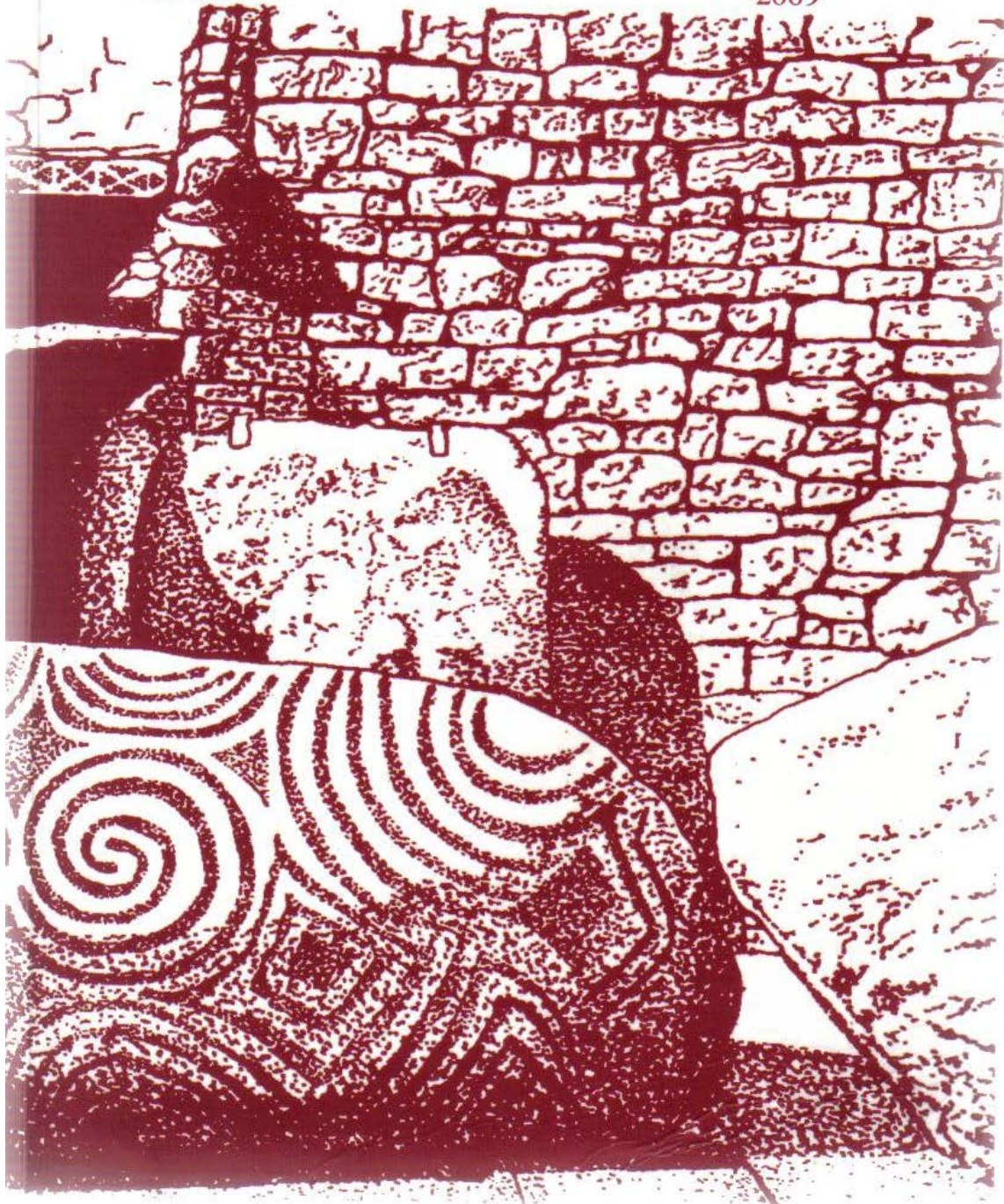


RIOCHT NA MIDHE

Records of Meath Archaeological and Historical Society
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Ríocht na Midhe

Vol. XX 2009

Cumann Seandálaíochta agus Staire na Mí
Meath Archaeological and Historical Society

“A hui Chuind, a Chormaic,” ol Carpre

“Cid is dech do rig?”

“Ni hansa,” ol Cormac. “Dech do. . .

Deithide Senchasa

Fritfoalad fir.”

“O grandson of Conn, o Cormac,” said Carbery,

“What is best for a king?”

“Not hard to tell,” said Cormac. “Best for him. . .

Taking care of ancient lore

Giving truth for truth.”

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Hon. Editor: SÉAMUS MAC GABHANN

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Belgian refugees in Ireland during World War One

Part One

PETER F. WHEARITY

Introduction

When about 3,000 Belgian refugees came to Ireland in autumn 1914, some were catered for in the region of N.E. Leinster. They were accommodated in workhouses in Dunshaughlin, Balrothery, Ardee, and in private homes at numerous locations in County Meath, including Drogheda, Laytown, and other centres.

The refugee crisis began with the outbreak of World War One between Great Britain and Germany on 4 August 1914. When the German army broke through Belgian defences at Liege, it cut a swathe through rural and urban areas alike, thereby displacing Belgian civilians in their hundreds of thousands. Most of these sought safety in neighbouring countries not then affected by the German military juggernaut. The situation worsened and by 20 August, all of Belgium, except part of Flanders, was under German control. The King of Belgium and his government had fled from Brussels and over 1,000,000 Belgian civilians had been made homeless out of a population of seven and a half million.¹ Of those displaced, 500,000 fled to Holland, 250,000 to Britain, and much of the remainder to France.²

As a former protector of Belgian neutrality, Britain felt an onus of responsibility, and in September 1914, it bestowed the 'hospitality of the nation' on that country's refugees. However, not all British politicians were favourable towards the idea. Winston Churchill was one such, and he declared that 'this was no time for charity', suggesting that it would be preferable to leave refugees on the continent where they would consume food which otherwise might end up in German mouths.³

When refugees landed at the English ports of Deal, Folkestone, and Dover, they were received by the War Refugee Committee (WRC), a voluntary body established by Dame Flora Lugard, Mrs Alfred Lyttelton, Lord Hugh Cecil, and Viscount Gladstone, which

catered for their needs.⁴ Flora Lugard had family connections with Clonmel, County Tipperary, and also with Kimmage, Dublin. Her grandfather, Sir Frederick Shaw, had his home in Kimmage. She spent many summers there in her youth and Shaw had a great influence on her later life.⁵ Shaw represented Dublin in parliament for the period 1830 to 1832, and then Dublin University until 1848. He was also a recorder for a time.⁶ Lugard's connections with Ulster unionists through her grandfather were instrumental in giving an Irish dimension to the procedures utilised by the WRC in evacuating Belgian refugees to Britain. James Craig made plans available to Lugard, which had first been drawn up by the Ulster unionist party for the evacuation of Ulster women and children in the event of civil war breaking out in Ireland over home rule. Of these plans, she later said, they had 'put me in touch with people who had the necessary information', indicating that they were beneficial to her and the WRC.⁷ However, not everyone agreed on the usefulness of the plans. Dame Edith Lyttelton, in particular, felt that 'beyond the registration forms, there was not much else to count upon'.⁸

When the Belgian refugee influx overwhelmed the WRC in England, the Local Government Board (LGB) utilised former skating rinks, and facilities at Alexander Palace and Earls Court, London, as a holding and distribution centre for them.⁹ It was from there that most refugees were dispersed throughout the United Kingdom, including Dublin. The Dublin based Belgian Refugees Committee (BRC) had the responsibility of providing for the needs of refugees before despatching them to places of hospitality and accommodation throughout Ireland. Importantly, it will be seen that through contacts between individuals on both sides of the Irish Sea, principally in London, Dublin, and in Oldcastle, provision for the comfort of Belgian refugees in London was being made for a time before any of them arrived on Irish shores.

In this article I hope to give a view of the situation of Belgian refugees after their arrival in Co. Meath and the neighbouring area. However, for a wider and more comprehensive perspective upon Belgian refugees in Ireland, one must look to the doctoral thesis of Clare O'Neill, 'The Irish home front 1914-18, with particular reference to the treatment of Belgian refugees, prisoners of war, enemy aliens, and war casualties'.¹⁰ On events in England, vital work has been done by Peter Cahalan in *Belgian refugee relief in England*

*during the Great War.*¹¹ Both of these works have proved beneficial to this study, but that of O'Neill is particularly important as she has pioneered the study of Belgian refugees in Ireland. My current article, though relatively confined in time and space, aims to draw upon sources which can shed new and useful insight into the situation of Belgian refugees in this part of Ireland. Meanwhile, O'Neill's work shows that about 3,000 Belgian refugees came here in the period 1914-1919, peaking towards 2,300 near the end of 1914, while about 1,000 was the norm at other times.¹² The illustrations in plates 1 and 2 show refugees leaving their homeland, some heading west towards Ostend, while others went north to Holland. All presented a procession of despairing humanity, most of them carrying pathetic bundles.¹³ Though the events in Belgium were widely reported in the press, nevertheless, for those eager to learn more, lantern slides of the dramatic events could be purchased from T. Mason, Optician, 5 Dame Street, Dublin.¹⁴

Plate 1. A family forced to desert their home at Ostend.¹⁵



Plate 2. Not in twos or threes, but in crowds the refugees fled Antwerp.¹⁶



The arrival and reception of Belgian refugees

What defines a refugee, Belgian or otherwise? The following extract from an address given by Nobel Peace Prize winner, Rev P re Pire, O.P, to the Irish United Nations Association at University College Dublin in March 1960, is informative. He said:

They are human beings, which is the essence of their plight, and one must see them as human beings who are uprooted, and not see these aspects in isolation; otherwise, you will be crushed by their misery and may miss the possibility of the resurrection, which exists in man. The problem of refugees goes back a long way to the 1914-18 war. Refugees lose everything and as yet have found nothing; their world and their background have gone, and if that happened to us we would not realise what we had until it was gone. In the way that a child does not know a parent, until he or she has gone. It is the same for fatherland, climate, customs, religion, comrades, and all that make up man's life.¹⁷

The principal bodies providing aid to Belgian refugees in Ireland were the Belgian Refugees Committee (BRC), and the Local Government Board (LGB). Mrs Helene Fowle, 26 Elgin Road, Dublin, headed the

former, while the vice-president of the LGB was Sir Henry Robinson. These agencies received the refugees coming through Dublin port and dispersed them to places of hospitality and accommodation both in the city and elsewhere in the country. Members of the BRC were listed as Sir Henry Robinson (LGB); Countess Fingall; Captain G. St Lawrence; Lady Moloney; Mrs Rushton; Miss Boland; Miss Fitzgerald-Kennedy; Sir Horace C. Plunkett; Rev T. V. Nolan; E. Bourke; John Murphy (Belgian consul); M. J. Murphy; and E. White (LGB).¹⁸

An event of Irish interest occurred on 13 September 1914 in London, when Cardinal Mercier, Archbishop of Malines and Primate of Belgium, on his way from Rome to Antwerp, attended a public meeting in his honour at Archbishop's House, Westminster, hosted by the Irish parliamentarians John Redmond and T.P. O'Connor. Up to 50,000 people, many of whom were Irish, attended, and the event was seen as being of both local and international importance.¹⁹ The fact that the archbishop was present at such a fraught time underlines the warm relationship between Ireland and Belgium at that time and reflects the historical links with the distant past. Meanwhile in Oldcastle, County Meath, at that time, a committee of women and girls were working under the auspices of Fr Barry, PP, and Mrs Naper, collecting and mending clothes destined for the Belgian Relief Fund, in London.²⁰ And at nearby Kells, Lady Rose Headfort and a group of thirty-six women were engaged in making clothes for the Red Cross Association, the Leinster Regiment, St John's Ambulance Service, and enough for 110 female refugees.²¹ The Marchioness of Headfort's working party had, in November, sent 711 pairs of socks and 278 body belts to the frontline troops. Her efforts in that regard were remarked upon along with those of other women in a letter dated 18 November 1914, to Lady Sylvia P. Everard, Randlestown, Navan. Among those mentioned were Mrs Macartney-Filgate; Lady Gormonston; Marchioness Conyngham; Lady Everard's working party; Miss Taylour; and Miss Woods.²² Another working party at Trim under Miss Montgomery was making mufflers, bandages, socks, shirts, and pillow cases to be sent to the front by way of the St John's Ambulance Fund.²³ An indication of the need for these gifts is better appreciated when one considers how little a soldier in the trenches was allocated to keep himself warm: a blanket, an over-coat, and a water proof sheet.²⁴ Regarding the refugees in Ireland, the need for winter clothing was ongoing and Mrs Fowle requested that such items be sent for sorting and distribution at 198 Great Brunswick Street, Dublin.²⁵

Fr Barry of Oldcastle was in close contact with Mrs Fowle in London, and she, after receiving a letter and further gifts from him, replied from the Rubens Hotel, where she was aiding distressed relatives and friends. By her direction, ordinary clothes were to go to Mr Warean, 8 Christchurch Street, while quality garments should go to Madame Reyntiers, 63 Cadogan Square, London, 'who takes care of them and knows how to distribute them to what used to be well-to-do people'. Her letter ended with these poignant words about Belgium: 'all this is so sudden! All their homes burnt! Their people killed! Their country ruined in a matter of a month'.²⁶ It may well be that her distressed relatives were among the newly arrived refugees. She was making decisions based on social class, and one wonders what other concessions apart from superior clothing, were made to those of the higher social order. Her actions in that regard were nothing out of the ordinary, as exemplified by the Lady Lugard Hospitality Committee for better class Belgian refugees in Britain, the sole purpose of which was to ensure that former elite Belgians received better treatment than those of the lower social orders. The aim of this committee was 'to provide for everyone according to their station, quite simply, but in a spirit of hospitality which is not allowed to degenerate into charity'. In practice this meant that elite Belgian refugees were accommodated in hotels and were accorded private hospitality at the expense of the committee.²⁷ In any event, such refugees were not destined for the mass holding centres of London as detailed earlier. This was to be the lot of ordinary refugees.

The first indication that refugees would come to Ireland arose in early October 1914, when the North Dublin Union discussed an LGB request to take fifty refugee children in a possible emergency. When a guardian informed the board that the nuns at Cabra, County Dublin, were willing to take them if necessary, the chairman, Alderman Keogh, grasped the opportunity to relieve the workhouse of fifty Irish children instead. He sent the Irish children during the following week 'to breathe the pure air of Cabra', thereby, at a stroke, transferring their responsibility to the nuns.²⁸ No record has been found of any refugee children arriving at the North Dublin workhouse subsequently. It seems that Keogh's action was a cunning stroke albeit at the nuns' expense.

When Mrs Fowle went to London to offer facilities for some refugees, she was surprised to be offered 200 per week, a number that far outstripped the resources of private hospitality.²⁹ The LGB

reacted by despatching communications on 15 October 1914 to selected poor law unions, urgently seeking offers of accommodation. The following day (Friday), Sir Henry Robinson (LGB vice-president) and Augustine Birrell (Irish chief secretary) visited workhouses at Ardee and Balrothery, and met the chairmen and staff. Crucially, however, the guardians were not included in the talks, an omission that greatly annoyed them. Further visits by LGB inspectors on Saturday resulted in instructions that isolation wards were to be made ready to receive refugees. Importantly, the proposed refugee quarters were to be entirely separate from those used by ordinary inmates.³⁰

Refugees arrived at the North Wall Dublin on Sunday 18 October 1914, from Holyhead, aboard the SS Rathmore. However, the ship's master, Percival Sorge, wrote to *The Irish Times* complaining of distressful scenes on the quayside where language difficulties made it almost impossible for refugees to get directions to their place of hospitality.³¹ Perhaps in response to the letter, which was published on Monday 19 October 1914, a meeting took place at the Mansion House Dublin, on that same day. The meeting was attended by Dublin's Lord Mayor, Lorcan J. Sherlock,³² along with members of the recently formed BRC, and presided over by Mrs Fowle. Two clear objectives were to be addressed: the urgent need for interpreters, and the inadequate offers of private hospitality. The first objective was quickly disposed of when women in the attendance proffered their services as interpreters. The second objective proved problematic; nevertheless, action was needed urgently as batches of refugees were to arrive on the following morning, and would continue to come during the following weeks until an anticipated number exceeding 600 had arrived. The meeting discussed the issue and although offers to take one or two refugees were plentiful, what was needed was a solution on a much bigger scale.³³ A magnificent offer from Bray Relief Committee, to give hospitality to the first 100 refugees, was heartily welcomed. However, the problem of what to do with the rest remained. In the end, a decision was arrived at whereby those without offers of hospitality would receive temporary accommodation at Gorey workhouse, County Wexford.³⁴

The question of when the earliest refugees arrived in Ireland is the subject of conflicting accounts. A parliamentary paper relates that the first refugees landed at Dublin port on Saturday 17 October 1914.³⁵ However, a short piece in *The Drogheda Independent*, a weekly newspaper, dated 17 October, is informative. Under the heading 'local

happenings' it relates not only that a refugee colony was to be established at Laytown, but more importantly, that the 'defenders of Antwerp have arrived in Drogheda'. It was followed by the words 'this has not yet been submitted to the censor'.³⁶ In an effort to corroborate the story, I searched the poor law guardian minute books for Drogheda but nothing on the matter of refugees was found.³⁷ The significance of the sentence relating to the censor is obscure; perhaps it meant that there was insufficient time to inform him of the decision before going to print. In any event the report, in order to appear in a weekly edition, which usually goes on sale from midweek, would have gone to press before then. This means in essence that the refugees must have been in Drogheda from early in the week ending Saturday 17 October 1914. How they got there so early and with only a single record of their coming is puzzling. As a possible answer, I offer the suggestion that they paid their own passage and therefore did not come to the BRC's attention. They may also have arrived through the port of Drogheda. However, other pieces of information from *The Irish Times* for mid October are relevant here. One report dated 10 October tells of the first refugee arrivals in England and mentions that some were also in Ireland.³⁸ A second report dated 16 October relates to Mrs Fowle and to information she wished to disseminate to the general public about what to do with funds collected on behalf of Belgian refugees before any came to this country. A sum of £2,000 had already been remitted to the Belgian Minister in London, Count de Lalaing. She received his sanction to utilise further funds collected in Ireland for the benefit of Belgian refugees coming to this country. She suggested that contributors, who disagreed with this action, be free to send their remittances direct to the aforesaid minister. Importantly too, she stated that 'owing to the recent developments in Belgium, and the fall of Antwerp, a certain number of Belgian refugees are [would be], coming to this country, and some have already arrived'.³⁹ Another report on 17 October, relates that the London and Northwest Railway Company had agreed to provide free travel for Belgian refugees and their escorts between London and Dublin, and London and Greenore.⁴⁰ One wonders if that service operated prior to the published date and whether the Drogheda refugees could have come via Greenore. The above sources seem to confirm the early arrival of some refugees in Ireland and may perhaps have related to those who were already in Drogheda, but this is conjecture on my part. In any event, the fact that the early arrivals at Drogheda did not seek the

sanctuary of the workhouse lends credence to the notion that these Belgians had some financial means at their disposal. Meanwhile, in Antwerp, the Germans had taken the city on 14 October 1914, having begun the bombardment of its suburbs on the first day of that month. Of the original population, only 15,000 older people and children remained. These were overseen by a similar number of German soldiers.⁴¹ Only a few days previously, the Belgian Government had fled to Le Havre with 350 officials and police (gendarmes).⁴²

On Tuesday 20 October 1914, thirty five refugees, mainly women and children, arrived at Laytown on the 11.45 a.m train, accompanied by an interpreter and a Belgian Embassy official. All got a warm reception at the rail station, which was bedecked with flags and bunting, some with mottoes in Flemish. The cheering crowds included many from Laytown, Bettystown, and the surrounding area. Amongst the welcoming dignitaries were Rev Fr Norris, CC, St Mary's parish, Drogheda; Rev Fr Shaw, CC, Stamullen; Mrs Creaser, and Mrs Cullinan from Kells. The refugees, the majority of whom were women and children, were subdued and wearied by their journey from London. Nevertheless, they responded cheerfully and politely to the many overtures made to them. A few could speak French and these found someone to converse with among the welcoming party. The others spoke Flemish and a few had a little English. The majority were from Antwerp, with others from Alost, Brussels, and Tournai. They were accommodated in cottages owned by Mrs Creaser, while Mrs Cullinan, Mrs Jameson, Colonel Pepper, and A.W. Archer also gave support. Many local people visited the Belgians on the evening of their arrival in order to sympathise with them. Of those Belgians who ventured outside, their dark swarthy complexions were notable and were said to be a 'certain sign of their nationality'. A reporter from *The Drogheda Independent* interviewed the refugees and their accounts make interesting reading. An example is that of the Le Cheminant family who previously had a saloon bar on Antwerp's South Quay. Mr Le Cheminant, in an effort to prepare the ground for his family's evacuation had managed to get aboard the last ship to leave Antwerp and in this endeavour, he said, strategy was the key to getting a place on board, and not 'gold'. He told of the subsequent travails of his wife, her elderly father (granda Van Duyee), and a servant girl, all of whom had to flee their home in Antwerp before the German army took possession of the city. They made their way on foot to Flushing, in Holland. However, his wife bemoaned the fact that they had to sleep

on the streets in Holland and that her requests for coffee and bread from Dutch people drew a negative response. She was also distressed at having had to pay five francs for a wisp of straw to lie on. However, their luck changed for the better when they were evacuated to London and there reunited with Le Cheminant before being despatched to Laytown.⁴³ All the refugees at Laytown were effusive in their praise of their carers, especially of Mrs Creaser whose whole time was given over to looking after their needs. Meanwhile, Mrs Cullinan sent a motor from Kells, laden with sweeping brushes and kitchen utensils for the use of the refugees.⁴⁴

Another account of a journey from Antwerp to Laytown, by a group of twenty Belgian men and their wives and children (some as young as seven years), is found in *The Irish Times* dated 28 October 1914. The story was related by members of the de Velde family and translated from the Flemish for publication by Fran Saey. Their tale begins at midnight of 7 October 1914, when neighbouring families of Vrede Street, Antwerp, sought the shelter of a cellar to escape German shells bursting overhead. Next morning, a decision was made to leave the city together as a group and make their way to the relative safety of the Dutch border. As they walked through Antwerp, the scene was one of devastation until the open countryside was reached and the German bombardment faded into the background. In Holland, they took a train to Middleburg, from whence they walked to Flushing on the North Sea coast. They were provided with food and shelter there which allowed them, especially the children, to regain their strength. After five days, they left Flushing expecting a four-hour boat journey to Folkestone, but for some unexplained reason, the journey took twice that time. On arrival in England, the War Refugees Committee took them in care before sending them by train to London. After two days at a comfortable lodging house in the city, they set out on their journey to Ireland, via Holyhead. At Amiens Street Station, Dublin, the group were well received and the children each got a gift to help lift their spirits. Afterwards, they left by train at two o'clock on the short journey to Laytown. On arrival, some were carried shoulder high through the village, such was the fervour of the welcome for them. When going through a 'triumphal arch' and seeing the word 'welhom' emblazoned across it, many of the Belgians were moved to tears and felt truly welcome. They were housed in cottages furnished with good beds, fresh food, and well stocked kitchens. They remained in Laytown for two days before finding hospitality

elsewhere in the region.⁴⁵ The story of their experiences before arriving at Laytown was published at their own behest, to express their gratitude to those who assisted them on the journey from Antwerp, including Belgian, Dutch, British, and Irish benefactors.

When the chairmen of the Ardee and Balrothery workhouses responded to the LGB's request for accommodation of refugees, they submitted remarkably similar estimates, saying that about sixty people could be taken in each case. As already stated, individual guardians were not consulted by the chairmen; perhaps it was assumed that they would rubber-stamp the decisions made without their input. This proved not to be the case. When the Balrothery guardians met on 21 October 1914, they struggled to contain their anger towards the chairman and the LGB, especially when it transpired that the workhouse clerk had failed to read out details from a letter, which told of the imminent arrival of refugees about whom they had no prior knowledge. The chairman was accused of going behind their backs and then rubbing salt in the wound by calling a meeting when everything 'was already cut and dried'. With the meeting on the verge of disorder, one guardian raised his voice above the din and reminded them of the debt owed to Belgium, which could be repaid in a small way, if only they put their rancour aside. The good name of Balrothery guardians was at risk he said, unless refugees were accepted into the workhouse 'for the greater good'. When urged by the chairman to show solidarity on the issue by returning a unanimous verdict, the guardians, albeit somewhat reluctantly, acceded to his wish.⁴⁶ The question for the workhouse authorities of how best to accommodate the refugees has inadvertently given an insight into how they regarded both the refugees, who had yet to arrive, but also the Irish poor already in their charge. 'Clear out all able-bodied adults and children and put 200 refugees in their place' urged one guardian. Refugees would be more productive than the present inmates, some of whom it would 'take a German shell to hunt [out]'. Notwithstanding the drastic nature of this proposal, it found sympathy among the board, including the chairman, who lamented that the proposal was impracticable to implement.⁴⁷ In any event, the nature of the discussion makes it clear that while taking a dim view of their own charges, the guardians seemed willing to regard Belgians whom they had yet to meet, in a brighter light. Was this a classic case of 'rose tinted glasses'? It certainly appears to be so. In the weeks and months ahead, these same guardians would reflect on their preconceived notions of Belgian

refugees and rue their misplaced confidence or naivety in regard to strangers, no matter what nationality they were.

Relations between the LGB and the Dunshaughlin guardians were also fraught with difficulty as is shown by a press report of 16 January 1915. The trouble appears to centre on the transfer of workhouse inmates to Navan late in the previous year, as the Dunshaughlin workhouse had to be closed for a time in preparation for the accommodation of refugees in the new year. The closure was used as an excuse by foodstuff suppliers to deem their contracts broken and therefore they sought higher prices for the goods elsewhere. The housemaster told of having difficulty in procuring even a bag of sugar and reported that only the milk supplier was still holding to his contract. However, one contractor made his feelings on the matter plain. J.P. Egan wrote to the board stating that when the inmates were sent to Navan the previous year, he understood that such an action automatically terminated his contract to supply butter to the union. His own contract with a creamery called for 45 pounds weight of butter [20.45 kilos] to arrive daily by train for the use of Dunshaughlin Union. However, the cancellation of the order at short notice by the board had the effect of leaving this butter on his hands, a situation which caused him considerable inconvenience at the time. Afterwards, Egan contacted the board to say that he had re-negotiated with the creamery for 28 pounds of butter [12.72 kilos] which he could supply at a price one penny a pound less than the Dublin rate. However, the board took the view that Egan would have no problem selling the butter elsewhere as there was a shortage of butter then. The guardians' attitude was unsympathetic to Egan and the other former contractors as they believed that all of them had gained by ending their contracts with the board. With regard to the contractors and their prices, another guardian suggested that if the house was 'in full swing with 1,000 people we would break them'.⁴⁸ The guardians may have been unrealistic in their view because from as early as October 1914 the price of butter in Dublin had risen by a penny to 1s-4d, a not insignificant increase then.⁴⁹

The LGB's proposed changes for Dunshaughlin workhouse did not sit well with guardians there. One guardian said that 'when we were elected members of the board of guardians, we never undertook all these duties that are being fitted onto us now'. The chairman added that if the LGB imposed the refugees on the workhouse 'then let them send money from the Belgian Refugee Fund' to pay for them.

The feeling of the board was that their primary duty was to the local ratepayers. 'We are not going to be treated like a lot of old women' said the chairman. When it transpired that £1,000 worth of goods had been ordered for the workhouse and it seemed unclear who was to pay the bill, the chairman angrily protested, 'no matter what, I will not pay it and would go to jail first'. Another member related that the guardians at Tullamore, County Offaly, had refused to allow refugees into their workhouse.⁵⁰ Was the LGB at fault here or was this sense of grievance merely a case of intransigence on the part of the guardians?

Regarding the situation at Tullamore, to say that the guardians there would not accommodate refugees was not quite correct. The main issue there related to the perceived unsuitability of workhouse accommodation at a time when mansions stood vacant all around. It was felt too, that the British government thought it had absolved itself of responsibility towards refugees once it had ensconced them in Irish workhouses. It was pointed out that the old military barracks at Philipstown, or Lord Digby's castle at Geashill, would be more fitting accommodation. In any event, having made their point, the Tullamore guardians relented and refugees were accepted into the workhouse.⁵¹ What does become clear is that poor relations between the LGB and workhouse guardians obtained not just in the Louth-Meath area but also on a more widespread scale.

The situation at Dunshaughlin was again discussed by the guardians in late January 1915, when it was agreed that refugees would enter the workhouse on certain conditions. The primary concession by the LGB was that accounts for refugee maintenance would be kept on a separate register for payment by the LGB, thereby absolving the local ratepayers of the expense.⁵²

The end of October 1914 saw twenty-seven men, eight women, and one child arrive at Balrothery workhouse. An additional seven men had gone to the home of Mrs Jameson at Sutton, County Dublin.⁵³ However, the mother of a refugee family also staying with that lady, Madame Jeanne Bresselers, was returned to the workhouse at Balrothery suffering from tuberculosis. She died there on 22 November 1914.⁵⁴ The following month another refugee, 58 year-old Emile Fykleur died there on 12 December. Madame Bresselers was buried at an unspecified place by Balbriggan undertaker, James McNally, at a cost of £3. 5s.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, Fykleur was interred by a different but unspecified undertaker at Lusk on the following Monday

at a higher cost of £4. His father-in-law, son-in-law, daughter, and granddaughter were still among the refugees at Balrothery workhouse. 'All the aliens paid a last parting tribute of respect to the remains by attending the funeral'.⁵⁶ In an attempt to find out which of the two cemeteries at Lusk were utilised for the burial or burials, Michael Egan's *Memorials of the dead* for those graveyards was examined. But no mention of refugee graves was found there.⁵⁷ However, his work does point to a number of unmarked graves in the newer of the two cemeteries and any of these graves may contain the remains, since any original markings may have faded away over time. An account of a refugee burial at Celbridge union indicates that such burials could be the equal of any ordinary Irish interment at that time.⁵⁸

When the guardians of Ardee workhouse met at the end of October 1914, they too felt aggrieved by their exclusion from the talks about refugees. However, their anger was less vehement than that of the Balrothery guardians. The main issue at Ardee was the proposed use of the isolation ward for refugees and the subsequent displacement of infectious patients to facilities elsewhere. However, an agreement was made between the LGB and the Drogheda and Dundalk unions that any infectious cases arising at Ardee would be cared for in either of these union hospitals should the necessity arise. Only one guardian objected to the plan, suggesting that it would cause hardship to both patients and their relations to have to travel outside the union for medical attention. However, under pressure for having the temerity to oppose the board, he withdrew his objection and the motion was passed.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, in November, the unions at Navan and Kells also offered the use of their hospital facilities to the Ardee board should the need arise.⁶⁰ The upshot was that any infectious cases arising in the Ardee union would now be treated in any one of four hospitals.

Catering arrangements were at issue in mid October 1914, when the guardians at Ardee discussed the subject of food preparation. It was pointed out that the cooking range was obsolete and should be replaced. The chairman, however, thought it was adequate: after all, he said 'Belgians use a lot of soup and coffee and very little butter'.⁶¹ Why he refused to replace a worn-out cooker when the board believed that all expenses connected with the preparations for refugees would be refunded by the LGB is unclear.⁶² On the question of cooking victuals, one guardian observed that the Belgians could not to be expected to cook a half-pound of steak in a boiler, and this provoked mirth

amongst his colleagues. When they regained their composure, the chairman suggested that it would be preferable if the Belgian women did the cooking as they could then follow their own practices.⁶³

A reluctance to spend money on items for the use of the refugees was evident not merely on the part of the Ardee board. In February 1915 a similar situation arose at Balrothery workhouse. The guardians there were in conflict over whether to order a clothes-drying press for the refugees, even though they saw the need and usefulness of it, not only for the refugees but for all others in the workhouse too.⁶⁴

In late October 1914, in Ardee, in preparation for the arrival of female refugees, the workhouse inmates were confined to their dormitories, thereby leaving the day room free for the expected newcomers. Subsequently, twenty-one males, rather than females, arrived on the four o'clock train. Their arrival aroused much enthusiasm among those who came to greet them, and in addition, as a special treat, the Ardee Corps of Volunteers, who bore their rifles in public for the first time, provided them with a guard of honour.⁶⁵ The refugees were led to the workhouse dining room where they enjoyed a meal of meat, soup, and bread. The group were reported to be of a respectable class and ranged in age from nineteen to forty years. Most were Flemish, and included painters, masons, sculptors, clerks, and tramway men. They had reached Ireland by way of Holland and England.⁶⁶ The date of arrival of this group is not given in the report. However, another source relates that a party of twenty or so Belgian refugees boarded a train at Amiens Street Station, Dublin, at two o'clock on Tuesday 27 October 1914, bound for Ardee.⁶⁷ Perhaps these two groups were one and the same. In any event, the fact that a group of males arrived at Ardee instead of the anticipated females demonstrates the somewhat confused nature of refugee movements at the time.

Though no refugee could be taken from any workhouse without permission of the authorities, nevertheless, enquiries were plentiful, particularly for those with some understanding of the English language.⁶⁸ Mrs Jameson, Sutton, and Mrs Plunkett, Portmarnock, appeared to have no difficulty in taking on refugees. Others were refused, and one, a Mrs Wilson, had her request for a servant girl turned down.⁶⁹ Although Mrs Jameson was protestant, and her nine servants similarly so, she was nevertheless, very willing to take on Catholic refugees. Meanwhile, Mrs Plunkett, a Catholic, like her five servants, experienced no difficulties either.⁷⁰ Therefore, it appears

that the refugees' plight allowed them to cross the religious divide in this part of Ireland. On the other hand, at Portadown, County Armagh, where several Catholic refugee families had been encouraged to convert to protestantism, the matter was entirely different. Despite the best efforts of the BRC to settle the problem, in the end, it was decided to cut off relations with the Portadown committee and cease to send refugees there.⁷¹

At Ardee, meanwhile, refugees who had then been at the workhouse for five weeks were taken by motor vehicle to new accommodation at the home of Mrs Pratt, Beauparc, Slane. However, they were unhappy there and petitioned the LGB to return them to Ardee, where they said 'they were treated with every kindness'. In turn, the LGB's view was that arrangements had already been made and these could not now be changed.⁷² On the other hand, when another batch of refugees was sent to the Ardee workhouse in January 1915, they refused to stay, and the BRC had to send them elsewhere.⁷³ It seems that refugee expectations were variable and what suited one group might not suit others, as evidenced by events at Ardee.

The issue of refugee suitability for employment was of public interest. In this respect, a report at the end of October 1914 by nurse Hegarty, at Balrothery workhouse, is informative. She showed that of the thirty-nine refugees in her charge, very few were viable workers. Of five women, only one could work, but she had suffered from appendicitis, while the others were of the poorer class and were unskilled. While most of the thirty-three men were energetic and willing to work, their lack of training in basic hygiene standards held them back. They were mainly fishermen or peasants and not at all suitable for the work available, which was primarily housework.⁷⁴ T.T.S de Jastzebski, in his register of Belgian refugees, for the British Royal Statistical Society, points to the fact that though many Flemish refugees were urban dwellers with skills in law, medicine, education, and metalwork, nevertheless, fishermen were over represented among those who came to Britain, while agricultural workers were under represented.⁷⁵ The situation at Balrothery may have represented in microcosm what de Jastzebski found in his research in regard to the preponderance of fishermen among refugees in Britain.

In relation to agricultural employment, Horace Plunkett was nominated by the BRC to investigate the idea of rejuvenating the flax industry with a view to providing employment for Belgian refugees. He was in communication with Monsieur Van Houte on the matter.

The source does not give any details about the Belgian or what help Plunkett hoped to get from him. However, at a BRC meeting in December 1914, Mrs Fowle decided to await a reply to an enquiry sent to Frank Barbours, Rathvale, Athboy on this subject before doing anything further.⁷⁶ It is not clear what was expected of Barbours, either. Perhaps he was a flax grower or someone with expertise in the matter. Of interest too, was the decision taken in November 1914 by Sir Edward Grey (Foreign Office), to permit Dutch seed into Ireland in an effort to improve flax production here.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, in October 1914, John H. McElderry, proprietor of St Mary's Mill, Drogheda, in a letter to the press outlined what he believed were excellent opportunities in flax production if the skills of Belgian refugees already in the area were coupled with the experience of Leinster farmers, a course which could work to their mutual benefit.⁷⁸ However, as we have seen, the skill sets of refugees in this area were not amenable to the ideas advanced above regarding flax production.

Flax was not the only agricultural enterprise to be envisaged as offering opportunities for Irish farmers and Belgian refugees. Sugar beet farming was also mooted as worthwhile in Ireland. Letters from interested parties appeared in *The Irish Times* in October 1914, and one of these called for the utilisation of the 'ranch lands of County Meath' for sugar beet production. It was suggested that 12,000 to 16,000 acres of Meath land would need to be converted to tillage if the plan were to be viable and to allow for crop rotation. Comparisons were made with the situation in Germany and Britain, which suggested that all that was required here was 'finance, skilled organisation, and careful design'. One writer, who signed himself 'pioneer', suggested that 'huge sums of money will be collected with the best of intentions and the least useful results for the relief of these very unfortunate victims of Kaiserism'. A Belgian colony could be established to deal with the by-products of sugar beet production and this would have the benefit of providing sustainable employment and so enable the Belgians to maintain themselves. Such a project should be situated near a seaport such as Drogheda to take advantage of its coastal and cross-channel services. A Belgian style light rail system could connect the operation to the port.⁷⁹ Clearly, people were giving the arrival of Belgian refugees to Ireland serious thought as to the opportunities it could possibly have opened up. They were well aware that Belgium had a notable reputation for its agricultural enterprise such as the production of flax and sugar beet. However, since refugees with the

necessary skills did not reach this part of Ireland, such ambitious plans as those outlined above were never viable.

The potential of the refugees as workers was illustrated at Ardee workhouse, where a refugee with useful metalworking skills was about to be employed by a blacksmith named McArdle, at Tullakeel, County Louth, until that is, he was recalled for military service and the blacksmith was left disappointed. While discussing this case, the chairman, Sir Vere Foster, tendered his resignation on the grounds that he too was going to the war front, but in his case, to fight for Ireland.⁸⁰ Interestingly, he appeared to believe that his fight was to be for Ireland rather than for Britain. This incident is perhaps a timely reminder that human traffic was two-way at that time. The conflict which drove refugee Belgians to Ireland was simultaneously drawing Irishmen in their thousands to the continental war front. The situation in this part of Ireland became even more confused when German prisoners of war arrived. About sixty such prisoners were held at Oldcastle workhouse, which had been fortified with barbed wire and sentry posts. Meanwhile, the residents of the town were said to have been bemused by the heightened activity at the workhouse, which formerly housed Irish poor.⁸¹

However, while the majority of the aliens, whether Belgian or German, returned to their homeland at the restoration of peace, the same cannot be said of the Irish, whose numbers were much depleted by the losses of that same calamitous war.

To be continued

Acknowledgements

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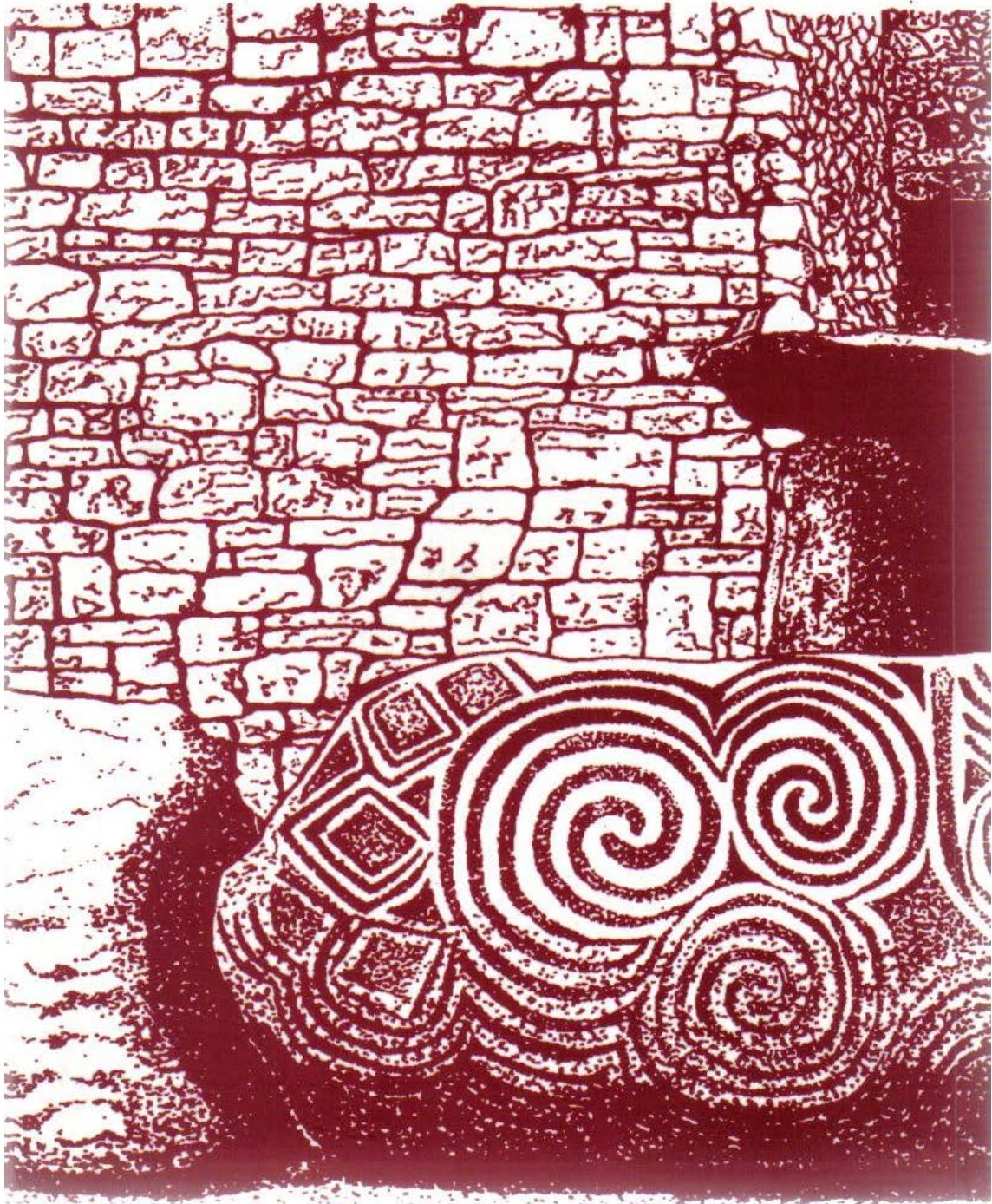
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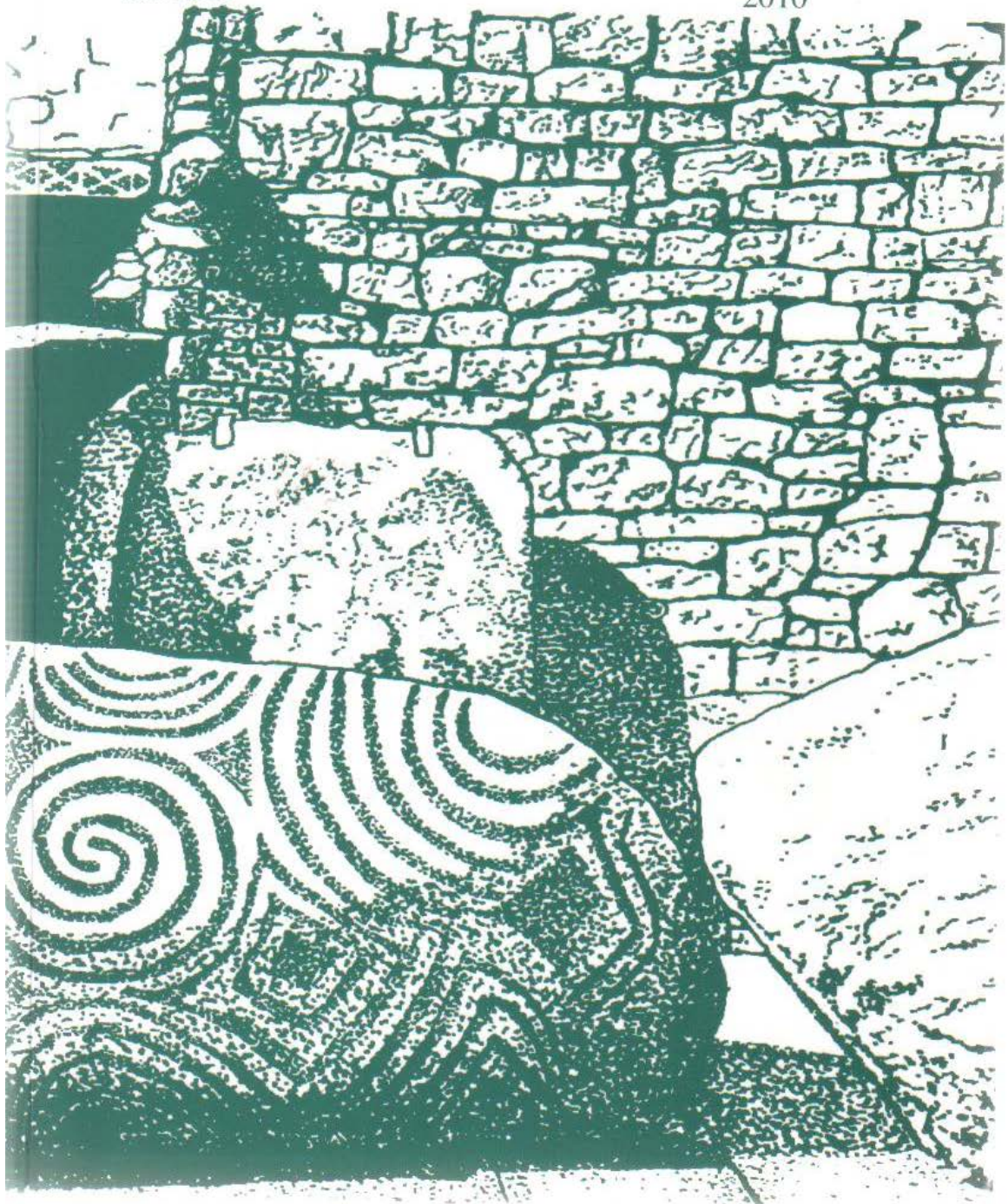
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RÍOCHT NA MIDHE

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Ríocht na Midhe

Vol. XXI 2010

Cumann Seandálaíochta agus Staire na Mí
Meath Archaeological and Historical Society

“A hui Chuind, a Chormaic,” ol Carpre

“Cid is dech do rig?”

“Ni hansa,” ol Cormac. “Dech do. . .

Deithide Senchasa

Fritfoalad fir.”

“O grandson of Conn, o Cormac,” said Carbery,

“What is best for a king?”

“Not hard to tell,” said Cormac. “Best for him. . .

Taking care of ancient lore

Giving truth for truth.”

TECOSCA CORMAIC

Hon. Editor: SÉAMUS MAC GABHANN

Ríocht na Midhe

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Belgian refugees in Ireland during World War One

Part two

PETER F. WHEARITY

From October 1914, there was strenuous fund-raising activity in northeast Leinster and church-gate collections were made on foot of a promise by Irish bishops to Cardinal Mercier to assist his relief efforts in Belgium. Funds collected in County Meath enabled a draft for £620 to be sent to Monsignor M. E. Carton de Wiart. He, in turn, when acknowledging receipt of the money, wrote the following letter dated 30 November 1914, to the most Rev. Dr Gaughran, Lord Bishop of Meath, at his residence, Bishop's house, Mullingar, Westmeath:

My dear Lord — I am deeply grateful to you for [your] letter and the generous offering of your lordship and diocesans. I enclose formal receipt. The amount will be converted into notes and sent to H.E. Cardinal Mercier at the earliest possible opportunity. This becomes most difficult, as letters, many consisting of notes, have actually been destroyed in the hall of the house of the Spanish Minister in Brussels. Apologies have been offered to him, but the fact remains. If your lordship could enlist the sympathy of your colleagues in the episcopacy, I should be most grateful. I would suggest two cases. 1, the bishop of Tournai. He was seized by the Germans and made prisoner. For five days he was in an attic, and only saved from starvation by some friends who smuggled some food to him. I am told he is in utmost poverty. He does not mind it but people come to him for help. 2, the district of Hastiere, which I know well, is in utmost need. Hastiere, Gardels, Flermuton, Autlece, Siervice, etc, have been destroyed, priests murdered, villages burnt, etc. The poverty is great. With my renewed thanks, I remain, my dear lord, your humble servant in Christ, M.E. Carton De Wiart. ¹

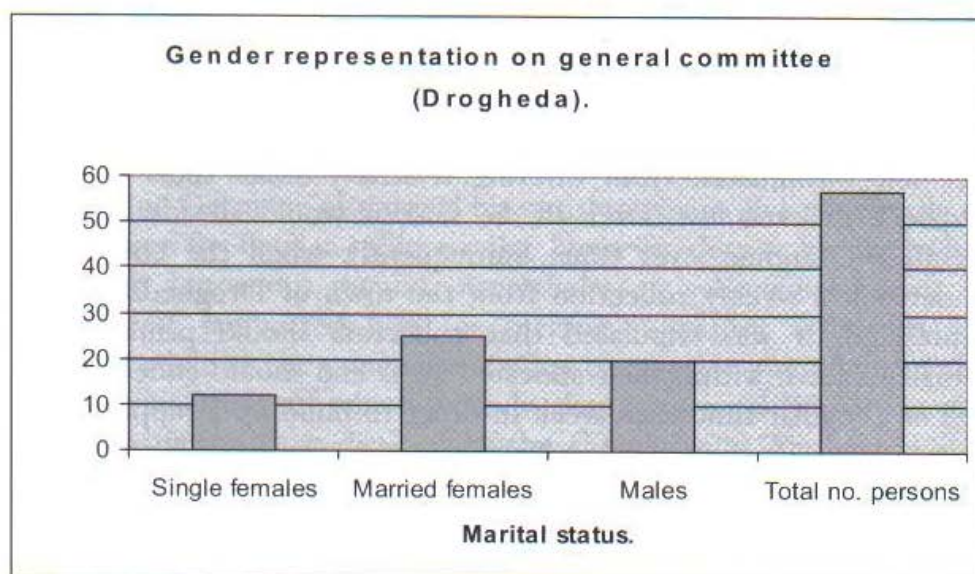
When Cardinal Mercier wrote to Mr R. J. Kelly, KC, he expressed his thanks to the Irish nation for their testimony of sympathy with his country's plight. His eminence was then archbishop of Malines and

primate of Belgium.² He later suffered arrest in January 1915, when the German Government took exception to his written condemnation of their army's actions in Belgium.

Meanwhile, in Ireland, at a fund-raising lecture in Drogheda, Fr O'Neill, SJ, Dublin, spoke of his time spent at Louvain before its destruction. When he concluded, plans were made for a concert at Whitworth Hall, Drogheda, on 30 November to raise money for refugee maintenance at Laytown, then costing £15 a week. Monsignor Seagrave pointed to the need for a general committee to keep the fund-raising effort going. He stressed the importance of Drogheda's role in maintaining its complement of refugees at a level commensurate with its size and importance in Irish life, saying that it should be comparable with efforts by Galway and Sligo on behalf of their refugees. He went on to say that in the former city, the gentry had come together and subscribed nearly £300 for Belgian relief. He spoke of the 'people on this east coast, superior people, who were supposed to look down on the west, which was just another of their illusions'. His words brought forth cheers and laughter in equal measure, perhaps indicating that his audience were unsure how to interpret what he meant. Perhaps he was talking with tongue in cheek, all the better to extract the maximum contributions from the Drogheda gentry to equal or exceed the west coast gentry. An early and positive indication that this would be so was seen by a letter sent to the Drogheda Lord Mayor, from T.E. Preston, Riverstown, Balbriggan, who though unable to attend the above meeting, nevertheless, enclosed a cheque for £10. Returning to matters of the meeting where a working committee was formed of the following fifty-eight people: Miss Arnold; Lady Bellew; Mrs Boylan; Mrs Brunskill; Miss Brodagan; Mrs P. Cairne; Mrs A. Cairne; Mrs Callaghan (lady Mayoress); Mrs Coddington; Mrs Creaser; Mrs Cullinan; Miss Curtin; Mrs J. Davis; Mr Davis; Mrs Elcock; Mrs Farrell; Miss Finnegan; Lord and Lady Gormanston; Lady Henrietta Gradwell; Mrs Hall; Mrs W. Jameson, Delvin Lodge; Mrs May; Mrs Montgomery; Miss Montgomery; Miss McDonnell; Mr and Mrs F. McKeever; Miss McKeever; Mrs Turnstall Moore; Mrs C. Macartney-Filgate; Mrs Osborne; Miss Osborne; Miss Smyth (Greenhills); Miss Smith (Kilineer); Miss Smyth (Newtown); Mrs Smyth; Mrs Preston; Miss Shuttleworth; Miss Whitty; Mrs A. Farrell; Mrs Matthews; Dr Bradley; Mr G. Daly; Luke Elcock; Rev Fr Flynn; Mr G. Gradwell;

Rev A. Hall; Rev Chancellor Ladoux; Col. Pepper; C. Macartney-Filgate; J. McIlderry; Dr Moore; archdeacon Seagrave, PP, VG, St Mary's; R. Smyth; Mr Symes; J. Walker; and councillor J. Callaghan, JP, and Lord Mayor.³

The chart showing gender representation helps to elucidate some aspects pertaining to the above committee.



The chart showing gender breakdown demonstrates that the largest section of the group was of married females, at 44%. Males comprised 35%; while single females made up 21%. When the female categories are combined it is clear that females out-numbered the males by almost two to one. Still on the aspect of female involvement in refugee aid, an article in *The Irish Times*, in October 1914, under the heading 'Irish women and Belgium', provides further evidence of female commitment to the refugee cause. The content of the article comprises a letter to the editor, on 15 October, from B.W.B. Mildred, Jeanne d'A. In it the writer asked the question on behalf of Irish women, 'what can we do to help the Belgians? England is working for them with all her heart, Ireland must do something big, too'. It went on to relate that at that very week at Maynooth, the catholic hierarchy had passed a resolution recommending that each bishop in his own diocese should call attention to the needs of Belgium at that time. The bishops should encourage their flocks, on a given Sunday, to subscribe towards the Belgians relief. This would also have the effect of getting

the country talking about the situation as well as showing cardinal Mercier that Irish Catholics had 'substance as well as sentiment'. The letter writer also felt sure that protestant Bishops and leaders of other denominations would rally behind the cause too.⁴ It has already been seen in this study that refugee relief both here in Ireland as elsewhere, was a multi-denominational effort on behalf of the Belgian's plight.

Meanwhile, returning to the general committee, Drogheda, where member, Dr W. J. Bradley, JP, raised the social aspect of the committee and felt it was a poor representation of the townspeople as a whole. In view of this he wished to see encouragement given to those of lesser means to enable them to contribute, as he believed many wished to do, but felt intimidated from offering relatively small sums such as sixpence or even less, after all, he said, it would all add up to a significant amount over time. Subsequently, when the committee undertook a weekly collection from the town of Drogheda and its hinterland, it was stipulated that collectors should primarily be females known within their allocated areas and should endeavour to call at a regular time each week in order to build up a rapport with contributors. It was decided by the committee to collect weekly amounts rather than accept lump sums, as it was feared that once contributors had given such sums, that thereafter it might prove difficult to illicit further sums from them.⁵ Bradley was also vice president of Drogheda Gaelic League,⁶ so perhaps his involvement in the local community as a doctor, a justice of the peace, and as a member of the aforementioned league, endowed him with a wider perspective on the residents of the town, no matter what social class they came from.

Elsewhere, church gate collections were also being taken up for the Belgian cause; two examples were seen in October and November 1914, when £47 was raised at three masses at Navan, while another £60 was raised at Balbriggan. The contributions were subsequently sent on to the Duchess de Vendome. The collections in Meath were held at all churches in the diocese on Sunday 11 October.⁷ Notwithstanding the generosity and willingness of the people in the study area to provide for the Belgians, nevertheless, such demonstrations of benevolence were in some cases criticised for taking scarce resources away from the indigenous Irish poor. Examples of this attitude appear to have extended outside Ireland, and a press report in the *New York American* relates that it received complaints that funds sent to aid Belgians abroad, should have been utilised to relieve poor American children,

many of whom were living in poor circumstances despite the relative affluence of American society at that time.⁸ In Ireland, Joseph Lawless, a self-confessed Sinn Féiner, and a guardian at Balrothery Union, provides another insight into the reluctance of some people to assist Belgians. He stated at a guardians meeting that he would not support foreigners while there was still poverty in Ireland. 'we should support our own first' he said. Furthermore, he related instances where Irish people had received notices to quit their jobs, and their homes, and more of this would occur in the future he thought.⁹ Another example of this line of thinking is seen by an instance which arose in October 1914, when Fr Michael Woods PP., Trim, at Sunday mass, while speaking in praise of the British defence of Ireland and haranguing Germany, also urged his parishioners to give generously to a collection for Belgian refugee relief. However, despite his somewhat seemingly innocuous request, nevertheless, a subsequent report in *Éire-Ireland*, lambasted him for seeking monetary assistance for refugees while at the same time, failing to mention the plight of the native poor, some of whom were in desperate need literally in the streets within a short distance of the church walls. The article also pointed to a recent concert which had raised £60, and that plans were afoot for a 'ball' in the weeks ahead were all funds raised were also destined for the benefit of such refugees. The organisers were lampooned as the 'new charity mongers' and the 'shoneens of Trim', who ignored the 'cry of Trim's hungry poor, lost in the sounds of revelry organised to aid imported foreigners'. Meanwhile, Trim's unemployed fathers looked hopelessly at their hungry children while government departments were seeking employment for Belgians 'already being supported by the misdirected charity of Irish people'. The hard-hitting report coins the slogan: 'bread for the Belgians, a tomb-stone for the Irish'. It relates that when measles swept through Trim the previous year, none of the ladies and gentlemen now so interested in the welfare of Belgians showed any interest in the predicament of sick Irish children. Striking a somewhat political chord, the report suggests that 'all the sympathy is for the foreigners, who were dumped on the town by the English Government in an effort to aid the recruiting campaign by creating a terror of the Germans'.¹⁰ What can one make of the above? It certainly demonstrates the vehemence felt by a section of the community towards the elites who were absorbed by efforts to relieve refugee distress while at the same time they were seemingly oblivious to the

needs of the native poor within their own area. Notwithstanding the intensity of the feelings expressed in the report, it is remarkable that the strongest language employed against the Belgians went no further than to call them 'foreigners'. Regarding the term 'shoneens', what did this mean? Terence P. Dolan gives the following definitions: 'a person who is more interested in the English language and customs over Irish ones; a 'west Britain'; a 'pretentious person affecting airs and graces'; an 'upstart'; and a 'hanger on'.¹¹ In this part of the country, probably the term west-Brit carries the strongest connotations of alleged lack of allegiance to Ireland in favour of England.

When it came to workhouse guardians, the behaviour of those at the Navan workhouse seems to demonstrate that some sort of bias was working in favour of Belgians while at the same time militating against the Irish poor. The incident relates to the refusal of the guardians to assist a local mother and her seven children whose husband had died from tuberculosis thereby leaving the family without a breadwinner and destitute. It took one of the guardians to highlight the fact that the board appeared willing to help foreigners of whom they knew nothing; while at the same time they refused a desperate case on their own doorstep. His intervention forced a change of heart and thereafter the family received help.¹² Instances were seen in other unions of individual guardians being intimidated by the rest of the board into subsuming their views into line with the others. An example at Balrothery where a lone guardian took an opposing view and then suffered the wrath of the others until he withdrew his proposal. However, returning to the Navan guardians, what does the situation there tell us about their attitudes towards the Irish poor at that time? It is perhaps significant that only one guardian on the board could see the unfairness of the situation and had the backbone to stand up against the others when it would have been easier for him to do or say nothing at all, or cave-in as the guardian did at Balrothery. The above cases appear to show that guardians could be hard-nosed not only towards the Irish poor, but also towards their own brethren on boards of guardians.

On the matter of those who gave hospitality to the refugees, it might prove informative to examine one of them briefly here, and who better to choose than Mrs Creaser, who was singled out by the Drogheda general committee for fulsome praise and lavished on her by Lady Gormanston.¹³ Much of the following information comes from the work of James F. Todd, 'The Creaser family of Townrath'.

The lady in question, formerly Margaret Anne Eagar, was from a landowning family at Drogheda. She married Thomas Creaser of The Mall, Drogheda in 1879. He was an English Methodist whose uncle left him a building and contracting business in the town. In 1905, the couple moved to Townrath House, Townrath, to the north of Drogheda, where they lived thereafter and raised a family. The couple owned property at Laytown, which included Netterville and Victoria Terrace's among other seaside dwellings. These were let out to summer visitors, but accommodated refugees at other times. Margaret was described as a capable businesswoman who owned and drove one of the first motorcars in the Drogheda area. She collected eggs and took donations on behalf of a wounded soldiers and sailors fund in the Great War.¹⁴ Her commitment to the refugee cause appears to have been on-going as Lady Moloney of the Belgian Refugees Committee (BRC) contacted her in September 1915 in regard to accommodating more refugees.¹⁵ Whether she did so is not known here, but in any event some refugees stayed at St Joseph's, Laytown, in February 1915.¹⁶ However, a cursory search failed to bring forth any additional information on that place, suggesting perhaps that it was a private dwelling.

What motivated Mrs Creaser and others like her to expend their time, energy, and money in caring for refugees? Peter Cahalan in his work on Belgian refugees in England suggests that in that country, women of a certain social class helped refugees for 'quite spontaneous and unpolitical reasons'. They had little outlet for expressing their patriotism and perhaps such work allowed them to feel that they were doing something useful towards the war effort. Interestingly, he points to a disproportionate number of females on local committees, who, he says, 'did the real work'. Nevertheless, males were useful as figureheads and were to be found in greater numbers on executive committees. Lloyd George made the comment that the relief effort for Belgian refugees had been 'a great act of humanity'. However, for many of those who undertook the task of caring for them, for whatever reason, the reality often proved to be unexciting, thankless, and in many cases the carers suffered the deprivation of their personal privacy, having taken refugees into their homes. Gladstone described those who took on such responsibilities as 'willing horses', part of a still thriving philanthropic community.¹⁷ It seems reasonable to suggest that such views are also applicable in the context of Ireland and thereby may help explain what motivated people to act towards

Belgians in the way that they did here. It can certainly be seen that more women than men contributed to the relief effort in the northeast Leinster region. Such women appeared to have been moved by something akin to religious zeal, such was their enthusiasm for the task no matter how onerous it proved to be.

When it came to the challenge of finding jobs for the refugees, the daunting extent of government rules and regulations ought to have allayed any fears that they would displace Irish workers.¹⁸ However, there were numerous examples of people who believed that Irish workers would suffer. One of these was James Connolly, and he wrote in *The Irish Worker* in October 1914, of his concern that the 'large number of refugees in Ireland, might displace Irish workers from their jobs'. He believed that some young Irish men were being sacked so as to make them more amenable to join the army and he encouraged anyone with evidence of such to bring it to his attention.¹⁹ Another body, the Dublin Fair Trades Council, who met in mid November, discussed the possible repercussions of refugee employment on fair labour in the city. One member, before speaking further, said that under the present circumstances to say anything against the Belgians is 'tantamount to being martyred'; nevertheless, his belief was that 'charity began at home'. Furthermore, though wishing them no harm, he felt nevertheless, that they should be fighting for their country rather than expecting charity here, while at the same time supplanting Irish tradesmen and servant girls from their jobs. It was suggested by another member that if refugees did get jobs then at least proper wages and conditions should apply to them.²⁰ This aspect was important, as the LGB had received requests for refugee workers on conditions described as '*domestique* without pay'.²¹ The practice of seeking refugees as employees on little or no wages also pertained in Britain. Numerous letters were written to *The Times*, by people who thought that the arrival of refugees was the answer to the 'servant problem' there.²² This situation appeared to be due to would be servants, especially females, finding better-paid work in industry rather than the poor rates paid in domestic service. Of course, the many vacancies opening up to females then, was due to the dearth of males as thousands of these had gone off to fight in the Great War. Notwithstanding the concerns over refugees putting Irish workers out of jobs, there was another aspect to be considered and that was the effect on refugee morale of having no work at all. *The Church of Ireland Gazette* suggests that such a situation allowed them too much time to

brood on the circumstances which brought them to Ireland, and led to some refugees becoming disaffected and then getting into trouble.²³ While work was scarce for refugees, in any case the task of placing them in employment was made more difficult by the unsuitability of their training and skill-sets before arriving in Ireland.

There is evidence to support the above assertion that a portion of refugees became troublesome. An example was seen at the beginning of November 1914, when the refugee colony at Balrothery workhouse was described as 'a peaceful little colony'. However, this soon changed and refugees from the workhouse were reportedly cajoling money and drink out of generous or naive residents of the villages of Lusk and Rush. The last named place attracted some of the Belgians on an almost daily basis and who enjoyed walking along the sandy beaches there. When alcohol-fuelled disturbances became a regular occurrence in the area, the BRC and Mrs Fowle became embroiled in trying to sort the problem out. One refugee in particular, Joseph de Groof, proved such a nuisance that he was sent to Rathdrum workhouse but he refused to stay there. The housemaster at Balrothery was advised to treat him 'not as a Belgian', and instead to send for the police. The rationale behind the threat to treat de Groof as other than a Belgian, seems to indicate a mind-set not unlike that discussed earlier at Navan workhouse and which placed the Belgians on a higher plane than the Irish poor. However, not all poor law guardians placed them on such a level. One such was Joseph Lawless at Balrothery, who said at a guardians meeting, that 'people would get enough of the Belgians yet'. However, the chairman appeared to be sympathetic to the Belgians in his care, saying that if people gave them 'stimulants' [alcohol], they, having gone through extreme hardship, 'could not cope with it'. In the meantime, he said that they [the guardians], would have to put up with them, but agreed that the BRC and the LGB should be informed of the type of undisciplined refugees that had to be dealt with at Balrothery.²⁴ Elsewhere, refugees at Ardee also had access to alcohol, and while discussing how the refugees were grasping the rudiments of the English language, a guardian, Mr McNello, related in a light-hearted way that they had no trouble saying 'the same again' in the public house.²⁵ Further instances of trouble carried over into the New Year and in February 1915, it appears that within the study area that 'twenty Belgians were reported on in one month' for trouble making.²⁶ Père Ottevaere, of whom little is known, apart from his being a Belgian, attended a BRC

meeting on 27 January 1915, and spoke about the unacceptable behaviour of a substantial number of refugees at Balrothery. It was felt by those at the BRC meeting that the work of the BRC was being undermined by such conduct. A decision was taken by Mrs Fowle and her board that in addition to informing the WRC at London of the intolerable situation here, but also those refugees who misbehaved would be returned to their care forthwith.²⁷

However, it should be realised that only a minority of refugees behaved badly, with the majority causing no trouble at all. In fact, some staying in the Drogheda area, after performing at a Sunday concert in aid of their countrymen and which took place at St Mary's parochial school hall on 14 February 1915. Their performances were lauded and encores requested, such was the appreciation of the mainly local audience for the universality of the Belgians musical talents. The show opened with the Belgian national anthem 'La Brabanconne', after which, Madame Cotur, sang 'Ave Maria'. Others, such as Master Lucian Van Gobbleschroy, Master Robert Cotur, and M'selle Julienne Van Gobbleschroy, all performed to the accompaniment of Mons Gobbleschroy on the piano. The highlight of the evening was said to have been when the children sang 'Tipperary', to the great delight of the audience. The orchestra was made up of local musicians such as the Misses McGough, Courtney, M'Quail, and other local talented singers and musicians. Throughout the evenings performance it was noted that a section of the audience not noted for its decorum at such events, where on the occasion remarkably restrained and on their best behaviour. So much so that Rev Father Flynn, PP, in his concluding remarks, felt that in future such audiences would behave themselves as well as those of 'the other side' [meaning perhaps concerts put on by other religious denominations in the town]. Several of the Belgian performers were said to have been catered for at St Joseph's, Laytown.²⁸ Other concerts were organised during that time period in Drogheda to raise funds for the Belgian's cause. In addition, *The Irish Times* in October 1914, provides information of a ninth list of subscriptions to the Belgian Relief Fund. Some of the entries show that the Rev J.H. Rice, B.D., of Kentstown, donated part of the harvest offerings, an amount of £2 to the fund. A Capt. Woods gave an individual subscription of £25, a magnificent sum for an individual donation at that time.²⁹ However, while Wood's address was not given in the report, nevertheless, the then owner of Milverton estate, Milverton, Skerries, fitted the limited description in every respect and may

possibly have been the subscriber of the large sum.³⁰ In addition, the same report detailed a card collection among some members of the Skerries Golf Club, and the result of semi-finalists, mixed foursomes, which enabled the secretary E. H. Bailey to forward £2, 17s, 2d, to help the refugee cause.³¹ Meanwhile, a Dundalk subscriber, a Mr J. Siraux [with such a surname, presumed to have been a Belgian], was busy collecting funds for his countrymen, and raised the goodly sum of £22. However, unlike the other subscribers whose donations were either spent on refugees then in Ireland or went to cardinal Mercier, Siraux sent his money to a British fund-raising charity being run by the weekly publication *Everyman*. The editor of that publication, C. Sarolea, in an editorial in a November 1914 issue, wrote that the *Everyman* appeal was to the world, and that £31,000 had been raised thus far, an amount which no weekly journal had ever surpassed before. He felt that the Belgian tragedy had touched the hearts of many people throughout the world and this was why the appeal was so successful. A list of subscribers demonstrates the broad base of the subscribers, several of whom were living in Ireland.³² The fund continued to attract funds and by July 1915, a quite extraordinary sum amounting to over £50,000 was raised.³³ These examples demonstrate the various ways that people devised to assist the work of those catering for the needs of the Belgian refugees both here and abroad at that time.

When it came to the subject of refugee accommodation, much energy was expended on the desirability of private housing as opposed to the workhouse. There was unease at the notion of tainting refugees with pauperism by placing them in workhouses, principally because those places were historically seen as the accommodation of last resort for destitute Irish people. This aspect was discussed by the workhouse guardians at Delvin, County Meath, at a meeting in November 1914. Though the majority of the guardians expressed the view that the many vacant private houses within the area would be preferable to accommodate the refugees rather than the Delvin workhouse. Nevertheless, despite this, it was decided to utilise the workhouse.³⁴ At another meeting in December, it transpired that the LGB had decided that the workhouse facility would not after all be required and the guardians were thanked for any arrangements made.³⁵ The question remains as to why the guardians, having come to the conclusion that private accommodation was better, then went on to choose the workhouse? In any event it did not matter in the end. An example perhaps of the alleged superiority of private

accommodation can be gauged from that on offer at Beauparc, County Meath. Through the kindness of Capt. Brodigan, Seneschalstown House had been offered rent free in late October 1914, to house about fifteen Belgian refugees. A small committee of willing people was on standby to look after the refugees, provided that sufficient funds were forthcoming from friends and sympathisers for the cause. The house was said to have been suitable for the purpose in every way. Its location was about one mile (1.3 kilometres), from Beauparc railway station, and also convenient to the Roman Catholic church and the national schools. It was calculated that it would cost about eight shillings per refugee to run such a house for a week. The committee were waiting to see what level of financial and other support they would receive before completing arrangements to take the refugees. It was promulgated that any help, however small, would be thankfully received by Mr J. Dallas Pratt, at 19 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin.³⁶ Yet another example occurred at Telltown, County Meath, where an advanced party of six refugees out of a total of 300, who came via the North Wall, Dublin, during the previous week, arrived by motor at the home of Mr and Mrs Arthur McCann, at Telltown, near Navan. The couple had put their home there at the disposal of the refugees. The property was situated along the river Blackwater, and was said to have been at the centre of the most progressive agricultural area in county Meath. Six more refugees could be accommodated at Telltown, while others were to arrive in the following days at Philpotstown and at other houses in the district. The action came about at the behest of several prominent but unnamed Meath ladies. However, the McCann's personally supervised the arrangements for their refugees and their butler and cook were made available for the comfort of the visitors during the interim period.³⁷ It certainly appears that what was envisaged for the refugees in the examples above, would be highly preferable to workhouse accommodation under any circumstances.

However, notwithstanding the merits or otherwise between private and local authority accommodation for refugees, nevertheless, Irish poor also needed housing. Some of the latter felt that they were competing with the former in regard to the provision of workhouse accommodation. It certainly was the case that no Irish poor were considered for private hospitality, the question simply did not arise. An example arose at Swords Petty Sessions Court in October 1914, where a John Wilson appeared before the magistrate on a charge of

non-payment of rent on a house at the Rock, Swords, owned by a Mrs Pentony, who wanted him evicted. Wilson described his position as desperate, and related to the court that if he should lose his home, then he would be destitute, and unlikely to find sanctuary at Balrothery workhouse because it was full of refugees: 'I am as bad as they are now' he said.³⁸ It could be said that he was in a worse position, as it has already been shown that in some instances that the Belgians were treated more favourably than ordinary residents in the workhouse. In the case of England, Peter Cahalan, suggests that though Belgians were treated differently there, that nevertheless, it was better to have been a poor Belgian than a poor Englishman.³⁹ If one substitutes Irishman for Englishman, then a strong case could be made for a similar situation pertaining here. However, in Wilson's case it could perhaps define the inherent difficulty in asking broad and open-ended questions such as whether the Irish-Belgian interface was a positive or negative one for each side. After all, when all is said and done, apart from generalisations, it is perhaps only on the individual level that anything approaching an answer can be attained, which in Wilson's case was firmly in the negative category. However, this must not deflect one from aspiring to look at the bigger picture in the hope of being able to draw firmer conclusions from it.

Provisions for Christmas day at Balrothery workhouse show that only the 'usual fare' was on offer. Neither the refugees nor the ordinary inmates were presumably afforded such luxuries as turkey and plum pudding. Furthermore, the only exception was made for New Year's day when twelve sweet cakes would have to suffice among all the workhouse occupants, which was hardly a feast as most would agree. In contrast, the records show that the guardians stocked up generously on yuletide drink, with one gallon of whiskey, ten dozen bottles of porter, and a similar quantity of sherries, presumably purchased for the enjoyment of the guardians and for the entertainment of those associated with the management of the workhouse.⁴⁰ However, one could not envisage the largess filtering down to the inmates of the workhouse, no matter whether they were Irish or Belgian. Nevertheless, such conjecture could be wrong, and thereby rendering a disservice to the Balrothery guardians. Meanwhile, at Kells workhouse, the inmates were provided with what was described as 'the usual extras', however, no details were given of what these extras entailed over the usual fare.⁴¹ Elsewhere, an example was seen were refugees, fortunate enough to have enjoyed the

hospitality of Madame Van Bever's home at Montpelier Parade, Dublin, were regularly served with stout. Furthermore, the beverages appear to have been paid for along with other bills by the LGB, at a cost of £1.15. 6d.⁴² It seems incongruous however, for the above agencies to be paying for alcohol for refugees, especially when it was its consumption that caused so much trouble amongst them in the workhouses in the recent past. Whatever about the residents of Montpelier Parade enjoying their occasional stout, the circumstances there, may have been more liberal than that which took place at the relatively more austere regime in workhouses. In early April 1915, the Balrothery workhouse bade farewell to the last fourteen of its refugees who were on their way to the workhouse at Dunshaughlin. A figure of 182 Belgian refugees had availed of accommodation at Balrothery since the previous October, when the refugee crisis was at its peak. Some of those who left for Dunshaughlin subsequently sent a letter presumably to *The Drogheda Independent* (as it was in that paper it was found), offering thanks to the officers of Balrothery workhouse for making their time there such a pleasant one. The content of the letter, dated 4 April 1915 was as follows;

Dear Sir, kindly reserve a little space in your most interesting newspaper to give publicity to the deep feelings of gratitude, which we Belgians do care for the Irish people. Thanks beforehand, Joseph Weygeleir, Belgian refugee; Easter Sunday.

As we are the last refugees leaving the Balrothery Union, for the reason that the place was to be cleared for other purposes, and as we were living there for five months, surrounded by the most heartily sympathetic regards, we find it our duty to express, in the name of all the Belgian refugees who left there, our deepest show of gratitude. We considered us, nevertheless, our exile, at home, thanks the comfort, thanks the sympathy, thanks the never-failing kindness. We would be ingrates, without mentioning that we all owe this to the master of the union, Mr Duffy; and to the nurse, Miss L. Hegarty. They never failed when anything could be done for a refugee. They were individual examples of that warm-hearted Ireland. We might not end this without saying that we [owe] the most thankful feeling to Mr James Stack, the clerk of the union, who had his share in the sympathy shown by the Irish people to our suffering Belgium. We cannot better express our thankful feelings than to cry, as an honour to Ireland, as a blessing for Ireland, 'God save Ireland'. Sincerely thankful; Joseph Weygeleir, Oscar Verkouille and family; Pierre Gods, Joseph Neyns.⁴³

The above letter is not only interesting for the insight it provides into how those particular Belgians saw their situation as refugees in a foreign land. That they missed their homeland and longed to return there is understandable in the circumstances. However, another aspect, which comes through strongly in the letter, is their whole-hearted appreciation for, and, a deep-seated need of any sympathy shown by Irish people towards their own individual plight as well as that of Belgium as a nation. A sense of their insecurity also prevails and is manifested in their perceived attachment to figures of authority within Balrothery union. When the above letter of thanks was later discussed at a Balrothery board meeting, the attitude of one of the three guardians present was an unexpected one. The guardian in question, Mr Sweetman, expressed the view that the Belgians, while acknowledging the support of the workhouse officers, had failed to mention the guardians at all. Furthermore he said, it was the guardians who, 'had given them shelter, to those that let them put in their heads [in the door], and paid out so much money in their interests'. The chairman, Miss M. Adrien, suggested that the refugees would not have been aware of the source of the maintenance, to which Sweetman replied, 'they did well'.⁴⁴ It seems that there is no accounting for the way that people perceive the same set of circumstances differently.

In mid January 1915, Trim Joint School Board held a special meeting to discuss a proposal from the LGB to temporarily take over the school for the reception of an anticipated arrival of a large number of Belgian refugees. The proposal envisaged the school pupils being sent to the North Dublin Union at Cabra, County Dublin.⁴⁵ The board was made up of members from various poor law unions in the area. However, after a meeting on 15 January 1915, the LGBs proposal was rejected by a majority of the members of the board. It was the LGBs difficulty in finding sufficient private hospitality and which had forced it to look at publicly owned facilities such as the Trim Joint School. Though the LGB promised that no extra cost to local ratepayers would ensue on foot of their proposal, nevertheless, guardians still opposed the plan. The board of Kells Union wrote to the LGB and stated that vacant houses in the area should be used instead. The matter raised discussions among interested parties and the general consensus was that vacant housing was the preferable option. Empty mills at Drogheda were suggested as being eminently suitable places for refugee accommodation if a little work was carried out to make them habitable. Meanwhile, the Drogheda Union

threatened to withdraw its school children attending at Trim, back to Drogheda, if the LGB persisted with its plan. It was also suggested by one guardian that some people saw the Trim school as a type of jail, and therefore it was not a suitable place to bring refugees. Other guardians pointed to the many children who after learning a skill at the school, then went on to earn an honest living thereafter.⁴⁶ When the Navan guardians and council met in February, the discussion centred around the mansions then vacant in Meath, such as Stackallen house, Somerville house, the Earl of Mayo's house at Hayestown, and others, which might be used for refugee accommodation. It was decided by the board to notify the LGB and the War Office of such idle houses and make them aware of their latent potential for sheltering refugees or indeed injured soldiers who also required housing at that time.⁴⁷ The above raises a host of questions as to why such mansions were vacant at that time and also why the LGB did not want to utilise them for refugee accommodation. In any event it appears that the LGB did not get its way in regard to the Trim school being utilised for accommodating refugees. However, the body then came forward in mid February 1915, with plans to bake bread for the Belgian refugees staying at Dunshaughlin workhouse. The new proposals centred on the use of Canadian wheat to be baked into loaves by the bakery staff at the Trim school. The LGB would supply the flour and it was agreed that the school bakery would produce the bread on a contract period of six months. The loaves of white and brown bread would be fed to the refugees then at Dunshaughlin and Trim workhouses. In regard to whether the refugees would find the new bread appetising or not, Mr F. McCarthy, LGB Inspector, related that the refugees at the South Dublin union had accepted it without any problems. Furthermore, he had brought with him a sample loaf for the board's examination. McCarthy had eaten the bread himself and found it to be fine in both taste and texture, and therefore he could foresee no difficulty with the refugees in the area liking it too. A discussion took place on the methodology of baking with Canadian flour and also the number of loaves to be expected per sack of flour. There was technical talk about 'pan' or 'greased' loaves and it was determined that a figure of ninety loaves of four pounds (nearly two kilo's), weight could be produced per sack. Subsequently, it was agreed that the Trim school would take on the work at a cost of 11s, 3d, per sack to the LGB.⁴⁸ The rationale behind the LGB's wish to use Canadian wheat had to do first and foremost, with the cost of flour,

and as a consequence, with the cost of feeding Belgian refugees. The Canadian Government had begun, soon after the outbreak of the war, and as part of its war effort, shipping its cheaply produced wheat at a discount to Britain. It was a tiny portion of this wheat which made its way to Ireland, which the LGB wanted to make good use of.

Before bringing this story to a close, another aspect to the case of bread and Belgians arose at the Balrothery union in April 1915. William Ennis Bakery, Skerries, having tried unsuccessfully for months to extract an increase in its bread contract with the union, endeavoured to tackle the problem from a different perspective. In a letter to the board of guardians, it sought an increase on that portion of its bread contract which pertained to the Belgian refugees. In its argument, the bakery sought to make a case that goods consumed by the Belgians was not a part of the contract and therefore the bakery was entitled to the usual increases on account of the increased cost of raw materials due to the shortages caused by the war. As a consequence of receiving the letter, the union's clerk carried out a review of bread prices from other suppliers in the area. It emerged that bread produced by Dublin bakery Johnston Mooney and O'Brien, charged $6\frac{1}{2}d$, per four pound loaf. Ennis's, on the other hand, according to the clerk, charged a contract price of $5d$, a not inconsiderable saving in the price of a single loaf. When the guardians discussed the matter later, some took the view that Ennis's should be accommodated; while others thought that there might be legal impediments in trying to differentiate between the bread consumed by refugees and that eaten by other occupants of the workhouse. It was decided to refer the matter to the Belgian Refugees Committee for their appraisal on what action to take.⁴⁹ This aspect on bread is only the tip of an iceberg, which stretched to include a myriad of other consumables required in the daily maintenance of Belgian refugees in this part of Ireland.

Conclusion

Although the Belgian refugees in Ireland undoubtedly received a warm reception overall, nevertheless, some of the earliest to come were beset with language difficulties in making themselves understood on landing at Dublin's North Wall. More than a month before the first refugees reached Irish shores, some were already benefiting from the activities of Mrs Fowle and Fr Barry's committee through their personal linkages with Madame Reyntiers at London.

Other important Irish links with that city were between northern unionist James Craig and Lady Lugard over her plans for the evacuation of Belgians. Contacts were also made between John Redmond, T.P. O'Connor and Cardinal Mercier showing the solidarity between Ireland and Belgium. The Catholic bishops encouraged the collection of funds, which were then sent to Cardinal Mercier in Belgium for the relief of distress there. Therefore Belgian refugees were benefiting from Irish endeavours both in Britain and Belgium, even before any came here.

When refugees did arrive in this part of Ireland, most of them found systems which the BRC and the LGB had already set up to receive them. However, due to the confused conditions of the time, and because of insufficient offers of private hospitality, many refugees had to be accommodated in poor law union workhouses such as at Gorey, Balrothery, Ardee, and Dunshaughlin. Sources indicate that there appears to have been some difficulty in keeping track of the movements of the earliest refugee arrivals, with a parliamentary paper giving one account and other sources giving another. Current knowledge ascribes the 17 October 1914, as the date when the first refugees arrived into this part of Ireland. However, a report in *The Drogheda Independent*, dated 17 October 1914, relates that the 'defenders of Antwerp have [had] arrived in Drogheda', a statement which suggests that the 'first' refugees may actually have arrived several days earlier than 17 October. Such was the enthusiasm for refugee relief in the Drogheda area that a refugee colony planned to open after that date received its first occupants as early as 20 October. A general committee established at Drogheda to relieve distressed Belgians accommodated them in seaside properties owned by Mrs Creaser. The Drogheda committee was made up primarily of the town's social elite; a fact alluded to by one of its members, Dr Bradley, who made the point that it was a poor representation of the townspeople as a whole. It was mainly such socially advantaged people who extended benevolence to the refugees and the evidence shows that they were sometimes attacked because of their generosity to the refugees and their apparent indifference towards the Irish poor. Trim offered a graphic case, where those acting to help Belgians were attacked as 'shoneens' for ignoring the plight of the poor on their own doorstep.

Tensions also arose over employment prospects for Irish workers once Belgians became available to Irish employers. James Connolly and the Dublin Fair Trade Council suggested that Irish female

servants, tradesmen, and young men might be sacked in favour of refugees. However, it was evident that the skill-sets of some refugees would hardly recommend them to prospective employers, especially if housework were involved. The unavailability of employment or their own unsuitability for work caused the problem of refugees having too much unoccupied time and this in turn drew some into troublesome ways. Drink related incidents occurred at Balrothery workhouse and it was suggested that Belgians took advantage of naïve residents of Rush and Lusk, in order to cadge money to purchase alcohol.

Another aspect, which caused much debate in some quarters, was the nature of the accommodation supplied to refugees in the absence of offers of private hospitality. Some people, such as Fr Carolan, PP, of Tullyallen, suggested that not only was the utilisation of poorhouses a bad choice by virtue of their association with pauperism, but also that it was made worse because so many vacant mansions were available, which he thought would be preferable. When he said that future Irish historians would denigrate Ireland's efforts for the Belgians in their time of need, one wonders how he would regard the fact that until recently, the subject had been largely forgotten not only by historians but also by the Irish population in general.

It is difficult to assess accurately the nature of relations that existed between the Belgians and their Irish hosts, beyond generalisations and individual case studies. I am however, struck by the lack of any discernible animosity shown towards the Belgians in this particular part of Ireland. Those opposed to their presence, nevertheless, appeared to qualify their comments with the preface that the Belgian people were a noble and hard-working nation. Perhaps their very ordinariness, and their stoic acceptance of their plight, immediately disarmed any malice which otherwise would have come their way. This, combined with the ancient historic past shared by our two small Catholic nations may have earned them an affection normally reserved for friends. Perhaps the British Government's term 'guest of the nation' was an apt one after all.

Finally, it is worth remembering that the human traffic between Ireland and the European continent was two-way in the period 1914-15. However, while the majority of Belgian refugees successfully made their way home after the war, many Irishmen never came home, their broken bodies left to lie where they fell along with those of other nations, sacrificed in a war which many believed was fought for the freedom of small nations such as Belgium and Ireland.

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