James Sunderland
Kilcock	James Lube	James Lube	James Lube
Kilcullen	Henry Fay	Henry Fay	Henry Fay
Kildare	Charles Bergin	Charles Bergin	Charles Bergin
Kilmeague	John Quinn	John Quinn	John Quinn
Kilteel	J.B. Malone	J.B. Malone	J.B. Malone
Maynooth	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald	Lord Fred. Fitzgerald
Monasterevan	John Dempsey	John Dempsey	John Dempsey
Morristown-biller	Joseph Connolly	Joseph Connolly	Joseph Connolly
Naas	Michael Fitzsimons	Michael Fitzsimons	Michael Fitzsimons
Newbridge	P.J. Doyle	P.J. Doyle	P.J. Doyle
Rathangan	James Coffey	James Coffey	James Coffey
Timahoe	Patrick Phelan	Patrick Phelan	Patrick Phelan

Ex-Officio members

Athy No. 1 RDC	John Conlon	John Conlon	John Conlon
Baltinglass No. 3. RDC	John Kelly	John Kelly	John Kelly
Celbridge No. 1 RDC	Wm. T. Kirkpatrick	Wm. T. Kirkpatrick	Wm. T. Kirkpatrick
Edenderry No. 2 RDC	J.O'Loughlin	J.O'Loughlin	J.O'Loughlin
Naas No. 1 RDC	Patrick Coffey	Patrick Coffey	Patrick Coffey

Co-opted

Joseph O'Connor
William Murray

Co-opted

Joseph O'Connor
William Murray

Co-opted

Joseph O'Connor
William Murray

1920 - 1921*

Athy

Patrick Dooley
Wm Murray

1921 - 22

Athy

Patrick Dooley
George Harbourne

1922 - 23

Athy

Patrick Dooley
George Harbourne

Wm Mahon
Christopher Supple

Clane

John Cusack
Richard McCann
Patrick Phelan

Kildare

Eamonn O' Modhrain
James Cregan
Francis Doran
Nicholas Hanaghan
Arthur Murphy

Naas

Donall Ó Buachalla
Mark Carroll
Michael Fitzsimons
Thomas Harris
Joseph O'Connor

Newbridge

Hugh Colohan T.D.
Thomas Doran
John Fitzgerald
Michael Smyth

Ex - officios

Athy No. 1 - Laurence Heffernan
Celbridge No. 1 - Michael Fay
Edenderry no. 2 - Wm. Burke
Naas No. 1 - John Traynor

Co - opted

Henry Fay
Nicholas Travers

Wm Mahon
Christopher Supple

Clane

John Cusack
Richard McCann
Patrick Phelan

Kildare

S.J. Malone
James Cregan
Joseph Doran
Nicholas Hanaghan
Arthur Murphy

Naas

Donall Ó Buachalla
Mark Carroll
Michael Fitzsimons
Wm. Murray
Joseph O'Connor

Newbridge

Hugh Colohan T.D.
Thomas Doran
P O'Kelly
Pat Grogan

Ex - officios

Athy No. 1 - James Behan
Celbridge No. 1. James Farrell
Edenderry no. 2 - Pat O'Loughlin
Naas No. 1 - Pat Grogan

Co - opted

Henry Fay
Nicholas Travers

Wm. Mahon
Christopher Supple

Clane

Joseph Cusack
Richard McCann
Patrick Phelan

Kildare

Eamonn Ó Modhrain
James Cregan
Joseph Doran
Nicholas Hanaghan
Arthur Murphy

Naas

Donal Ó Buachalla
Mark Carroll
Michael Fitzsimons
Thomas Harris
Joseph O' Connor

Newbridge

Hugh Colohan T.D.
Wm. McGrath
John Fitzgerald
Michael Smyth

Ex - officios

Athy No. 1. James Behan
Celbridge No. 1. Major Wm. Dease
Edenderry No. 2. Wm. Bourke
Naas No. 1. Patrick Tuite

Co - opted

Henry Fay
Nicholas Travers

1923-24
Athy

1924-25
Athy

1925-26*
Athy

Patrick Dooley
George Harbourne
Wm. Mahon
Christopher Supple

Clane

Joseph Cusack
Richard McCann
Patrick Phelan

Kildare

Eamonn Ó Modhrain
James Cregan
Joseph Doran
Nicholas Hanaghan
Arthur Murphy

Naas

Donal Ó Buachalla
Mark Carroll
Michael Fitzsimons
Thomas Harris
Joseph O' Connor

Newbridge

Hugh Colohan T.D.
Wm. McGrath
John Fitzgerald
Michael Smyth

Ex - officios

Athy No. 1. James Behan
Celbridge No. 1. Major Wm.
Dease
Edenderry No. 2. Wm.
Bourke
Naas No. 1. Patrick Tuite

Co - opted

Henry Fay
Nicholas Travers

Patrick Dooley
George Harbourne
Wm. Mahon
Christopher Supple

Clane

Joseph Cusack
Richard McCann
Patrick Phelan

Kildare

Eamonn Ó Modhrain
James Cregan
Joseph Doran
Nicholas Hanaghan
Arthur Murphy

Naas

Donal Ó Buachalla
Mark Carroll
Michael Fitzsimons
Thomas Harris
Joseph O' Connor

Newbridge

Hugh Colohan T.D.
Wm. McGrath
John Fitzgerald
Michael Smyth

Ex - officios

Athy No.1. JamesBehan
Celbridge No. 1. Major Wm. Dease
Edenderry No.2. Pat O'Loughlin
Naas No. 1. Patrick Grogan

Co - opted

Henry Fay
Nicholas Travers

Wm. Fennell
Thomas Corcoran
George Henderson
James Foley
John N. Greene

Clane

David Weld
Richard McCann
Patrick Phelan
Andrew McNally
Wm. E. Fawcett

Kildare

James Cregan
Thomas Murphy
Joseph Behan
Michael Lennox
James Bergin
Edward O'Reilly
P.J. Dunne
Nicholas Hanaghan

Naas

Mark Carroll
Michael Fitzsimons
Bertram Barton
Edward Coonan
William Saults
Nicholas Travers

Newbridge

Hugh Colohan T.D.
Michael Smyth
John Conlon T.D.
Robert Gannon
Peter Keenan

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