

LIMERICK AFTER THE CIVIL WAR, 1923–1930

A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY



Seán William Gannon and Brian Hughes

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Limerick City and County Council



An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir,
Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán
Department of Tourism, Culture,
Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

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Front cover image:

Seán Keating, *Irish Free State Bacon*: poster design for the Empire Marketing Board, 1928
(courtesy British National Archives).

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O'Connell Street, Limerick in the mid-1920s (Courtesy Sean Curtin)

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W.T. Cosgrave addressing a crowd in the Crescent during one of the 1927 general election campaigns (Courtesy Sean Curtin)

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An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

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Foreword

Limerick City and County Council's first collaboration with the Department of History at Mary Immaculate College (MIC) under the auspices of the Decade of Centenaries, *Studying Revolution*, used documents from the MIC archive to examine college life during the War of Independence and Civil War periods. In this, our fourth such collaboration, we and our MIC colleagues revisit this methodological approach. *Limerick After the Civil War, 1923–1930* presents a series of previously unpublished documentary sources retrieved by its authors from a variety of local and national repositories such as our own Limerick Archives and Limerick Museum, Limerick Diocesan Archives, UL Special Collections and Archives, Mary Immaculate College Library, the GAA Museum, and the National Archives of Ireland. Contextualised with short introductions, these documents (which include letters, minutes of meetings, newspaper cuttings, and annual reports) are presented together with contemporary photographic images to provide windows into the political, religious, economic, and sociocultural history of County Limerick in the early years of the Irish Free State.

The authors do not claim to offer a comprehensive history of Limerick in the 1920s. But the snapshots of that history that their selection of documents and images comprise tell us much about contemporary life in the city and county. The picture that emerges, in their words, 'captures something of the complexity of political and social allegiances that existed throughout the 1920s' and charts some of the 'challenges, the successes, and the failures faced by individuals, businesses, and organisations, and much in between.'

Limerick City and County Council is proud to present *Limerick After the Civil War, 1923–1930* as its centenary publication for 2024. It forms an original and important contribution to the history of County Limerick in a period hitherto largely overlooked.

Damien Brady

Coordinator - Decade of Centenaries
Limerick City and County Council



oifis an méire
lúimneac

W. M. Nolan, Esq.,
Town Clerk,
Town Hall,
LIMERICK.

4th October, 1923.

A Chars,

At a recent Committee meeting of the Whole House I advised the members informally of my desire to be relieved of the Mayoralty. They asked me to re-consider the matter. I have since given it most careful thought but see no adequate reason for change of mind.

I undertook office for the second time in January, 1922 for a period of one year. My term expired last January, but was compulsorily extended to the Autumn of this year. It is now proposed to further extend it indefinitely.

Since March, 1921 until the present date- that is for two and a half years- my position as Mayor has involved the sacrifice of every hour of my time to National and Civic duties, whether in Ireland or America; in jail or at freedom.

During my prolonged term of office I applied myself wholeheartedly and unremittingly to the cause, first of Freedom and afterwards of Peace. If by continuing in Office now I could still do anything in either of these directions I would gladly remain, but I see plainly that the party with whom these things now rest exclusively is pursuing a policy destructive of all hope of peace. A peace which depends on the holding of hostages, and on the repression of public opinion, a peace based on conditions which exclude a substantial body of the people from all political expression is not a wise peace and cannot be a secure peace.

Whilst carrying out my National duties and responsibilities I applied myself at all times, to the limit of my capacity to the conduct of Civic Affairs. The time has now come, however, when I can no longer devote to them the attention, which they demand and deserve. It would, therefore, be unjust to the Council and to the City to continue to occupy the Civic Chair.

I, therefore, request my colleagues to relieve me at the earliest possible date of this very onerous duty, and allow me to resume my position as an ordinary member of the Council.

Mise, le meas *S. M. Meara*
MEARA.

INTRODUCTION

‘The Destiny of the Country is Entirely and Exclusively in Her Own Hands’: The Early Irish Free State¹

When Stephen O’Mara resigned as mayor of Limerick in October 1923, he was worn out by what he had experienced in the previous two and a half years. A city councillor since 1920, O’Mara had been appointed mayor in March 1921 to cover the remainder of George Clancy’s term in office following his murder, and that of his immediate predecessor Michael O’Callaghan, during what became known as the ‘Curfew Murders’.² Up to the declaration of a truce between the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Crown forces in July 1921, O’Mara risked a similar fate and spent the early months of his mayoralty on the run, sleeping away from home and protected by bodyguards. In March and again in June 1922, O’Mara had brokered deals to prevent conflict between opposing sides in the growing split over the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, signed in December 1921, and established a new (short-lived) city police force to fill the vacuum left by the disbandment of the Royal Irish Constabulary. But this was all in vain as the ‘fourth siege of Limerick’ broke out in July and the Irish Civil War came to Limerick. Opposing the Treaty, O’Mara spent four months in prison in late 1922 and early 1923, during which time local elections were postponed and his mayoralty was extended ‘indefinitely’.³

Stephen O’Mara was not alone in feeling disillusioned in October 1923, believing, like many on the anti-Treaty side, that the hopes and aspirations of the struggle for independence were not being borne out, or, like others, simply exhausted (or worse) after several years of violence and loss. When the Irish Free State came officially into existence in December 1922, in the midst of civil war, there were no parades and no fanfare. An editorial in the *Limerick Leader* praised the provisional government for surviving the ‘hampering and crippling circumstances prevailing during the past year.’ There was hope, however, that given ‘a fair chance, Ireland under her rule will in a short time be, for its size, one of the most progressive and prosperous nations in the world.’⁴ Two days later, the new state carried out the extra-judicial executions of four anti-Treaty prisoners in Dublin in retaliation for the killing of a government TD. In the Dáil, Labour leader Thomas Johnson was ‘almost forced to say that you have killed the new state at its birth.’⁵

As Anne Dolan has noted, the first ten years of the Irish Free State under W.T. Cosgrave’s Cumann na nGaedheal governments have been widely characterised as ‘the history of a disappointment’: ‘Book after book describes a flat, narrow place that lost the courage of its own revolution’s convictions, a cruel, timid place that was hard on its weakest and too much in thrall to those who preached right from wrong.’⁶ The fledgling state certainly faced significant

challenges. Speaking in 1924, Kevin O’Higgins, the vice-president of the executive council and minister for justice (and who would be assassinated in 1927), described the provisional government as ‘simply eight young men in the City Hall standing amidst the ruins of one administration with another not yet laid, and with wild men screaming through the keyhole’.⁷ This was also a state attempting to secure and consolidate international recognition of its sovereignty – the Irish Free State joined the League of Nations in September 1923 – when, at the same time, a significant portion of its own population supported, and continued to vote for election candidates who refused to recognise its legitimacy.

The financial cost of the Civil War to Irish industry, estimated in a Cumann na nGaedheal election poster in the early 1930s as £33,000,000, encouraged prudence by the government.⁸ By the end of its time in power, Cumann na nGaedheal was spending less on welfare than it had been in 1923. This miserly approach from government was most infamously represented in Minister for Finance Ernest Blythe’s cutting of the old age pension from 10s to 9s in 1924. In typically caustic style, historian Joe Lee described all of this as ‘a coherent campaign against the weaker elements in the community. The poor, the aged, and the unemployed must all feel the lash of the liberators.’⁹ Economic depression was suffered keenly in Limerick, notably in the bacon trade and in milling – the traditional industries most closely associated with the city. Nor had independence ended the flow of emigration as some had promised. While the figures were smaller than during the second half of the nineteenth century, the number of young men and women leaving the country was a constant source of concern. The most notable change was in regard to the most popular destination for Irish emigrants; by the mid-1930s, this had shifted from the United States (perhaps ironically) to Britain.

The nascent Irish state was socially as well as economically conservative; O’Higgins characterised himself as among ‘the most conservative-minded revolutionaries that ever put through a successful revolution’.¹⁰ The population of the twenty-six counties was over 90 per cent Catholic, and the Catholic Church’s already growing influence was extended throughout the 1920s. A firm commitment to the establishment of a state that was both Gaelic and Catholic quickly emerged. The population was devout in its religious practice, and in its commitment to attendance at mass and other church rituals. Indeed, the church loomed large in the social life of Limerick city, most notably via the Arch-Confraternity of the Holy Family – ‘the largest organised body of Catholic laymen in the world’.¹¹ Church control was evidenced in other areas too, notably in entertainment. Its concerns over what one 1927 Lenten pastoral termed the devil’s ‘snares for unwary feet ... chiefly the dance hall, the bad book, the indecent paper, the motion picture, the immodest fashion in female dress – all of which tend to destroy the virtues characteristic of our race’ were reflected in legislation censoring and restricting access to films, newspapers, and books which was enthusiastically backed by public representatives and large segments of the population.¹² Catholic Church control was also evident in education, with the vast majority of schools at both primary and secondary level under its patronage. Limerick’s

only third-level institution in the 1920s, Mary Immaculate College, was run by the Sisters of Mercy.

This expansion of Catholic Church influence disproportionately impacted on women. The 1922 Irish Free State constitution explicitly guaranteed equal rights and opportunities to all citizens ‘without distinction of sex’. However, gender equality was gradually eroded as Catholic social teaching – according to which the ‘natural’ role of women was as wives and mothers – began to shape state law. For example, the British-era ‘marriage bar’ was put on a statutory footing by the Civil Service Regulation Act of 1924, while an amendment act two years later empowered the state to restrict entry and appointments by gender, in pursuance of a policy which ‘confine[d] women to the lower grades of the civil service, thus limiting their career opportunities and earning power because of their sex.’¹³ Female equality of citizenship was further compromised by the Juries Acts of 1924 and 1927, through which Kevin O’Higgins sought to exclude women from jury service on the basis that their societal role was in the home. That his efforts achieved but partial success was due to the vehement opposition of women’s rights organisations and Jenny Wyse-Power and Eibhlín Costello in the Seanad.

But Dolan has questioned the extent to which the dominant narrative of conservatism, parsimoniousness, and stagnation stands up to scrutiny. While all of that was certainly to be found, the state and its people were less insular, less dour, than might be assumed.¹⁴ This was the case in Limerick as much as anywhere else. Sports and games were held across the city and county, often with provincial or national success. Limerick also maintained its long-standing marching band tradition. When Ireland competed at the Olympic games for the first time as an independent country in 1924, it was Limerick-born shot-putter John O’Grady who carried the flag at the opening ceremony, and Limerick men and women participated in the Tailteann Games of 1924 and 1928. While censorship had its impacts, there remained plenty of options for cinema and theatre-goers. Among the several showings advertised on the front page of one February 1929 issue of the *Limerick Leader*, for instance, was Charlie Chaplin’s comedy ‘Shoulder Arms’, the John Ford film ‘Mother Machree’, and the romantic drama ‘Flesh and the Devil’ starring John Gilbert and Greta Garbo.¹⁵

The Shannon Hydroelectric Scheme at Ardnacrusha was an ambitious and successful investment by the government in electrification and was presented as an assertion of national sovereignty, and a vindication of going it alone. It became a model for similar schemes in Europe, and brought some thousand German workers and their families to rural Limerick and Clare (although this was not without some attendant issues). But the awarding of the contract to the German firm Siemens-Schuckert was not without certain controversy. Concerns were raised within the state’s vestigial loyalist and unionist constituency that this could lead to what the pro-empire *Irish Times* termed the ‘Teutonisation’ of Ireland’s economy: ‘The Free State is a Dominion of the British Commonwealth. The paramount instinct throughout the Commonwealth today is for closer co-operation between all members, and she would defy

that instinct to her own grievous harm.’¹⁶ Remaining within the Commonwealth – a source of conflict in the split over the Anglo-Irish Treaty, but which offered some comfort to southern loyalists and unionists – did provide opportunities for the Irish Free State to look outwards. As part of the empire, it was able easily to export to Britain and its overseas markets, although it was given comparatively limited support and funding to do so by the Empire Marketing Board, which was established by the Colonial Office in 1926 to encourage reciprocal trade amongst Commonwealth members. Five well-known Irish artists were engaged to design posters to promote Free State agricultural produce in the British marketplace, their acceptance of these commissions highlighting the complexities of Anglo-Irish relationships in the later 1920s when, for commercial reasons, many Irish artists exhibited under ‘British art’ auspices. These included the Limerick-born republican Seán Keating; he was commissioned in 1927 to submit a design for a poster on Irish dairy but, following the intervention of Minister for Agriculture Patrick Hogan, was asked to produce designs for eggs and bacon as well. Keating’s *Irish Free State Bacon*, completed in 1928 and reproduced on this book’s front cover, demonstrates how he (and fellow Irish artist, Margaret Clarke) were able to subvert – while not entirely dismissing – the stereotypical agricultural identity present in designs for Irish produce submitted by other artists, most notably Paul Henry. His design for the dairy industry (which depicted milk being transported on a donkey cart) was considered so clichéd and backward-looking that it was dropped by the Board at the Cosgrave government’s insistence. While *Irish Free State Bacon* presents a well-ordered agricultural scene, the men in the image are not working, subtly undermining the Board’s ‘agenda of depicting productivity.’ The dress and posture of the figure to the left, which implies ‘the militancy’ of an anti-Treaty fighter ‘rather than a pig farmer’, may also reflect Keating’s republican sympathies.¹⁷ What Éimear O’Connor terms Keating’s ‘idea of nation-building’ through his art and ‘ongoing desire to document the birth of the Irish Free State’, as demonstrated in his Empire Marketing Board posters and earlier political works such as *Men of the South* (1921/2) and *An Allegory* (1924), was manifest in his series of Shannon Scheme paintings as well, most famously *Night’s Candles are Burnt Out* (1928). He considered the scheme ‘as fundamental to the symbolic end of the dark ages in Ireland, and perhaps particularly Limerick.’¹⁸

Central government was inclined to view local authorities with contempt in the early years of the Irish Free State, and local democracy suffered in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. Real and perceived inefficiency, mismanagement, and corruption – as well as a belief that power should reside centrally – prompted the government to dissolve borough (city) councils in Dublin and Cork, to be replaced by government-appointed commissioners. Limerick’s borough and county councils survived, though not without some difficulty, as seen in the forced resignation of county council secretary John Quaid in 1926 amidst a financial crisis. A series of acts passed by the Dáil also postponed local elections due in 1922, 1923, and 1924 until conditions were considered more suitable. When they were held, elections to city

and county councils presented opportunities for men and women to run, campaign, and vote under a range of banners that reflected local interests and concerns alongside wider national political divides. Voters elected republicans, Labour Party candidates, and independents of various shades to Limerick City Council in 1925 and again in 1928. The city also had its own Progressive Party, closely aligned to the government party Cumann na nGaedheal. Among the councillors elected to Limerick County Council in 1928 was Gilbert Hewson, a Protestant-loyalist landowner from Askeaton, at least in part for his campaign against the rates (local taxes) struck by the council. Hewson had earlier served a brief term in the Dáil between the general elections held in June and September 1927. His electoral successes demonstrate one important aspect of the Protestant and ex-unionist experience in the Irish Free State: the ability to settle down to life in the new order and contribute to local politics and society as a small but visible minority.

At a national level, meanwhile, a number of new parties emerged. Some lasted longer than others, but the 1920s saw the emergence of the party that would go on to dominate national electoral politics – for good or ill – for the remainder of the century: Fianna Fáil. Men and women in Limerick and elsewhere also attended speeches and rallies for one cause or another, raised funds for those causes, or supported them by buying newspapers, pamphlets, or poppies or Easter lilies to wear at public events to commemorate the dead of the Great War, the Easter Rising, the War of Independence, and the Civil War.

This book provides a series of snapshots of Limerick in the immediate aftermath of the Irish Civil War and during the early years of the Irish Free State. It does so through a selection of documents – letters, reports, minutes of meetings, newspaper cuttings, and photographs – organised into five thematic sections: politics, religion, work and business, sports and recreation, and culture and education. While it does not claim to offer anything like a comprehensive picture, the book does provide some sense of life in Limerick city and county in the 1920s and highlights some of the issues and concerns that especially exercised Limerick minds in this period. Themes and topics overlap and coalesce across different sections of the book and some individuals appear more than once. This, it is hoped, reflects the nature of life in the city and county in these years. There was no universal experience of post-Civil War life in Limerick, and the documents reproduced in this book capture something of the complexity of political and social allegiances that existed throughout the 1920s; the challenges, the successes, and the failures faced by individuals, businesses, and organisations, and much in between.

Notes

- 1 *Limerick Leader*, 6 December 1922.
- 2 A Volunteer, Joseph O'Donoghue, was killed on the same night, 6/7 March 1921.
- 3 Matthew Potter, *First citizens of the Treaty City: the mayors and mayoralty of Limerick, 1197–2007* (Limerick, 2007), pp 170–71.
- 4 *Limerick Leader*, 6 December 1922.

- 5 *Freeman's Journal*, 9 December 1922.
- 6 Anne Dolan, 'Politics, economy and society in the Irish Free State, 1922–1939' in Thomas Bartlett (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Ireland, Vol. IV: 1800 to the present* (Cambridge, 2018), pp 323–48, at p. 323.
- 7 Martin Maguire, 'From state-destruction to state-building: the civil service in revolutionary Ireland', *Irish Political Studies*, 39/2 (2024), pp 320–43, at p. 321.
- 8 'Crocodile tears: the cost of an empty formula' (National Library of Ireland, Ephemera, EPH F51(A)).
- 9 J.J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912–1985: politics and society* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 124.
- 10 Jason Knirck, 'Afterimage of the revolution: Kevin O'Higgins and the Irish Revolution', *Éire-Ireland*, 38/3&4 (2003), pp 212–43, at p. 212.
- 11 *Limerick Leader*, 21 July 1928.
- 12 Quoted in J.H. Whyte, *Church and state in modern Ireland, 1923-1979* (Dublin, 1980), p. 27.
- 13 Caitriona Beaumont, 'Women, citizenship and Catholicism in the Irish Free State, 1922–1948', *Women's History Review*, 6/4 (1997), pp 563–85, at p. 568.
- 14 Dolan, 'Politics, economy and society', pp 330–5.
- 15 *Limerick Leader*, 9 February 1929.
- 16 *Irish Times*, 20 December 1924.
- 17 Mike Cronin, 'Selling Irish bacon: the Empire Marketing Board and artists of the Free State', *Éire-Ireland*, 39/3&4 (2004), pp 132–43, at p. 141.
- 18 Éimear O'Connor, *Seán Keating: art, politics, and building the Irish nation* (Sallins, 2013), pp 161–3.

BRITISH LEGION

(IRISH FREE STATE)

LIMERICK BRANCH

YOUR REFERENCE NO.



Address 12 Cecil Street.

16th. October. 1928.

To
His Worship
The Mayor of Limerick.

Dear Sir,
May a permit be granted ~~and~~ please for the Poppy Day Collection
for the City and County on the 10th. November, 1928.

Yours faithfully,

D. Duffey

Hon. Secretary,
Women's Section,
British Legion,
Limerick Branch.

Your Clerk writes

17/10/1928

*Approved
MAK
22/10/28.*

I

Politics

1

‘Enough of the Gunmen’: Labour Party Poster for the September 1927 General Election¹

Two general elections were held in the Irish Free State in 1927. In the first, held in June, W.T. Cosgrave’s Cumann na nGaedheal lost sixteen of its sixty-three seats. The Labour Party, which had served as the only real parliamentary opposition to Cumann na nGaedheal since 1922, added eight seats for a total of twenty-two. Fianna Fáil, however, were the big winners. Formed just one year previously when founding leader Éamonn de Valera led a split from the anti-Treaty Sinn Féin party, it fielded eighty-seven candidates and won forty-four seats in its first general election. In the seven-seat Limerick constituency, which then comprised the city and county, all three parties won two seats each with independent Gilbert Hewson, later a county councillor for several years, and from a Protestant unionist background, taking the other seat.

A month after polling day on 10 July, Kevin O’Higgins was shot several times in Booterstown, Dublin and died later that day. A chance assassination by republicans who happened to pass him as he walked without security to Sunday mass, the violent death of a serving Cabinet minister (he was then Dáil vice-president and minister for both justice and external affairs) shocked the government and changed the political landscape. Legislation that followed the assassination forced Fianna Fáil to reconsider, and ultimately end, its abstentionist policy and its TDs – including Limerick TDs Tadhg Crowley (who had secured the majority of first preferences) and James Colbert – entered the Dáil for the first time in August 1927. This shifted the parliamentary arithmetic. Within days the government barely survived a vote of no confidence tabled by Labour, and supported by the National League, and Cosgrave decided to dissolve the Dáil.²

The election was set for 15 September. The poster presented here, courtesy of the National Library of Ireland, typifies those used in Irish Free State elections prior to this point; viz., text-based rather than illustrated, with black or red type varying in size to better command visual attention.³ It was printed on behalf of the Labour Party’s incumbent TDs in the Limerick constituency, Michael J. Keyes (1886–1959) and Patrick Clancy (1877–1947). Keyes, a trade unionist from the South Liberties area of Limerick city, had been educated by the Christian Brothers at Sexton Street. He had afterwards worked as a railway clerk and later served as chairman of the shopmen’s branch of the National Union of Railwaymen. Elected to Limerick City Council in 1925, Keyes served as mayor of Limerick in 1928 and 1930. Patrick Clancy was a carpenter born in Grange, County Limerick, and educated at St Patrick’s seminary in Bruff. He was an elder brother of George Clancy who, as serving lord mayor of Limerick, was one of three men murdered in the ‘Curfew Murders’ of March 1921. A veteran of the IRA’s East

Enough of the GUNNMEN

In 1924, Mr. O'Higgins insisted on the removal of Mr. Gearoid O'Sullivan from his post as Adjutant-General of the Army because of his connection with a mutinous secret society.

The late Minister had enough of the rule of the Gunman.

Now Cumann na nGaedheal could find no better candidate to succeed Mr. O'Higgins than Mr. O'Sullivan, and called on Mr. Bryan Cooper, Major in the British Army, to help to get him elected.

Cumann na nGaedheal cannot get away from the Gunman Mentality.

Only One Party has consistently opposed ALL Militarism, whether British or Irish.

Only One Party has always striven for Peace.

**Militarism Means Misery,
Poverty, Destruction.
We Want Reconstruction**

Vote for the Labour Candidates--
KEYES & CLANCY

Limerick Brigade, Clancy was first elected to the Dáil in 1923. Keyes was a first time TD in June 1927, having failed to be elected in 1923.

Having expending much of its limited resources in June, the Labour Party campaign brought significant challenges. ‘Under resourced, demoralised, attacked in the press and by its opponents on the left and right, [it] tried in vain to position itself as a responsible party which had merely sought to prevent a reactionary government from going too far.’⁴ Four years after the end of the Civil War, this election poster encouraged the voters of Limerick to reject the ‘militarism’ of the parties that emerged from that conflict’s divide. In particular, rather than focussing on local issues, it criticises Cumann na nGaedheal’s selection of Gearóid O’Sullivan as the candidate for the Dublin seat left vacant by O’Higgins’ assassination. After the end of the Civil War, the National Army (which had won the government the war) was vastly oversized for peacetime. As the government attempted to demobilise personnel, an influential group of officers – believing that they were being side-lined in favour of ‘ex-Britishers’ and calling themselves the Irish Republican Army Organisation – issued an ultimatum in March 1924 with a series of demands, including suspension of the government’s demobilisation scheme and a more ‘republican’ form of government. About fifty officers absconded from their posts with weapons and contact was made with the anti-Treaty IRA about a joint assault on the state and on Northern Ireland. Cosgrave, faced with the loss of nine government TDs in sympathy with the mutineers, and internal divisions in his party, committed to an inquiry into the management of the army and an amnesty was negotiated. When the amnesty was broken by a raid by the National Army and the arrest of the mutiny’s leaders, the government demanded and secured the resignation of its commander-in-chief, Richard Mulcahy (who was also minister for defence), and of the Army Council. O’Sullivan, who had been adjutant general of the National Army and a member of the Army Council, had personally ordered the raid and was forced to stand down with his colleagues as the government sought to diffuse the crisis. It ended his active military career, though he was cleared of any wrongdoing in mid-1924.

Clancy was re-elected to the Dáil in the September election, but Keyes lost his seat (with only a tiny fall in first preference votes). Cumann na nGaedheal and Fianna Fáil secured three seats each as Gilbert Hewson also lost out. The fortunes of Clancy and Keyes were reversed in the 1930s, when Fianna Fáil came to power for the first time. Clancy failed to secure a nomination for Labour, lost his seat running as an independent labour candidate in 1932, and retired from politics. He had only spoken thirteen times in the Dáil and, as late as 1927, claimed in the course of a rare speech that ‘I was not conversant until quite recently with the want and destitution prevalent in my county and in the City of Limerick.’⁵ Meanwhile Keyes, unsuccessful in 1932, was re-elected in 1933 and served as TD for Limerick until 1948. When the Limerick constituency was divided in 1948, he was elected as TD for Limerick East and held the seat until 1957, serving from 1949 as minister for local government in the first inter-party government (1948–51).

For a brief period in 1927 the Labour Party held two Limerick seats. For most of the next thirty years, Michael Keyes was the sole Limerick Labour TD – reflective of a core of Labour support and also Keyes’ personal popularity, his long-standing involvement in trade unionism and local government in Limerick, and his skills as a politician and orator.

Notes

- 1 National Library of Ireland, Ephemera, EPH F36.
- 2 The National League largely comprised members of the defunct pre-state constitutionalist-nationalist Irish Parliamentary Party.
- 3 Cumann na nGaedheal broke this mould in this second 1927 election, countering the Labour/National League campaign (which it believed was being directed by Fianna Fáil) with a series of striking image-focussed posters. See Ciara Meehan, ‘Politics pictorialised: Free State election posters’ in Mel Farrell, Jason Knirck, and Ciara Meehan (eds), *A formative decade: Ireland in the 1920s* (Sallins, 2015), pp 12–35.
- 4 Niamh Puirseil, *The Irish Labour Party, 1922–73* (Dublin, 2007), p. 26.
- 5 Charles Callan and Barry Desmond (eds), *Irish Labour lives: a biographical dictionary of Irish Labour Party deputies, senators, MPs and MEPs* (Dublin, 2010), p. 39.

**‘There is Every Indication of Squandering of the Public Monies’: Extract
from the Department of Local Government Auditor’s Report on Limerick
County Council, 1926¹**

The Cosgrave administration was determined to overhaul local government, which it saw as incompetent, financially inefficient, and frequently corrupted by politics, and it passed a series of acts in 1923, 1925, and 1926 to this end. Limerick County Council (LCC) was soon in its sights. LCC was not politically charged during this time, as members of both the Sinn Féin council elected in 1920, and its successor returned following the first local elections in the Irish Free State in 1925, largely sidelined personal political differences in the interests of stable administration. In the case of the former, this was demonstrated by its scholarships committee in October 1922 which, when informed that two university bursary holders had been imprisoned for anti-Treaty activities, declared that they ‘were not disposed to sit in judgement on the political views of any student’, and adjourned consideration of the matter ‘until such time as [they] were at liberty to resume their studies’.² In the case of the latter, IRA crimes were condemned, but political-constitutional issues were otherwise largely ignored. As Colman Moloney observed, ‘looking at [LCC] in isolation it could not have been predicted that the main political divisions in the country a generation later would be based on the Treaty split’.³

But, in common with several other local authorities, LCC had serious issues with funding throughout the 1920s. The Sinn Féin council had great difficulty in striking and collecting a rate affordable in the economically depressed post-1922 period, and in staying within the budgetary parameters that this rate, together with some central government fixed grants, provided. For it not only had to cover routine spending such as the payment of council staff wages, but had to meet extraordinary post-revolutionary costs, such as pensions to former officials (including those left jobless when county union workhouses closed), and postwar infrastructural reconstruction. In addition, the council consistently overspent on road works during this time by using them as a means of relieving local unemployment.

Matters reached crisis point in 1925, by which time LCC was over £200,000 in debt. The long-serving county secretary, John Quaid, told the minister for local government in June that council finances were ‘at a complete standstill’; an overdraft limit of £50,000 sanctioned the previous year had been reached, and a government grant was immediately required.⁴ The minister, Séamus Burke, refused, stating that ‘the serious financial situation disclosed is one for which [LCC] must accept complete responsibility’ and he instructed it to raise an adequate rate.⁵ This was adopted one month later, but relations between LCC and the minister remained strained, not least because Quaid publicly blamed the government for the council’s financial

predicament, claiming that it was refusing to meet outstanding obligations amounting to £80,000.

Although the incoming 1925 council was determined to take LCC finances in hand, its efforts were hampered by its inherited debt, leading to demands by agricultural ratepayers, led by Gilbert Hewson, for a sworn inquiry into the Sinn Féin council's financial administration. Although Hewson's background as a Protestant-loyalist landowner appears to have given him a certain animus against this council over alleged activities during the War of Independence, he certainly believed that Limerick farmers were unfairly burdened with rates for which they received little in return. (He, in fact, stood unsuccessfully for LCC in 1925).

The catalyst for an inquiry was a July 1926 report of the Department of Local Government auditor on LCC's finances covering the March 1923–March 1924 period, which forms part of the LCC minute books held at Limerick Archives. In the extract presented here, the auditor stated that there was 'every indication of squandering of the public monies' under Quaid's watch as county secretary. For example, the pensions paid to former staff were wildly excessive, and expenditure on road works so 'lavish' that it represented a gross misuse of the county fund. The auditor's impending examination of the accounts for 1925/6 would, he remarked, inevitably uncover 'matters a good deal worse' and his interim findings, published in December, duly found evidence of 'many serious irregularities and forgeries in the accounts', including 'a system of deliberate fraud and embezzlement' in the pay sheets for road works during the preceding four years.⁶ A sworn inquiry was scheduled for the new year.

Quaid vigorously challenged the July 1926 auditor's report, but his position became increasingly untenable. He resigned in November after twenty-six years of council service, ostensibly on grounds of ill-health, but in actuality on ministerial orders. By Quaid's own admission to the inquiry, which opened on 22 January 1927 and heard sixty witnesses, his character was 'absolutely torn to shreds' in this report.⁷ He strongly defended his record; there were, he conceded, 'some things' done by the Sinn Féin council that 'were not strictly within the law', but these were technical illegalities necessary in disturbed and extremely difficult times.⁸ The report of the inquiry, published in August 1927, exonerated Quaid of personal corruption. But it was highly critical of LCC's financial management under his watch, citing poor accounting, jobbery and clientelist procurement, the misuse of publicly funded road works, a failure to revise excessive pensions and pay-outs to former staff, and a general lack of financial oversight and accountability.

Ratepayers' discontent persisted, however, and Hewson and his wife, Kathleen, successfully used the courts to have the 1926/7 rate quashed.⁹ But the 1925 council did ultimately succeed in placing LCC on a sounder financial footing through the introduction of a series of cuts, including lower wages, economies in work practices, and a reduction in number and value of its secondary school scholarship scheme. In March 1928, LCC struck a low rate

AUDITOR'S REPORT.

The following report from Mr. MacGuaigín, Local Government auditor, was taken as read, having been circulated:—

LIMERICK COUNTY COUNCIL.

**AUDITOR'S REPORT, HALF-YEARS ENDED 30th SEPTEMBER, 1923, AND
31st MARCH, 1924.**

No. 32157/26.

LIMMSEACH,
13 adh Iul, 1926.

A CHARA.

I beg to report that I have audited the accounts of the Limerick County Council for the half-years ended 30th September, 1923, and 31st March, 1924. Certified copies of abstracts of the accounts are transmitted herewith.

Notwithstanding the fact that the accounts generally were in an incomplete state and not properly prepared, the Secretary went on holidays soon after the opening of the audit and remained away for five weeks. Several matters requiring attention and explanation could not be dealt with in his absence and hence I was obliged to adjourn the audit for a considerable time. At future audits I shall not tolerate such inconvenience and delay and in this connection I would refer the Secretary and the Council to the provisions of Article 31 of the Public Bodies Order, 1925.

Under Section 20 (1) of the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1902, I have charged the Secretary with the following sums:—

- (a) £129 10s. 10d., poundage on temporarily uncollectible rates.
- (b) £36 18s. 6d., poundage on irrecoverable rates.
- (c) £34 13s. 10d., poundage on rates not lodged.
- (d) £349 6s. 7d., payments contrary to Article 92 (3) of the Public Bodies Order, 1904.
- (e) £2 8s. 9d., overpayment of gratuity.
- (f) £10 0s. 0d., advance to the late Mr. Fitzgerald, Secretary of the Old Age Pensions Committee.
- (g) £288 15s. 9d., payments contrary to Article 92 (3) of the Public Bodies Order, 1904.

I have also been obliged to disallow and surcharge the following sums:—

- (a) £51 18s. 0d., overpayment of mileage allowances to the County Surveyors.
- (b) £97 15s. 4d., illegal pension to Mr. O'Malley, engineer.
- (c) £100 0s. 0d., illegal gratuity to Mr. Austin, late Acting Clerk of Limerick Union.
- (d) £3 0s. 0d., overpayment of wages to John O'Brien, road foreman.

My reasons for making these charges and surcharges are set out in the Ledger.

Expenditure.—Throughout the accounts there is every indication of squandering of the public monies—pensions and gratuities to retired officials already very large have in many cases been overpaid; road expenditure on a very lavish scale and entirely in excess of the amounts levied or available; poundage to rate collectors on rates which were never lodged and purchases of all kinds were made without even asking for price quotations.

The final payments of gratuities do not all fall within the scope of this audit.

Bank Accounts.—The state of the Council's finances may be judged from the following figures which represent the balances of the various accounts with the Treasurer (The Munster and Leinster Bank, Ltd.) at 31st March, 1924:—

		Cr.			Dr.		
		£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
General Account	No. 1	175,295	6	1			
Subsidiary	.. No. 1				178,079	0	10
General	.. No. 2				10,022	18	7
Subsidiary	.. No. 2				4,290	15	3
Scholarships	..				76	1	0
Munster Fair	..	556	12	1			
J. J. Quaid	.. No. 2	6,077	10	0			
..	.. No. 3				13,695	8	1
..	.. No. 4				1,691	7	11
Croom Reconstruction Loan Account					12,000	0	0
Totals	...	£181,929	8	8	£225,855	11	8

When the outstanding paying orders amounting to about £15,000 are also placed on the debit side of the accounts the Council has a debit balance with the Treasurer of £59,000. The corresponding figures for the half-year ended 31st March, 1925, will show even a more unsatisfactory state of affairs.

There is no justifiable reason for having all these accounts with the Treasurer General Account No. 2, and Subsidiary Account No. 2 should be merged in General Account No. 1 and Subsidiary Account No. 1 respectively. Scholarships Account should be closed, and the balance transferred to General Account, No. 1. I understand that J. J. Quaid Accounts Nos. 2 and 4 have been discontinued since my last audit. J. J. Quaid Account No. 3 which is still operative, provides a means for getting money from the Treasurer without any authority from the Council. It contains payments of all kinds and is kept in a most irregular manner. This account should be closed at once and the balance transferred to General Account No. 1.

The interest charged and allowed on the various accounts is a matter which has yet to be dealt with and will probably arise at the next audit.

Retiring Allowances.—In checking the retiring allowances granted and paid to officers of the late Unions I found that the Guardians abused the discretion vested in them and granted, in many cases, not only the maximum amount allowable under the Superannuation Acts but also over estimated the money value of the apartments and other allowances in kind attaching to the various offices. The following are some of the instances in which excessive amounts were allowed:—

KILMALLOCK UNION.	Gratuity.		
	£	s.	d.
Ellen Hogan, Nurse—7 years' service	829	18	0
Catherine Coleman, Lunatic Caretaker—9 years' service	815	8	9
Philip O'Sullivan, Vaudriver—7 years' service	550	0	0
James O'Malley, Carpenter—7 years' service	514	0	0
LIMERICK UNION.			
Catherine Lynch, nurse—9 years' service	893	15	10
Annie O'Grady, nurse—7 years' service	625	13	1
Margaret Quinn, nurse—3 years' service	357	10	4
Frances Moloney, nurse—0½ years' service	695	13	1
James McNamara, Lunatic Caretaker—8 years' service	844	16	9

In this connection I would point out that if the Boards of Guardians and the County Council had acted on the instructions and suggestions issued from time to time by the Department, the burden of retiring allowances which the ratepayers have to bear would be about half what it is at present.

Many of the ex-Union officers of Rathkeale were actually paid twice by the County Council in respect of the quarter ended 31st March, 1923. I have directed that the next quarter's pension due to these officers be stopped, and failing this I reserve the right to review the matter at the next audit of these accounts.

Road Expenditure.—In the matter of road expenditure there is abundant evidence to show that the Council and the Secretary grossly mismanaged the finances of the county. The estimates of road expenditure authorised by the District Councils and adopted by the County Council were not included in full in the General Estimate of rates. The limits of road expenditure in the various Rural Districts prescribed under Section 27 (sub. Sec. 2) of the L. G. (Ireland) Act, 1898 (and altered from time to time by the Minister) were entirely ignored and the Council continued spending until their bank overdraft had reached such alarming proportions that the Treasurer refused to honour the Paying Orders issued for workmen's wages.

The following figures will be of interest as showing the monies levied for road expenditure and the amounts expended since the year 1921:—

Year.	Amount levied for Roads.	Amount spent on Roads.
1921.	82,701	94,345
1922	108,864	101,406
1923	91,116	106,726
1924	93,315	92,622
1925	78,340	84,814
Total	454,336	479,913

These figures show an over-expenditure of £25,577 over the five years. To this must be added a sum of £26,811 entered as "depreciation" but which is really made up of cost of repairs and small renewals of machinery and tradesmen's wages. Cost of machinery purchased over the period amounts to £19,026, making a gross over-expenditure of £71,414. It is, therefore, an easy matter to account for the large debit balance appearing in the books of Limerick County Council.

The purchase of expensive machinery out of revenue at any time is bad finance, but it is especially bad when the revenue account is already heavily overdrawn. Why the Council did not raise a loan for the purchase of additional road machinery is inexplicable, more especially as the Department, on more than one occasion, in the years 1923 and 1924 intimated that no objection would be raised to the obtaining of a short-term loan for such purpose.

to the farming community's expressed delight and in the local elections that summer, Hewson won a seat on the council which he would hold for several years.

Notes

- 1 Limerick Archives (LA), Limerick County Council minutes books (LCCMB), LK/MIN/14, 28 August 1926.
- 2 LA, LCCMB, LK/MIN/12, 6 October 1922. Following the formal inauguration of the Irish Free State in December 1922, LCC unanimously deplored the ongoing violence and called upon 'all parties, in the interests of common humanity, to use their immediate endeavours to end the strife', and it passed a resolution of sympathy on the death of Liam Lynch, acknowledging that 'his motives were honest and were guided solely by what he considered his duty' (LA, LCCMB, LK/MIN/12, 9 December 1922, 21 April 1923).
- 3 Colman Moloney, 'Limerick County Council, 1899–1932' (unpublished MA thesis, University College Cork, 1977), p. 251,
- 4 Diarmaid Ferriter, *Cuimnigh ar Luimneach: a history of Limerick County Council, 1898–1998* (Limerick, 1998), p. 46.
- 5 *Limerick Leader*, 18 July 1925.
- 6 *Limerick Leader*, 8 November 1926; Ferriter, *Cuimnigh ar Luimneach*, p. 50.
- 7 *Cork Examiner*, 24 January 1927.
- 8 Ferriter, *Cuimnigh ar Luimneach*, p. 51.
- 9 While serving as TD for Limerick between June and September 1927, Hewson petitioned the Department of Local Government for further disclosure on LCC's finances.

‘Knowing You to Be Such a Good Friend of the Movement’: Letters to Madge Daly, 1923–1930¹

Margaret ‘Madge’ Daly (1877–1969), along with the majority of Limerick Cumann na mBan, of which she was branch president, opposed the Anglo-Irish Treaty.² Reproduced here is a small selection of letters from the Daly Papers held at the University of Limerick, which were sent to Daly between 1924 and 1930. They give some sense of the efforts of the networks of republicans who rejected the Treaty to advance their cause in the years after the end of the Irish Civil War, as well as of the valued position of the Limerick Daly family, and Madge in particular, within those networks.

In her statement to the Bureau of Military History in 1953, Daly recalled that the ‘conditions in Limerick Jail were deplorable’ for anti-Treatyites held there during the Civil War and that ‘Our girls did all they could to help the prisoners.’³ She also sent care packages to prisoners beyond Limerick. One such recipient was Tomás Ó Donnchadha (Thomas O’Donoghue), the anti-Treaty Sinn Féin TD for Kerry (Fig. 1).⁴ He was arrested during the Civil War as a member of the anti-Treaty IRA (his brother joined the National Army) and imprisoned in Newbridge, County Kildare in 1923. Ó Donnchadha spent forty-three days on hunger-strike and was among anti-Treaty prisoners around the country who ended their fasts in late November 1923.

These republican networks extended beyond the island, as evidenced in a letter from France from a P. Ó hÉigearthaigh (Fig. 2). The ‘Bob’ mentioned in his letter was the current mayor of Limerick, Robert W. de Courcy, an engineer from Limerick city who had joined the IRA and was divisional engineer with the anti-Treaty IRA’s 2nd Southern Division when he was arrested at the Glen of Aherlow. The rumoured candidate, Liam Forde, had been O/C of the Mid-Limerick IRA Brigade during the War of Independence and Civil War and had been elected to Limerick City Council for the Irishtown ward in 1920. De Courcy was unanimously elected (to replace the resigned Stephen O’Mara) while taking part in a hunger-strike by anti-Treaty prisoners in October 1923. As it happened, the next council election was not held and no new mayor appointed until 1925.⁵ Ó hÉigearthaigh’s letter also refers to the recent ‘army mutiny’ (the ‘putsch’ in the ‘F[ree]. S[tate]. A[rmy]’). Major General Liam Tobin was one of the leaders of the mutiny, which revolved around an ultimatum made by senior army officers and saw some fifty officers abscond from their posts. Joseph McGrath, the minister for industry and commerce, resigned from Cumann na nGaedheal in sympathy with the ‘mutineers’ and was replaced by General Eoin O’Duffy. The mutiny culminated in the government demanding the resignation of the army’s commander-in-chief, Richard Mulcahy, and the Army Council. But

Amo

pa/aaa (24)

1489, Tomás O. Donnicada

Hospital,
Newbridge Camp
Co. Kildare

6/12/23.

a capa,

Zupa míle míle maicé sgar ar na púsaí
msice go léir a cuspóir cízam. I cannot say
how grateful I am for your kindness in
sending me all the good things in the parcel
which I received safely, with everything therein
correct, as mentioned in your letter.

And I feel more than glad to know that
I am remembered by you and your sisters,
and I hope that I am worthy of your
remembrance. Many changes have taken place
since I used to visit Barrington St. in 1917.
I think that the tea you sent is the best
I ever tasted, but lest you may think that I am
over-praising it I will admit that my palate
has been set astray during the ~~the~~ past
15 months. I haven't tasted the fruit cake
yet, in a few days more I will be able for it.

All the boys here are "progressing
favourably" as the newspapers say. The serious
cases have been taken to the Curragh
Hospital. We have become "as little children"

Fig. 1

as regards food, but some of us find it very hard to restrain our appetites to that extent. I am sorry to say that a few have become "as little children" mentally as well as physically, but we are all recovering.

I have no idea when I shall be released from prison, or what I shall do with myself afterwards, but if I do go to Kerry I shall certainly call to see you all, and be delighted to stay for a few days if I can possibly manage to do so. I hope that yourself and your mother and sisters are all well.

Please excuse pencil, ink is scarce here just now.

Yr mufe,

le zai Seaz-zuidie

Tomás Ó Donnóidá

Fig. 1

166 Boulevard de St Cloud,
Garches, S + O, France

PA/226 (2)

1 of 2

13 - 3 - 74

A capa,

I heard through a letter received this morning a rumour that Liam Forde is to be run as Republican candidate for the Mayoralty. I hope it is only the usual Limerick rumour for two reasons.

1. I do not think Republicans should lend the shadow of legality to Bob's imprisonment by taking part in the election of another Mayor. It implies a recognition of F. S. Govt. I think the correct attitude of Republicans is to challenge the legality of Bob's detention and to move that no Mayor be elected till he is released, the business to be carried on by a deputy. If the election of a Mayor be persisted in, Republicans to withdraw and take no part in election.

2. If ~~Republicans~~ the consensus of Republican opinion is in favour of putting forward a candidate why select Liam. Rightly or wrongly, he was a failure, and I do not approve at all of the suggestion. Are not Mrs O'Donovan and Mrs O'Callaghan both eligible? But, candidly, I do not think Republicans should take any part in accepting Bob as legally jailed.

The patch has come off in the F. S. A. I hear there were no 'incidents' in Limerick command. The English Press publishes Tobin's ultimatum in full. The resignation of McGrath and the appointment of O'Duffy are interesting. To my mind, O'Higgins has struck and joined issue with J.R.B. If John is in earnest, things should hum quickly. A point which does not appear in Irish Press is that he says he was offered £2000 to leave army + refused + he was then offered the 5th Dublin Seat. Strikes me

Fig. 2

as if the Govt will be pretty well shaken in people's eyes.
if they are not actually tumbled. Mulcahy doesn't seem to
be sure of himself. It is significant that his staff as C.M.C
have ~~been~~ resigned, Dick continuing as his P. Sec. but
evidently not Sec to Army Council.

I hope Seamus' little boy is improving rapidly, and
that the rest of us are O.K. Don't too bad myself.

Seamus' best love

Myc
SB

PA/226(2)
2 OF 2

Fig. 2

rather than destabilising the state, as Ó hÉigearthaigh suggested it might, the ‘mutiny’ ultimately served to cement civilian and democratic control over what became the Defence Forces in October.

Madge Daly had long been involved in fundraising for the republican cause and remained a regular contributor in the 1920s. The contribution highlighted here (Fig. 3) was to the Republican Daily Press fund which, established in September 1924, sought to raise capital through selling shares to establish ‘an Irish Republican Daily Press’.⁶ Around the same time, the last issues of the *Freeman’s Journal* (and its sister paper, the *Evening Telegraph*) were being published. Previously an unofficial organ for the Irish Parliamentary Party, it now carried a similar function for the Irish Free State and was owned by Dublin wine-merchant Martin Fitzgerald. After it ceased publication in December 1924, the newspaper’s assets were bought by its arch-rival Independent Newspapers; its *Irish Independent* had earlier overtaken the *Freeman’s Journal* as the largest national daily newspaper. The Republican Daily Press fund had intended to purchase the title and presses of the *Freeman’s Journal* but, as Daly was informed by Robert Brennan (Roibard O’Breandáin), were gazumped by Independent Newspapers in a manner that likely reflected the pro-Treaty standing of both the *Freeman’s Journal* and the *Irish Independent*.⁷ Daly’s £100 donation was returned.

A republican daily newspaper did eventually emerge in 1931 – The *Irish Press*, with Brennan as general manager – but as the organ of Fianna Fáil. When Éamon de Valera proposed a vote of condolence on the death of Madge Daly’s aunt, Ellen, he was still leader of Sinn Féin (Fig. 4). But soon afterwards, in March 1926, he split with the party to found Fianna Fáil. The remaining Sinn Féin party was severely damaged by the split and could only field fifteen candidates in the June 1927 general election and none in the election that followed in September. Austin Stack (1879–1929), who had seconded the motion and forwarded it to Madge Daly as a joint secretary of Sinn Féin, remained a major figure in the party until his death in 1929. Brennan joined Fianna Fáil.

Another anti-Treaty organisation adversely impacted by the defection of members to Fianna Fáil was Cumann na mBan. In 1926, Cumann na mBan had chosen the Easter lily as the symbol for a badge that would be sold to raise funds for the Irish Republican Prisoners’ Dependents Fund and worn at republican commemorations. The fund was originally aimed at the families of republicans imprisoned during the War of Independence but was, as W.T. Cosgrave put it, ‘seized on behalf of the irregulars’ in 1922 and directed at anti-Treaty internees.⁸ The letter sent to Madge Daly in February 1930 (Fig. 5) demonstrates the ambition of the movement in endeavouring to make and sell up to half a million lilies, the agency and activism of the women involved, but also the financial and other challenges they faced (including unemployment among members).⁹ The organisers hoped to make the collection for Easter 1930 ‘the biggest National Collection ever yet held’ which would ‘at least, rival in magnitude the British-Imperialist Poppy Day’.¹⁰

pa/237 (6)

REPUBLICAN DAILY PRESS.

'Phone.—Dublin, 2271.

6 Upper O'Connell Street,
DUBLIN.

Spáiro Uac, Uí Conaill 6
Át Cuiat.

17th Febr'y 1925.

*ans
21/2/25*

Miss Madge Daly.
Ardeevin.
Ennis Rd.
Limerick.

A chara,

I enclose herewith cheque for £100 your subscription towards the deposit fund for the purchase of the Freeman property. There were four tenders sent in and ours was the highest but some time after the tenders were opened the Receiver sold to the Independent Co without communicating with our solicitor in the meantime, although the Independent people had no tender in.

The Committee have decided to suspend activities in connection with the project until the autumn.

I wish to thank you very sincerely for your help in the matter.

Mise le meas,

Robbenaí an

Runaire.

Sinn Féin

23 Suffolk Street,
Dublin.

Roinn.....
(Department of)

PA/220(3)

1 of 2

SRÁID SUPOLA A 23
áC CLAIÉ:

May 8th, 1925.

To:
Miss Madge Daly.

A chara dhí:-

We are directed by the Standing
Committee to forward you the attached copy
Resolution adopted at their meeting on the 7th inst.

Sinne,

Arbairín ar Searc
Searcse O'Dalaigh.
Rúnaíóir Oíonúca

Ans
12/5/1925

Fig. 4

Pa 220 (3)
2012

Proposed by President de Valera
Seconded by Aibistin de Staic

THAT we have heard, with regret,
of the death of Miss Daly, sister
of the late Fenian leader John
Daly of Limerick, and aunt of the
late Commandant Edward Daly, and
that we tender to her relatives our
sincere sympathy in their bereavement,
and that copies of this Resolution be
sent to Alderman Mrs. Kathleen Clarke,
T.D., Dublin, and Miss Madge Daly,
Limerick.

Fig. 4

Cumann na mBan

Roinn Easter Lily Committee.
Data 20adh. Feabhra, 1930.

Ard Oifig,
ATH CLIATH.

27, Dawson Street.

Miss H. O'Daly,
The Bakery,
Sarsfield Street,
Limerick.

A Chera,

You have probably seen through "An Phoblacht" that Cumann na mBan has again undertaken the Organisation of the sale of Easter Lilies this year. We hope to do it on a very large scale so that the whole of the country will be covered as well as every part of the world where there are Irish exiles. In this, we are getting the whole-hearted support of all the Republican Organisations, and with the help of all we are hopeful of making the Commemoration even in a small way worthy of the event it is intended to enshrine in the hearts of the people.

In undertaking this task we have incurred great responsibilities and the financial aspect is not the least of these. In former years our expenses were not very heavy, but this year it will almost be trebled although we are trying to do things in the most economical way. Our aim is to turn out something like from 250,000 to 500,000 Lilies. The making of them is mostly done by voluntary workers, but in order to turn out the number required we have to employ some paid workers. This gives us an opportunity of giving work to our unemployed members. There are also several other expenses in connection with the organisation of the sale, and purchasing of materials.

Up to this, we have been greatly handicapped from **lack of funds**, and to continue the work we are compelled to seek a small loan for about three months, either through a Bank or from some individual.

Cumann na mBan**Roinn** Easter Lily Committee.**Ard Oifig,****Data** 20adh. Feabhra, 1950.**ATH CLIATH.**

27, Dawson Street.

Knowing you to be such a good friend of the Movement and your willingness always to give a helping hand when needed, the Committee have instructed us to write you in the hope that you might be able to secure a loan of £50. for us. The Loan would be in the name of a member of our Executive and so the Organisation need not be mentioned.

We are most reluctant to have to approach you on such a matter as this, and we earnestly hope that in doing so you will not think that we are imposing on your generosity. The Committee would, of course, pay the Bank Interest in full on any Loan secured, and would guarantee to re-pay the Loan as soon as possible after Easter when the returns would permit.

Is sinne, le meas,

Eibhlín de Turbraidebláinín de Cúisín.
Rúnaíche Onóracha.

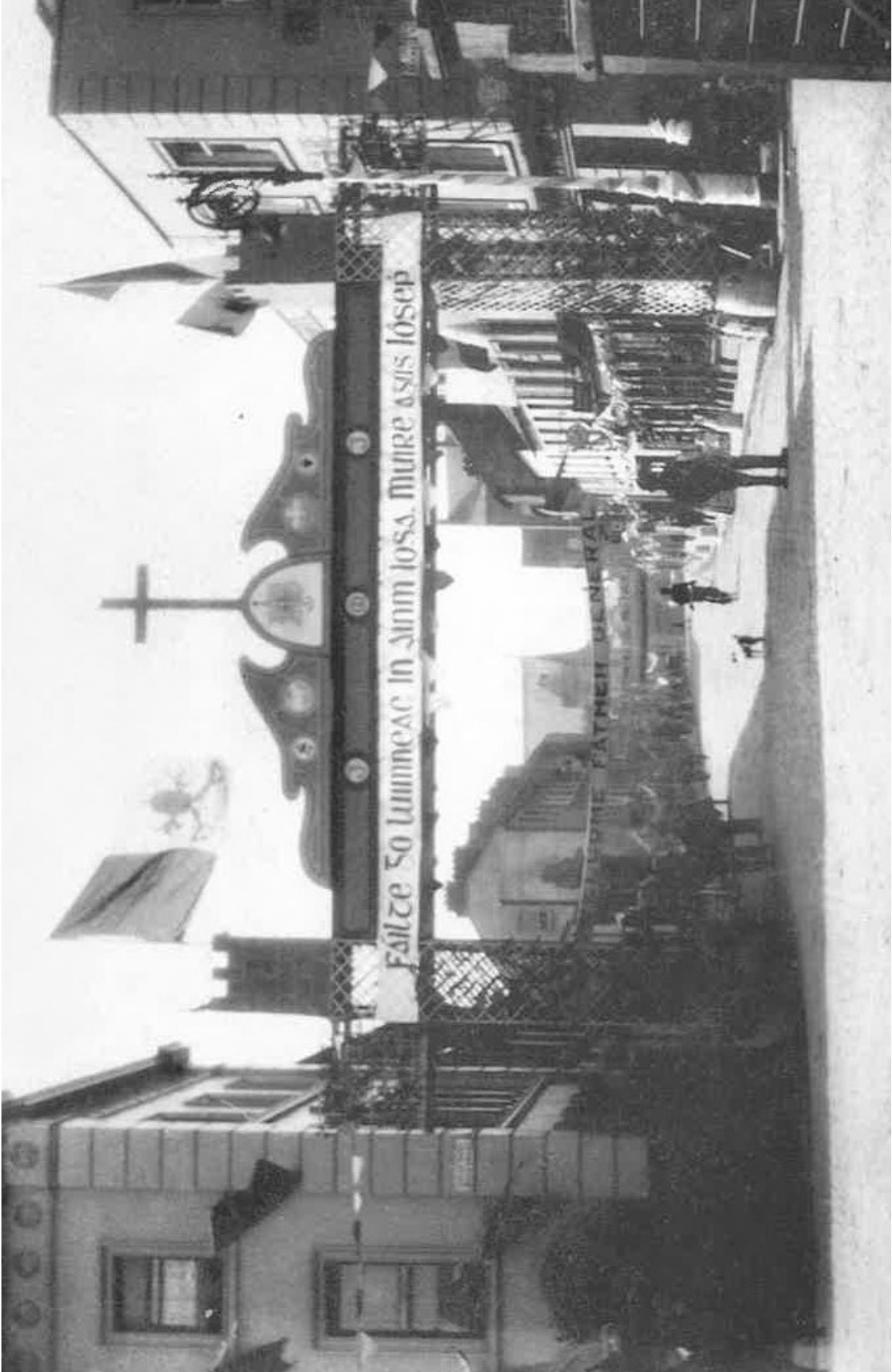
Daly was willing to help secure the loan of £50 that was needed, but this was not without its difficulties as Cumann na mBan had been declared an illegal organisation in 1923. The organisers were informed that as they ‘could not state that the Loan was required for an Organisation’, the letter provided by Daly could not be used, and it was suggested that she apply to the Limerick branch of the bank for a loan in her own name, or provide a letter stating that she would act as guarantor. Though its specifics are not recorded in the surviving correspondence, a solution was found and the original loan application was cancelled.¹¹

Civil War divides were still evident in Limerick by 1930, but the 1916 Rising retained some unifying power. On Easter Sunday 1930, a commemorative procession of ‘large proportions’ marched from Bedford Row to Mount St Lawrence cemetery to commemorate the dead of ‘Easter Week, 1916’. It was reported that “‘Easter Lilies” were worn by hundreds’ and the parade included ‘Boy Scouts, members of the Corporation with the Mayor (Councillor Michael J. Keyes), and adherents of the Republican cause.’¹²

Notes

- 1 ©Special Collections and Archives, Glucksman Library, University of Limerick (ULSCA), P2: Daly Papers.
- 2 Madge Daly was one of ten children of Edward Daly, a timber measurer, and Catherine Daly (née O’Meara). Her father and her uncle, John Daly, were prominent Fenians. Edward Daly died in 1890. In 1898, after periods of exile and imprisonment, John Daly established a successful bakery on William Street (the only premises in Limerick to use Gaelic lettering) where several of his nieces worked. The following year, he was elected mayor of Limerick and would be elected twice more. Both Madge Daly’s brother, Edward, and her brother-in-law, Thomas Clarke, who had married Daly’s younger sister Kathleen, were executed in 1916. When a Limerick city branch of Cumann na mBan was founded soon after the formation of the Irish Volunteers in the city, Madge Daly was appointed its president. The branch, which was dominated by Madge and Kathleen, was described in 1915 as one of the ‘most flourishing’ in Ireland and its activities were carried out in a ‘Fianna Hall’ constructed at the back of the Daly home on Barrington Street, later burned in early 1920 by Crown forces. Daly property was regularly raided during the War of Independence. In April 1921, the bakery – which Madge Daly was involved in running after the death of her uncle in 1916 – and the family home on the Ennis Road, ‘Ardeevin’, were also burned.
- 3 Military Archives, Ireland, Bureau of Military History witness statements, no. 855, p. 12.
- 4 Ó Donnchadha had first been elected to the Dáil in 1921 for the Kerry–West Limerick constituency. He was re-elected in 1922, and again in the August 1923 general election, this time for the new Kerry constituency. He did not contest the next general election in June 1927.
- 5 The Local Election Postponement (Amendment) Act, 1924, which extended the provisions of 1922 and 1923 legislation, allowed the minister for local government to postpone the holding of local elections, prolonging the life of the council elected in 1920 and the mayoralty of, first Stephen O’Mara and, then, Bob de Courcy. The next local elections were eventually held in June 1925 with Paul A. O’Brien of the Progressive Party (a Limerick party whose members were mostly affiliated to Cumann na nGaedheal) elected mayor by the new council. Bob de Courcy was re-elected to the council but did not stand again for mayor. See Matthew Potter, *First citizens of the Treaty City: the mayors and mayoralty of Limerick, 1197–2007* (Limerick, 2007), pp 169–74.
- 6 ‘Republican Daily Press, Circular 1’, c. 1924 (National Library of Ireland (NLI), Ephemera, EPH C222).
- 7 Robert Brennan (1881–1964) had been the first secretary of the Dáil Department of Foreign Affairs but rejected the Anglo-Irish Treaty and became director of publicity for the anti-Treaty IRA before returning to journalism and acting as secretary to the fund’s promotion committee.
- 8 W.T. Cosgrave to Rev. James Duhig, Archbishop of Brisbane, 3 January 1924 (NLI, Ms. 51,462).

- 9 The letter was sent by Blaithnaid Ní Chartaigh and Eibhlín Ní Thiobraide as honorary secretaries of Cumann na mBan.
- 10 Eibhlín Ní Thiobraide and Bláthnaid Ní Chártaigh to republicans in America, 23 December 1929 (NLI, Ms. 17,534/3/22). This was in reference to Armistice Day commemorations, held in November each year to mark the end of the Great War and remember its dead. Poppies were distributed and sold in large numbers across the Irish Free State throughout the 1920s.
- 11 Blaithnaid Ní Chartaigh and Eibhlín Ní Thiobraide to Madge Daly, 18 March 1930 and Blaithnaid Ní Chartaigh and Eibhlín Ní Thiobraide to Madge Daly, 28 March 1930 (ULSCA, P2/1/60/4/3).
- 12 *Limerick Leader*, 21 April 1930.



Davis Street is decorated for the arrival of Cardinal Willem Van Rossum to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of the Arch-Confraternity of the Holy Family, July 1928 (Courtesy Sean Curtin)

III

Religion

**‘The Most Beautiful Men’s Association Which Exists’: Souvenir Handbook
for the Diamond Jubilee of the Arch-Confraternity of the Holy Family,
1928¹**

The Arch-Confraternity of the Holy Family was founded in January 1868, during a mission to the men of Limerick instituted by the local Redemptorist fathers to this end. This three-week event, which commenced on the evening of New Year’s Day, was a huge success. In the words of the then rector at Mount St Alphonsus, Thomas Bridgett CSsR, ‘the church was crowded night after night, and the confessional thronged all day long’, and 8,000 people received communion.² The mission culminated in the inauguration of the Arch-Confraternity on 20 January when all attendees were invited to join. Around 1,400 did so immediately and numbers increased so steadily afterwards that it soon became necessary to divide it into two ‘divisions’ to facilitate meetings; St John’s (King’s Island, Irishtown, and Liberties parishes) and St Michael’s (the city centre parish of the same name) which met on Monday and Tuesday evenings respectively. A separate division for ‘working boys’, which came to meet fortnightly on Wednesdays, was established in 1891. Women were excluded from the Arch-Confraternity, but eventually formed a (far smaller) sodality of their own. By 1903, the membership of the male divisions exceeded 6,500 and the Arch-Confraternity became, as Síle de Cléir has put it, ‘the most important devotional organization in men’s lives in the first half of the twentieth century’.³

The Arch-Confraternity was run by a spiritual director and organised along quasi-military lines; each division was divided into sections around thirty-strong, which were managed by prefects and sub-prefects chosen and trained by the spiritual director. It was originally established to heal what the local Redemptorist fathers saw as ‘the dangerous estrangement between [the clergy] and the people’, which they believed had followed on from clerical opposition to Fenianism.⁴ Its ‘first and chief rule and end’ was the veneration of the Holy Family and the advancement of members’ salvation through prayer, scripture, and sacraments.⁵ Under this aspect, members were expected to take communion at least once a month at meetings and present for largely bi-annual devotional activities such as retreats, requiem masses for deceased members, ‘forty hours adorations’, and Marian processions. Participation in these activities promoted group cohesion amongst members drawn from different socioeconomic backgrounds, while public events such as the thousands-strong processions, which brought Limerick city centre to a standstill, emblematised the Arch-Confraternity’s power and influence within local Catholic life. This power, very much temporal as well as moral and spiritual, was closely guarded. Attendance at communion and other events was monitored by the prefects and those deemed ‘backsliders’ or ‘negligent’ in duty faced expulsion – a fate which befell

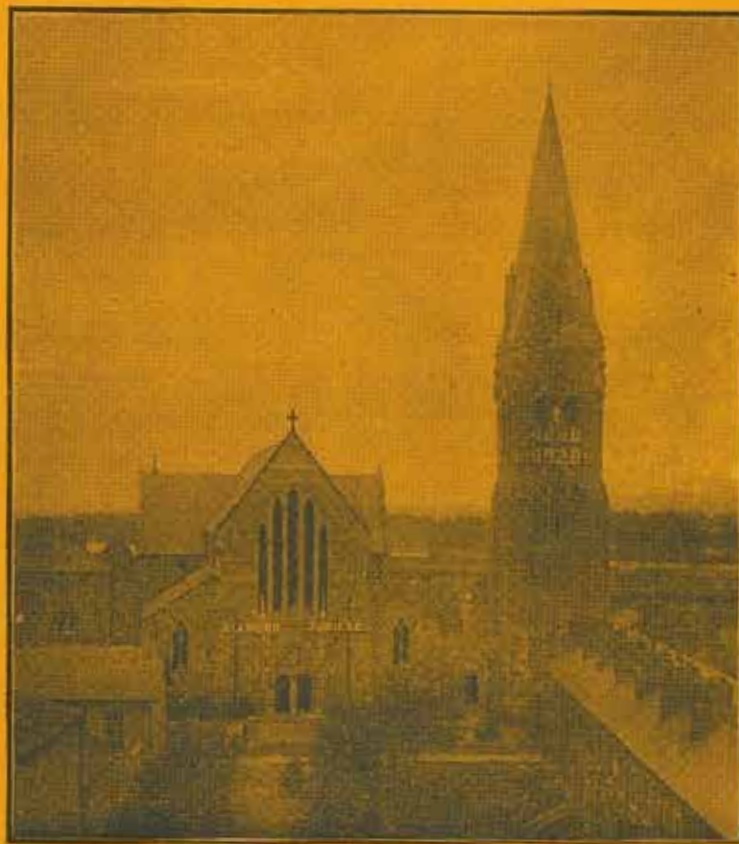
1868

Souvenir

1928

— OF THE —

DIAMOND JUBILEE



Arch-Confraternity of the Holy Family,

Mount St. Alphonsus, Limerick

Celebrated 22nd JULY, 1928.

PRICE . . . 6d.

Printed and Published by Limerick Leader, Ltd., Limerick.

CARDINAL'S TRIBUTE

To Arch-Confraternity

"A REAL GLORY FOR THE IRISH PEOPLE"

Addressing the men of the Confraternity at the nine o'clock Mass in the Redemptorist Church on Sunday, His Eminence, Cardinal Van Rossum, said—
My Dear Friends,

With an intense feeling of joy I have accepted the kind invitation to be present at the solemn celebration of your Diamond Jubilee, and it is for me another deep sense of delight and satisfaction to find myself amongst you at this memorable moment.

The man who founded your Confraternity now sixty years ago, the excellent religious and prominent priest who bore the name of Father Bridgett—I had the pleasure to know him. I met him forty-two years ago, when he came to our Convent at Witlem in Holland for the Golden Jubilee of the Students' Home, where so many of your Irish Redemptorist Fathers have had their priestly, religious and theological education. Another Irish Father who was intimately connected with your glorious Arch-Confraternity and whom I knew for many years in Rome, was Father Magnier.

These two venerable priests, and not less the Most Reverend Father General, your highly esteemed country man, Father Murray, whom I know so many years and appreciated always more for his virtues, told me many times about your marvellous organisation. And every time I felt an exceptional joy when I heard how it was always increasing in numbers and flourishing more and more and how full of zeal and true faith were its members.

The whole Catholic world celebrates the praises of your Confraternity; it is called the most beautiful men's association which exists; a real glory for the Irish people, an image of the constant, firm and invincible faith, of a faith which shows itself in a life according to its principles, and which has resisted the attacks of so many centuries.

I rejoice, dear friends, in assisting at this Jubilee and in seeing with my own eyes the immense benefits you have found in the life of your Association.

I congratulate with all my heart your Directors and yourself on your flourishing, incomparable Arch-Confraternity.

I pray God that you may persevere always as faithful, zealous members of this Association.

I was myself for many years Director of the Holy Family at Witlem and know by my own experience what a rich heavenly blessing the faithfulness to the membership and its duties bestow on the associates themselves and on their families.

Before leaving Rome, I spoke to the Holy Father about your splendid organisation and I asked him the faculty to bless you in his name, yourselves and your families, all your relations and all your interests.

The Holy Father answered: "With great pleasure I grant to you this faculty because by this I shall myself be present in spirit and take part in the joy of those good men."

So I shall give you now this Papal Blessing asking Jesus, Mary and Joseph that the blessing of the Vicar of Christ on earth may be for you all a pledge for your happiness on earth and for your everlasting life in heaven.

His Eminence then imparted the Papal Blessing.

an average of one hundred members per annum at the turn of the twentieth century and was described by the Redemptorists themselves as ‘a worse omen than death, for it has been remarked that God’s punishment often follows an expelled member’.⁶ Neither was temporal punishment unknown; for example, expulsion from the Arch-Confraternity meant automatic ejection from St Michael’s Temperance Society as well. While this could doubtless feel oppressive and even coercive, members interviewed by de Cléir who attended during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s also spoke positively of the routine, the social aspect, and the sense of community, as well as the local rivalries that emerged between sections as they sought to demonstrate the devotion of their local areas.⁷

In 1928, the Arch-Confraternity celebrated its diamond jubilee and produced an illustrated souvenir handbook priced at 6d. Membership had by now increased to 8,000 (representing approximately two-thirds of the city’s eligible Catholic males), necessitating the creation of a third men’s division – St Clement’s – to accommodate what had become the largest male sodality in the world. This handbook, images from which are here presented, was compiled to mark the jubilee’s official celebration in mid-July. The international importance of the Arch-Confraternity was demonstrated by the fact that both the prefect of the Vatican’s Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, Cardinal Willem van Rossum CSsR, and the superior-general of the Redemptorist order, Patrick Murray CSsR, travelled to Limerick from Rome to take part. They were welcomed at the railway station by the mayor and nine Irish bishops and brought to Mount St Alphonsus in a procession which included civic officials and local clergy, the Te Deum Choir and the Boherbuoy Band, and several hundred sodality members.

Van Rossum’s address to the members, delivered at Sunday mass on 22 July and published in the handbook, attests to the esteem and reverence in which the sodality was held. ‘The whole Catholic world celebrates the praises of your Confraternity’, he said, ‘the most beautiful men’s association which exists’. It was, he continued, ‘a real glory for the Irish people’ and confraternities from county towns such as Rathkeale, Newcastle West, and Bruff, as well as from Dublin, Belfast, Tipperary, and Wexford took part in the diamond jubilee procession later that day. The Arch-Confraternity’s ‘glory’ continued for decades thereafter, as its membership increased, reaching 10,000 by its centenary year of 1968.

Notes

- 1 Courtesy of Limerick Diocesan Archives.
- 2 Cyril Ryder, *Life of Thomas Edward Bridgett: priest of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, with characteristics from his writings* (London, 1906), 44.
- 3 Síle de Cléir, *Popular Catholicism in twentieth century Ireland: locality, identity and culture* (London, 2017), p. 34.
- 4 Ryder, *Thomas Edward Bridgett*, p. 46.
- 5 Mount Saint Alphonsus Monastery (Limerick), *Fifty years at Mount Saint Alphonsus, 1853–1903* (Limerick, 1903), p. 50.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 51.
- 7 de Cléir, *Popular Catholicism*, pp 29–35.

‘The Committee Appeal to the Members to Help to Make the Association a Living Body’: Letter from the Limerick Protestant Young Men’s Association to Union Assurance Ltd., 1925, and Extract from the Association’s Annual Report, 1929¹

The Limerick Protestant Young Men’s Association (LPYMA) was founded in April 1853 as a facility in which Protestant men of different denominations and social class in the Limerick city area could come together in good fellowship and advance their ‘spiritual, mental, moral, social and physical improvement’ through academic activities and sports.² In the 1920s, these activities comprised a bible studies group, lecture series, and ‘literary classes’, as well as hockey, cricket, tennis, badminton, and billiards clubs – a rugby club was formed in 1929.³ While the LPYMA’s membership, which extended to the great majority of the city’s Protestant families, was largely Church of Ireland, its governing authority comprised clergy from the main churches alongside elected officials, most importantly a president and a number of vice-presidents generally drawn from the local business and professional classes. Its long-serving president, Archibald Murray, was a successful Presbyterian businessman, who was succeeded on his death in 1927 by Gerald Goodbody, a member of the Quaker family who controlled the milling industry in Limerick city. Its roll of vice-presidents during this time included Barringtons, Cleeves, Goodbodys, Dennys, and Shaws.

As Craig Copley Brown has noted, the LPYMA had, as a thoroughly loyal institution, ‘found itself caught between the old world of empire and union’ and the emerging new Ireland during the Irish revolutionary years.⁴ This loyalty was most publicly demonstrated during this period by its strong support for the British war effort in 1914/18, which included fundraising and active enlistment: 164 members joined the armed forces, thirty-one of whom were killed. It also extended honorary membership to Protestant soldiers serving with Limerick city’s British Army garrison, and the association’s clubhouse at 97 O’Connell Street and sports ground in Farranshone became for them such popular recreational spaces that, by March 1919, the clubhouse had logged over 500,000 individual visits by soldiers in the previous four years. This saw the association’s membership increase significantly, averaging around 450 in 1914/18 and peaking at 532 in 1920, the largest number since its foundation.⁵ The LPYMA’s loyalty, however, came at a price. As Limerick city’s most prominent social space for Protestants (and thus loyalists, including British military personnel), it became a target of attack by anti-Treaty elements in spring 1922; the pavilion at Farranshone was completely burnt out on 29 March, and the clubhouse was damaged by gunfire and explosive devices on 30 March and 2 April respectively.⁶

These attacks were likely a catalyst for concerns for the LPYMA's future in independent Ireland, a changed political landscape where 'the place, acceptance, and strength of Protestant sociability ... might be at risk'.⁷ As with Protestant churches and institutions nationwide, adaptation, rather than resistance, to the new dispensation became the way forward. As the bishop of Limerick told the 1926 Church of Ireland general synod, 'changes and chances are the essence of mortal life' and 'if we are to turn them to our advantage, we are more likely to do it by courageous determination than by beating our breasts over the wrongs and misfortunes of the past.'⁸ This adaptation was exemplified by a reorientation from former unionist politics to public support for the new state. In the case of the LPYMA, this was heralded by Archibald Murray's address to its AGM in October 1922. In what Copley Brown terms 'a profound departure from the [association's] earlier views', he told members that 'the Government they now had in the country was constituted by Divine right and that they were placed there to obey and keep its laws'. Consequently, the LPYMA was 'ready ... to say that they wished [it] every success' and 'would work in every possible way to assist it in all its lawful endeavours'.⁹ Yet this accommodation to the Irish Free State did not necessitate a complete dismissal of old allegiances either, and the meeting ended with a rendition of the 'National Anthem' – 'God Save the King' – as did subsequent AGMs throughout the 1920s.¹⁰

The documents presented here demonstrate that fears for the LPYMA's future were unfounded. The March 1925 letter from its honorary secretary, J.E. Galbraith, to the Union Assurance Company in Dublin forms part of the LPYMA papers held at UL Special Collections and Archives. Galbraith's enquiry about the availability of outstanding monies due in compensation for the burning of the Farranshone pavilion in 1922 illustrates the association's efforts to secure its future financially. The LPYMA ran debit balances on both its current and building accounts throughout the 1920s and was compelled to raise its annual membership subscription from 15s to 20s in 1925 when its 'ordinary income' was 'not sufficient to meet ordinary expenditure, not to speak of making provision' for the maintenance of its premises.¹¹ At the Farranshone sports ground, a temporary pavilion erected in the immediate wake of the arson attack was still in use and compensation funds previously received were being used to offset interest on the association's building account overdraft. (The association had been awarded £993 with costs against Limerick Corporation under the terms of the Criminal Injuries (Ireland) Act, 1920 in June 1922, and had accepted an offer of £860 from Union Assurance in April 1923, without prejudice to the remainder). However, what it termed the 'pavilion money' already received was now being spent on the construction of a wall at the ground which, completed that summer, cost around £1,000.

The extract from the LPYMA annual report for 1929 also shows the association's determination to secure its future. Although reports for the previous five years chart a general membership decline – falling steadily from 455 in 1924 to 384 in 1927 – it records an increase to 400. While Irish Protestant depopulation was likely a factor in this decline, this report indicates

SEVENTY-SIXTH
ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

Limerick Protestant Young Men's Association,

97, O'Connell Street,

Adopted at the Annual General Meeting, held at

THE LECTURE HALL,

ON TUESDAY EVG., 22nd OCTOBER, 1929.

Gerald E. Goodbody, Esq., President,

in the Chair.

With Appendix of Members' Names, etc.

C. H. DAVIS, PRINTER, LIMERICK.

SEVENTY-SIXTH ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

Limerick Protestant Young Men's Association,

For the Twelve Months ending September 30th, 1929.

IN submitting to the Members the 76th Annual Report of the Association, your Committee are deeply conscious of the blessings Almighty God has bestowed on the work which has been carried on in the various departments of the Association.

During the Session the Association has sustained a serious loss in the removal by death of two of its Vice-Presidents, Very Rev. Dean Hackett, D.D., and W. A. Fogerty, M.D. For many years they were closely identified with the working of the Association. They freely gave of their advice and time to its work and set a high standard of Christian life and conduct.

We record with regret the death of Mr. J. N. Russell, a valued Vice-President and friend, Mr. J. F. Beunis, the oldest surviving member, Mr. A. W. Dunlop and Mr. W. Mitchell.

The formation of a Dramatic Class has been welcomed by all interested in the literary side of the Association. The public performance in the Lecture Hall of two plays was a great success from a dramatic point of view, but the exceptional keenness and enthusiasm of the members were not encouraged by the attendance of the general members of the Association. The receipts were barely sufficient to cover the expenses. During the ensuing Session it is hoped that members will support it by their presence on the occasion of its performances.

As in previous years, one of your Vice-Presidents, when in London, placed a wreath at the Cenotaph in memory of your members who fell in the great war.

Again the Hockey Club has distinguished itself and the Association by its record in the field of play. It won its way into the final of the Irish Senior Cup, and was only beaten by the margin of one goal after a desperate struggle.

A Rugby Football Club has been formed by the younger members of the Association, and from the talent available a successful season seems assured.

It is desired to place on record our great appreciation of the very valuable work being carried on amongst the junior members of the Association by the Church Lads' Brigade. In addition to the excellent disciplinary training which the lads receive, outdoor and indoor games, a gymnastic class, a signalling class and a dramatic class, as well as summer camps, sports and cycle runs, are organised by the Officers, to whom a debt of gratitude is due.

It is gratifying to the Committee to report an increase of 15 in the roll of membership. The number now stands at 400.

The Statement of Accounts submitted by the Hon. Treasurer shows that the adverse balance on the General Account of the Association has been reduced and now stands at £38 11s.

There is a debit balance on the Building Fund Account of £238 3s. 5d. and a credit balance to Painting and Renovating Fund of £42 13s. 2d.

Your Committee are concerned at the condition of the Lecture Hall roof which is in need of considerable repairs. Within the next few years a serious effort will have to be made to raise the necessary funds for the carrying out of the work.

In conclusion the Committee appeal to the members to help to make the Association a living body. The members have full control of the working of the Association, and it is in their hands to make it what they will. Many members complain of its want of vitality but they are the very ones who do the least to help. The passive onlooker and the critic are the bane of an Association such as this. If members will only put their best into the working of the Association they may look forward to the future with confidence.

BIBLE CLASS.

The Bible Class was held regularly during last session, and as we have had to record for some years past, the attendance, though small, was constant. Indeed, the consistency of the attendance of those who do come to the class encourage us to believe that if others would only make the experiment of coming once or twice they, too, might find our meetings sufficiently interesting to induce them to become "regulars" also. We studied portions of St. Matthew's Gospel, and there was no lack of discussion upon the various subjects brought forward, and discussion is, of course, one of the essentials of a successful class. Once more we appeal to the younger members of the P.Y.M.A. to support the premier class of the Association.

LITERARY CLASS.

<i>President</i>	-	<i>A. J. Bakins, Esq.</i>
<i>Hon. Secretary</i>	-	<i>W. B. Furlong, Esq.</i>

If sustained interest, increased attendance, variety of subjects and appreciative merit are descriptive of a successful session, then the Literary Class for 1928-1929 surpassed its previous achievements.

Though we had no expensive professional lecture last winter to help to swell the attendance, the average attendance exceeded that of former years.

P23/165 (1)

Limerick Protestant Young Men's Association.

— FOUNDED 1853 —

Patrons (THE RIGHT REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF LIMERICK, D.D.
THE RIGHT REV. BISHOP ORPEN, D.D.

President:
ARCHIBALD MURRAY.
Hon. Treas.
WALTER DUNN.
Hon. Sec.
J. E. GALBRAITH.

Motto:
"Quit Yourselves Like Men."

97 O'CONNELL STREET,

Limerick,

25-3-25.

Copy

Union Assurance Co., Ltd.,
Dublin,

Dear Sirs,

With reference to the Decree which we obtained against the Limerick Corporation in the matter of the fire at our Sportsfield some years ago; and which we transferred to you:

We are taking steps to put the field, etc. in proper order, and I have been asked to enquire if the matter of payment of the Decree has yet been completed, as we will want all the money we can get to carry out the necessary improvements.

I should be glad to hear from you, at convenience, with any information you can give me to place before my Committee.
Thanking you in anticipation.

Faithfully yours,

W. Galbraith

Hon. Sec.

that apathy amongst the enrolled and eligible membership was also an issue. Therein, ‘the Committee appeal[ed] to the members to help to make the [LPYMA] a living body’ which could successfully retain and recruit active members, and it denounced ‘the passive onlooker and the critic’ who were ‘the bane of an Association such as this’.¹²

In this, the LPYMA was, ultimately, successful. It remained very much a ‘living body’ for much of the twentieth century and it is still in existence today. Its O’Connell Street premises, beautifully restored in 2024, is the longest in continuous ownership on the street.

Notes

- 1 ©Special Collections and Archives, Glucksman Library, University of Limerick, Records of the Limerick Protestant Young Men’s Association, P23/165; *Seventy-Sixth Annual Report of the Limerick Protestant Young Men’s Association*, 1929 (Courtesy of Craig Copley Brown).
- 2 Quotation from the ‘Rules and regulations of the Limerick Protestant Young Men’s Association’, as published in the 1929 Annual Report, p. 4.
- 3 The hockey club was particularly successful in the 1920s, reaching the Irish Senior Cup final on a number of occasions, and winning in 1928.
- 4 Craig Copley Brown, ‘Muscular Christians: the Limerick Protestant Young Men’s Association, 1912–1923’ in Seán William Gannon and Brian Hughes, *Histories of Protestant Limerick, 1912–1923* (Limerick, 2023), pp 75–81, at p. 76.
- 5 Craig Copley Brown, ‘Forming identities: Protestant male sociability in Limerick, 1813–1923’ (unpublished undergraduate dissertation, University of Limerick, 2022), p. 16.
- 6 Liam Forde, commandant of the IRA’s Mid-Limerick Brigade, denounced these attacks as ‘cowardly and unjust’, and emphasised that they were not committed under official IRA sanction.
- 7 Copley Brown, ‘Muscular Christians’, p. 80.
- 8 *Northern Standard*, 26 June 1926.
- 9 Copley Brown, ‘Muscular Christians’, p. 79; *Freeman’s Journal*, 23 October 1922.
- 10 Two-minute silences were observed during this period for the thirty-one members who fell in the Great War, and an association vice-president routinely placed a wreath at the Cenotaph in London each year. *Seventy-Second Annual Report of the Limerick Protestant Young Men’s Association*, 1925, p. 7.
- 11 *Seventy-Sixth Annual Report of the Limerick Protestant Young Men’s Association*, 1929, p. 8.

‘I Think Everything Should Be Done to Ban This Stuff’: Letter from Fr Richard S. Devane SJ to Reverend James Dempsey, 1926¹

Richard Stanislaus Devane (1876–1951) was born at 29 William Street, Limerick on 9 September 1876 to grocer Cornelius Devane and his wife Joanna (née McCormack). The eldest of three sons and a daughter, he was first educated at the local Christian Brothers school before moving to Crescent College and later Mungret College, both run by the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). In 1895, Devane began studying for the priesthood at St Munchin’s, then situated just outside of Limerick city, and finished his studies at St Patrick’s College, Maynooth, where he was ordained in 1901. Following three years in a parish in Middlesbrough in England, Devane returned to Limerick as pastor of St Michael’s parish where he was involved in ‘rescue and vigilance work’, the temperance movement, and (with the support of the Limerick Borough Council) the early regulation of cinemas.² In July 1918, he left Limerick to enter the Society of Jesus at St Stanislaus College, Templemore and was appointed director of the retreat house for working men at Rathfarnham Castle in Dublin in 1922 (a position he held until 1933 and again from 1945 until his death).

A devoted advocate and prolific writer, Devane was perhaps best-known publicly in the 1920s for his campaigns for legal redress for mothers and offspring in irregular unions and for the regulation of imported literature. By the mid-1920s, there were widespread calls in the Irish Free State for the censorship of so-called ‘evil literature’ – material, usually imported, that dealt with matters of sex, contraception, divorce, crime, and other subjects deemed likely to corrupt impressionable minds. In February 1925, Devane published an article in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* entitled ‘Indecent Literature: Some Legal Remedies’. It called for the state to use its ‘new won’ powers to censor and restrict the importation of ‘indecent literature’. Whereas Devane had earlier been involved in a ‘vigilance committee’ that could pressure shopkeepers in Limerick to boycott certain publications, he believed that this was less likely to work in larger and more religiously-diverse cities.

For Devane and those like him, this was part of a broader desire – promoted by the Catholic Church in alliance with the government – to de-Anglicise the state and mould Irish youth according to ‘true Christian values’. Devane was especially concerned with advertisements for contraceptives published in imported English newspapers next to more mundane material that could be easily and inadvertently accessed. Moreover, as Martin Walsh has noted, ‘Devane would argue repeatedly – to the day that he died – that Irish publications were being crushed under the weight of cheap foreign publications that were allowed into the country without restriction.’³ Efforts to control what people read, as well as what they watched, wore, how they danced, and the music they listened to were further motivated by the perceived need for a

return to ‘some sense of societal normality, order, and control after the Civil War.’⁴ A number of lay Catholic organisations, including the Catholic Truth Society and the Irish Vigilance Association, conducted a vigorous campaign against ‘evil literature’ in the 1920s – following a similar campaign over a decade earlier.

In 1924, the Priests’ Social Guild, of which Devane was a member, presented the case for censorship of literature legislation to Minister for Justice Kevin O’Higgins (the Censorship of Films Act was passed in 1923). In February 1926, O’Higgins finally responded to outside pressure with the formation of a committee to report and advise on ‘whether it is necessary or advisable in the interest of the public morality to extend the existing powers of the State to prohibit or restrict the sale and circulation of printed matter.’⁵ The Committee on Evil Literature was made up of five men, including one Catholic and one Protestant clergyman.

Devane received a ‘special invitation’ to come before the committee (the only individual to do so), and was one of six individuals and eight organisations to present evidence and recommendations.⁶ The copy letter reproduced here is found among a file of correspondence between Devane and the committee, mostly with the committee’s secretary J.P. Clare of the Department of Justice. It was written to Reverend James Dempsey, a friend of Devane’s and member of both the Priests’ Social Guild and the Committee on Evil Literature. Updating Dempsey on his efforts to convince interested parties to come before the committee, the letter was written as Devane convalesced from an ‘attack’ of ill-health at the Sacred Heart Convalescent Home in Milford, County Limerick.

Devane gave his evidence to the Committee on Evil Literature in June 1926 and the final report was presented to the government in December (Devane had spent the interim complaining about the delay). The report largely reflected the recommendations of Devane and other witnesses, where there was almost universal agreement on the need for some censorship of publications, and formed the basis of the Censorship of Publications Act, 1929. As the bill had worked its way through the Oireachtas, Limerick County Council passed a resolution offering its ‘whole-hearted approval to the general principles embodied in the Censorship Bill’, and further denouncing any ‘sinister amendments’ that might ‘weaken or emasculate the Bill’. The tone of the meeting is captured in the headline of the *Limerick Leader*’s report, a quote from one of the councillors present: ‘Outpourings of Hell’. That same councillor paid ‘tribute to the City of Limerick, where action was first taken to stem the flow of filthy newspapers, and where they were publicly burned.’⁷ The Act that came into law allowed for the banning of printed material deemed ‘indecent or obscene’, any material relating to contraception, and anything that ‘devoted an unduly large proportion of space to the publication of matter relating to crime’. To oversee this, a five-member Censorship of Publications Board was formed.

COPY.

Sacred Heart Convalescent Home,
Milford,
Limerick.

April, 31st. 1926

My dear Father Dempsey,

A reference to your Committee and its sittings suggested my writing to you. I went to Dublin about 10 weeks ago to organise and help to organise Evidence and witnesses and was fairly successful in so far as I got Primary and Secondary Dublin Teachers to send forward representatives to the Committee and also got the Knights of Columbanus & Catholic Writers Guild interested. However in the midst of the operations I got an attack which developed and left me 9 weeks hors de combat. I am here convalescing. Judging by yesterday's report things are moving slowly. I shall not be able to give evidence for some considerable time. I got some Protestants interested - Dean Kennedy and some organisation of 'Christian Churches' - I think it must be the Copeck affair. They have a committee of 6 going into the question I suggested we should take up Birth Control Propaganda and he wrote saying many conscientious "Christian" people believe in this practice. I wrote and said while our Church was very definite in its teaching and while the State did not interfere with present practice it was quite a different matter when there was question of indiscriminate sale of such books involving the corruption of the young and the spreading of amateur prostitution. I suggested that a friend of mine would put some of this hideous literature at his disposal but he did not rise to the offer. I think everything should be done to ban this stuff. Frank Duff (Vincent de Paul Society, Myra

House) has a choice collection of catalogues, advertisement and books dealing with this unsavoury matter which it may be well you would have a look through. We showed Mr. Clare some of this but he did not seem to be impressed. In England there are lending libraries now being established in Mills where girls work, circulating copies and other articles of this filthy pornographic matter. There is nothing to prevent a few fanatics going round and spreading it here at home. I do hope we get a distinct definition of obscenity simply because as long as we have the same definition our legal friends will say - if such and such a book is allowed circulate in England and is not regarded as obscene why should we prevent it in Free State. I found the legal mind is dominated by English tradition and practice and unless we break away altogether we shall be still ruled by the English standards.

I showed these Teachers etc. some of this Birth Control stuff and they were really horrified. It is a pity we cannot get a few educated women to come forward and give their views on Birth Control propoganda. I think they would help to impress the Committee.

I have a good deal of miscellaneous matter collected for evidence but am forbidden all work at present. I hope whatever the Committee does that it will deal drastically with this Birth Control stuff -(1) Advertisements, (2) Catalogues and (3) Books. France & Belgium have now placed Birth Control on same level, as far as propoganda etc. is concerned, as Abortion. This is a marvellous volt face. The U.S.A. Fedral & State Law is very strong also and so is

Sweden.

Wishing your efforts every success.

I am,
Dear Father Dempsey,
Yours sincerely,

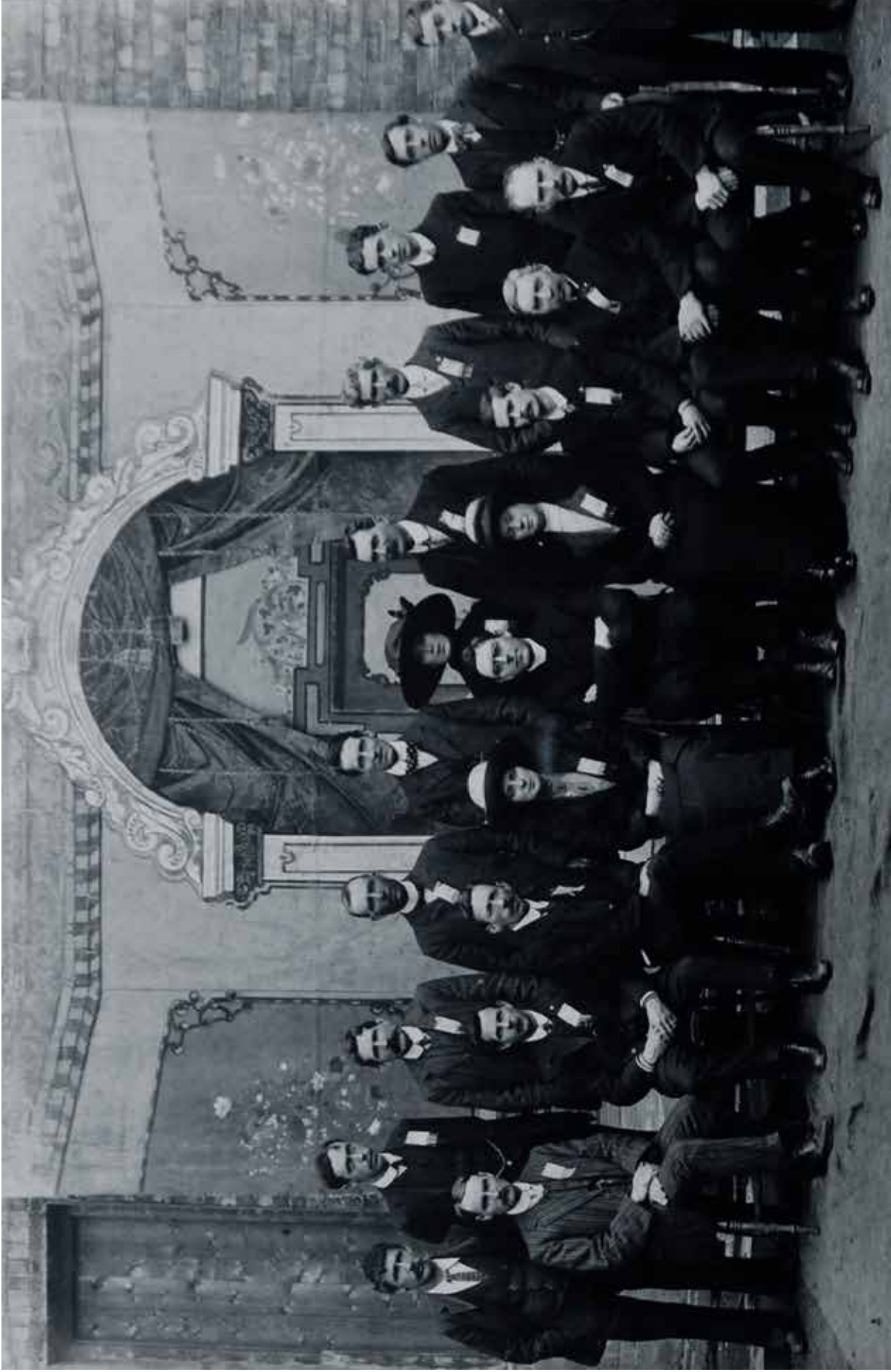
R. S. Devane, S.J.,

Rev. J. Dempsey, P.S.

The censorship of ‘obscene’ literature was not a solely Irish obsession, as Devane identifies in his letter to Dempsey, but the letter does highlight the extent to which it exercised minds in Limerick and elsewhere in the Irish Free State in the 1920s.

Notes

- 1 National Archives/JUS/7/2/9 – Typed copy of letter from Fr Richard Devane to Rev James Dempsey, 21 April 1926. *Reproduced by kind permission of the Director of the National Archives of Ireland.*
- 2 Cinemas had been placed under local authority control by the Cinematograph Act of 1909.
- 3 Martin Walsh, *Richard Devane SJ: social commentator and advocate, 1876–1951* (Dublin, 2019), pp 85–6.
- 4 Aidan Beatty, ‘Where does the state end and the church begin? The strange career of Richard S. Devane’, *Studi Irlandesi*, 9/9 (2019), pp 443–64, at p. 447.
- 5 *Report of the Committee on Evil Literature* (Dublin, 1927), p. 3.
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp 4–5. In addition to the ‘special invitations’, an open call to interested parties was issued in the press.
- 7 *Limerick Leader*, 18 February 1929. The only councillor to demur was Gilbert Hewson, who agreed with the principle but cautioned that its ‘wide’ powers could be ‘abused’.



Richard Devane (front row, centre) with St Michael's Temperance Society Dramatic Society. Devane was the society's president at this time (Courtesy St Michael's Rowing Club, with thanks to Kieran Kerr)

All communications to be addressed to the Firm at Limerick and not to Individuals.

The Limerick Clothing Factory, Limited

TELEGRAMS:
DISPLAYED, LIMERICK.
DISPLAYED, DUBLIN.
DISPLAYED, LONDON.
NO 45 LIMERICK
TELEPHONE 1789 DUBLIN.



LONDON OFFICE
24, CLAVERTON STREET,
PIMLICO, S. W.

LIMERICK, 16th August. 1928.

The Mayor of Limerick.

Town Hall.

Dear Sir,

In reply to your letter of the 14th inst., asking us to allow 3 of our employees who are members of the Boherbuoy No.1. Brass and Reed Band, to go to Dublin on Thursday next to compete in the Tailteann Games, we have much pleasure in agreeing to your request.

Yours truly,

THE LIMERICK CLOTHING FACTORY LTD.,

J. M. Ruffin
MANAGING DIRECTOR.,

Limerick Clothing Factory grants Mayor Michael Keyes' request that employees who are members of the Boherbuoy Band be given leave to attend the second Tailteann Games in 1928. It was one of several city businesses to do so. (*Limerick Archives, Mayors of Limerick City/Limerick County Council, Correspondence: Letter Books, L/FR/MY/2/1/5*).

III

Work and Business

‘Business Gone Down and Going Down Still More’: Extract from Leo Matterson’s Unpublished History of Joseph Matterson & Sons Ltd, 1925 and Letter from IT&GWU to James Bannatyne & Sons, 1929¹

By the turn of the twentieth century, Limerick was recognised internationally as an important manufacturing centre. Native, predominantly Protestant-owned Limerick firms such as the Limerick Clothing Factory and Cleeve’s Condensed Milk Company of Ireland were taking advantage of Ireland’s membership of the British empire to access its overseas markets, while Limerick lace, the production of which had been commercialised in the late 1820s, was a popular luxury commodity in Britain, Australia, and the United States. What Frank Prendergast termed Limerick’s ‘primacy in the area of ham and bacon products’ was also internationally acknowledged.² Four large-scale curing factories were established in Limerick in the nineteenth century: Matterson’s (c.1820), Shaw’s (1831), O’Mara’s – alone Catholic-owned (c.1840), and Denny’s (1872).³ Their custom curing recipes created ‘the unique sweet [less salty] taste that made Limerick bacon famous’ and, by 1900, they had ‘put Limerick on the map internationally’, exporting to, and/or operating in countries as diverse as Britain, Germany, Spain, Russia, South Africa, India, China, and the United States.⁴ The trade became so central to Limerick’s economy that the city came to be referred to as ‘Pig Town’.

But business was not without its challenges. Irish bacon exports were increasingly undercut by competitively priced imports, primarily from America and Denmark, while the high cost of foodstuff resulted in periodic shortages of pig supply to Irish factories. By the 1920s, the trade was in general decline, recorded in the extract from a private company history of Joseph Matterson & Sons Ltd. presented here. Written by Joseph’s son, Leo, and held at Limerick Diocesan Archives, it charts the fortunes of the family business from 1890 until 1929. Although Matterson intended that it be destroyed on his death, it found its way into the papers of LPYMA president Archibald Murray, and was subsequently purchased by Bishop Jeremiah Newman, a keen collector of historical material relating to Limerick.⁵ In 1925, Matterson was reporting ‘business gone down and going down still more’ and, by 1929, that ‘the very profitable days’ of bacon manufacture were ‘a thing of the past’. His part apportioning of blame to the change in ‘type and ideas’ of the ‘Irish peasant’ betrays an ascendancy mindset and suggests a degree of difficulty in emotional adjustment to the new Irish socio-political landscape.

The 1920s was also a period of ‘business gone, going down still more’ for Limerick’s other traditional industry, milling. It developed in medieval times and, by the early 1800s, ‘it would have been difficult not to be near a mill or a grain store’ in the city.⁶ In the nineteenth century, the local industry was reshaped by technological advances and the establishment of the

A
FORTY YEARS HISTORY
OF THE
VARIATIONS IN THE FORTUNES OF
THE FIRM OF J MATTERSON AND SONS LTD.

BETWEEN
1st JANUARY 1890 & 31st DECEMBER 1929
AND THE
RESULTANT EFFECTS ON THIS FAMILY

COMPILED IN MARCH 1930

by LEO GORDON MATTERSON
(Son of JOSEPH.)

ERILOGUE.

Later Years. 1919-1929.

1919 and 1920. Dividends at 6 per cent on the Ord. Sha. were continued. Indeed, 1919 and 1920 were such exceptionally good years - due entirely to the continued British Government control - that substantial bonuses were added in each year to the Ordinary Share dividends. Between 1914 and 1920 the goodwill which had stood at £45,000, (vide Part I, v(c)) had been written down to £25,000.

1921. BRITISH GOVERNMENT control lifted. Political state of Ireland in ferment. Dividends go down very considerably. A poor year, but just enough made to enable the 6 per cent dividends on Ordinary Shares to be paid out of profit.

1922. Great civil disorders in Ireland. Irish Free State established. Another poor year, but dividends on Ordinary Shares at 6 per cent as above.

1923. First year of Irish Free State. General remarks as for 1921 and 1922. Dividends at 6 per cent on Ordinary Shares just payable.

1924. Second year of Irish Free State. Same trading conditions as in 1921, 1922 and 1923. Dividends at 6 per cent on Ordinary Shares only payable OUT OF INTEREST on large reserves which had been carefully invested. In this year under the Irish Free State Government railways of the Irish Free State were amalgamated. Under the new scheme the Southern Railway took over the CORN BLACKHOLE & PASSAGE Co. and reorganized its capital. The £1,585 Ordinary Shares of J.M.'s Estate now held by Mrs. A.S.W., and of a nominal value of £15,850 were written down to £1,585 in £100 Bonds/issued to her Against her Holding.

100

1925 to 1927. Business gone down and going down still more. BACON trade conditions in Ireland undergoing vital changes. Supplies much reduced, and exceedingly expensive, and what little there was not all of the right type. Outlook bad and getting worse. JAMISH & OTHER competition very considerable and a new export trade of live raw material to meet a new and increasing demand for fresh PORK adds to unfavourable conditions and prices. Dividends on Ordinary Shares at 6 per cent now being sustained OUT OF INTEREST on the large reserves so well invested.

1928. A bad trading year. A loss even after interest on investments be credited. Interest on ordinary shares paid chiefly EX INTEREST ON UNVESTED RESERVES.

This year in October A.M. dies full of years, aged 84.

19

1929. The worst trading year since 1914. Interest on Preference Shares paid partly EX INTEREST AND Capital of RESERVE and that on the Ordinary Shares wholly EX RESERVE CAPITAL. Decided to close down the Branch in WATERFORD.

H.E. The very profitable days of the MANUFACTURE OF BACON ~~is~~ so far as IRELAND'S concerns, are now a thing of the past. DAVISH AND other FOREIGN BACON is on all British markets in abundance, while the ~~Irish~~ peasant has changed in type and ideas. No longer will he, or rather his daughters and wife bother to look after and care for "THE GENTLEMAN WHO PAID THE RENT" even though assured of good payments for doing so. The bare legs are now clothed with artificial silk stockings. The Ford is at the door and the Cinema calls.

489/1761

IRISH TRANSPORT & GENERAL WORKERS' UNION

H. O. Reference

Limerick. Branch

Dated *28th May* 1929.

Address *91 O'Connell street.*

Messrs James Bannatyne + Sons, Limited,
Roches Street,
Limerick.

Dear Sirs,

In reply to yours of 22nd Inst, I am directed to state that we do not think it possible to have the matters which were the subject of previous conference, now settled by correspondence therefore we think that the conference should resume at once, when we feel that all the matters mentioned can be settled to the satisfaction of both sides.

Thanking you for your attention, and hoping our suggestion meets with your approval.

Yours faithfully,
Geo Connors,
Secretary.



Men arriving at 91 O'Connell Street for a special general meeting of the IT&GWU, 1925

two mills that came to dominate local production: Newtown Pery Mill founded by John Russell in 1810, and City Mills opened by James Bannatyne in 1858 – commonly referred to as Russell’s and Bannatyne’s respectively. By 1900, Limerick’s milling industry was consolidated under the Goodbodys, a Quaker family from Offaly. They bought out Bannatyne’s and Russell’s in the 1890s (maintaining them as separate companies, trading under their own names), and acquired controlling interests in the city’s other mills and grain stores. The Goodbodys enjoyed significant success which, despite the upheavals of the revolutionary period, continued into the early 1920s. This was driven largely by Cecil Mercier, a talented Limerick miller appointed superintendent of Bannatyne’s in 1920, and who came to manage Russell’s as well. However, unfavourable economic conditions such as poor harvests, high taxes, labour unrest, and intense competition from foreign flour imports resulted in financial difficulties. The Goodbodys joined other Irish millers in calling for tariffs to ease the situation but the Tariff Commission, established by the Cumann na nGaedheal government in 1926, refused. So grave did the Goodbodys’ situation become that Bank of Ireland threatened to withdraw credit in 1928.

Mercier’s response to this crisis was rationalisation, including efficiencies in production, and work practices and terms and conditions. His efforts to overhaul the latter led to significant industrial unrest and, on 9 May 1929, a labour conference between Goodbodys management and the millers’ union, the Irish Transport & General Workers’ Union (IT&GWU), was convened to find a way through. The letter reproduced here, part of the Cecil Mercier papers held at Limerick Archives, was sent by the secretary of the IT&GWU’s Limerick branch, John Conroy, to Mercier at Bannatyne’s and gives an indication of how fraught were their negotiations. Therein, Conroy dismisses Mercier’s suggestion that discussion of issues outstanding since the conference should be carried on by correspondence and requests that another meeting between union and management be scheduled. Matters were eventually ‘settled to the satisfaction of both sides’, but the measures agreed could not reverse the Limerick mills’ commercial decline. Flour prices collapsed as the post-1929 ‘Great Depression’ took hold and both Russell’s and Bannatyne’s had to temporarily shut down on account of excess stock.

In respect of Limerick’s milling industry, the remedy was corporate takeover. In late 1929, the Goodbodys approached Ranks (UK) Ltd – which already held 30 per cent of the Irish flour market – about a buy-out. Despite some opposition locally and nationally to what Fianna Fáil termed ‘English economic penetration’ (for Limerick Labour Party mayor, Michael Keyes, it was another step in England’s reconquest of Ireland through capital), this was effected in spring 1930.⁷ Conroy gave tentative support to the ‘fusion’ of Goodbody’s and Rank’s, telling the *Limerick Leader* that ‘most people will feel fairly satisfied’ if it resulted in more employment and increased production.⁸ The survival of Limerick’s bacon industry was ensured by both government regulation and protectionism which became a primary plank of Fianna Fáil economics after it took power in 1932, and a drive for new markets typified by the Empire

Marketing Board campaign for the industry – in which Seán Keating’s poster, *Irish Free State Bacon*, played a role.⁹ Matterson’s continued trading until 1985.

Notes

- 1 Limerick Diocesan Archives, Jeremiah Newman papers, Box 16; Limerick Archives, Cecil Mercier papers, P89/77.
- 2 Frank Prendergast, ‘The decline of traditional Limerick industries’ in David Lee and Debbie Jacobs (eds), *Made in Limerick: history of industries, trade and commerce*, vol. 1 (Limerick, 2003), pp 1–22, at p. 6.
- 3 By the 1890s, Shaw’s was reportedly the second largest curing plant in Europe, processing 150,000 pigs each year, while O’Mara’s was described in 1912 as ‘the most important bacon factory in the British Isles’. Paddy Lysaght, ‘Limerick’s bacon factories’, *Old Limerick Journal*, 15 (1983), pp 10–12, at p. 11.
- 4 Ruth Guiry, *Pigtown: a history of Limerick’s bacon industry* (Limerick, 2016), pp 8, 33.
- 5 Murray, who died in 1927, was a friend of Joseph Matterson. He had navigated the firm through near bankruptcy in 1903 following losses incurred by Joseph’s involvement in a failed railway company in Cork, together with general financial mismanagement.
- 6 Edward Whelan, *Cecil Mercier & the Limerick Rank Mills* (Limerick, 2010), p. 3.
- 7 Whelan, *Cecil Mercier*, p.7; *Limerick Leader*, 29 March 1930.
- 8 *Limerick Leader*, 26 February 1930.
- 9 This was inaugurated with the Pigs and Bacon Act of 1935, which strictly regulated the bacon industry.

8

‘I Feel Confident That His Claim Cannot be Overlooked’: Letter of Recommendation from Limerick City Mayor for a Land Commission Allotment, 1925¹

‘The completion of the land acts is the most earnest concern of the Government of Ireland. As soon as internal affairs are sufficiently stable to warrant a step forward, measures will be taken to settle finally the land question.’² So wrote civil servant John M. Duff shortly after the formal commencement of the Irish Civil War in late June 1922. Just weeks after it formally ended with the anti-Treaty IRA’s order to dump arms in late May 1923, two monumental land acts were signed into law. The first was the Land Law (Commission) Act which was enacted on 24 July. It reconstituted the Irish Land Commission – responsible for both the advancement of government loans for tenant purchase, and the collection of mortgage repayments, under the terms of the British land purchase acts – as an arm of the Irish Free State and transferred to it the functions of the Congested Districts Board. The second was the Land Act of 9 August, which invested the Land Commission with the authority to compulsorily acquire and redistribute untenanted lands (primarily Protestant estate lands at this time) to enlarge economically unviable holdings – defined as comprising less than twenty acres of ‘reasonable’ land or less than £10 in rateable value – and to provide the landless with farms. In the immediate term this legislation, like the land acts of 1881/1909 before it, sought to quell ongoing agrarian unrest, including widespread illegal land seizures, which the Cosgrave government viewed as republican approved or inspired and with having social revolutionary potential. In the longer term, it was intended to complete the revolution in land ownership begun with the Landlord and Tenant Act of 1870 and, in the words of Cumann na nGaedheal TD William Sears, ‘dispose of the last remnant of Irish landlordism ... a system that was the curse of this country’.³

There were approximately 2.6 million untenanted acres in Ireland in 1923. However, exemptions from compulsory purchase in respect of estates (for example, those providing significant local employment, ‘big house’ home farms, demesnes with woodlands of recognised importance, and land used for breeding thoroughbred stock), together with the Cosgrave administration’s reluctance, for electoral and economic reasons, to commandeer land from graziers and large farmers, left just 1.2 million acres readily available for redistribution. Patrick Hogan, who served as minister for agriculture and lands during this period, believed that those farming uneconomic holdings should be prioritised over other claimant groups, such as the landless, evictees, and IRA veterans who had taken the pro-Treaty side. But as there were 120,000 alone of these so-called ‘congests’, competition for land grants was intense. Using a £30 million loan underwritten by the British government, the Land Commission eventually

J. Collins, Esq.,
Irish Land Commission,
DUBLIN.

17th November, 1925.

A Chara,

I have just been informed that the lands at Farnane, Murroe, Co. Limerick (Cloncurry Estate) are about to be divided. I wish to make a personal appeal on behalf of an applicant for a share in the distribution. The name of the applicant is William Frahill, Rath, Murroe, Co. Limerick. He is at the moment a tenant on the Cloncurry Estate holding something over 9 acres - P.L.V. £5.5.0. and paying his annuities to the Irish Land Commission.

Frahill is one of the most respectable and industrious men in the County and his family are most popular and generally respected. I knew his father, who died about 20 years ago. I also knew his mother who died of a broken heart within six weeks of the date on which her son was killed by the British Military during the Irish War in 1921. The boy's dead body was taken away by his comrades and secretly buried. His corpse was disinterred during the Truce and a great public funeral was accorded him. He is one of those to whom the magnificent Monument in Murroe was erected some few years back.

The applicant William Frahill has a particularly strong claim for some of this land and if his application is successful it will give pleasure to the whole countryside. From what I know of the family this man will prove a most desirable tenant; one who will put all his energy into developing the land and who will always be most punctual in settling his accounts.

I feel confident that his claim cannot be overlooked in view of the statements made on his behalf.
Mise, le meas,

MEARA.

purchased 333,000 acres of untenanted land and divided it amongst around 16,600 allottees in the 1923/32 period.⁴ However, this comprised just 27 per cent of the available land and addressed only 15 per cent of congested tenancies.

Inevitably, politicians involved themselves in individual cases for, as Terence Dooley has noted, ‘no other social issue was as important to political survival – not only that of individuals but also that of parties – as land division’ in the first two decades of the Irish Free State.⁵ The letter presented here, taken from the letter books of Limerick’s city mayors, provides an example. Here Mayor Paul A. O’Brien lobbies the Land Commission to allocate land to a congest personally known to him named William Frahill, as part of its distribution of lands acquired from the estate of Valentine Lawless, 4th Baron Cloncurry, in Murroe.⁶ O’Brien’s citing of the Frahill family’s sacrifice during the War of Independence – William’s brother John had been killed in particularly heinous circumstances by Crown forces during an engagement at Lackelly in May 1921, and their mother was believed to have died of grief a few weeks afterwards – speaks to the influence of IRA service on opportunity at this time.⁷ This, as much as Frahill’s industriousness and exemplary character, makes O’Brien ‘confident that his claim cannot be overlooked’.

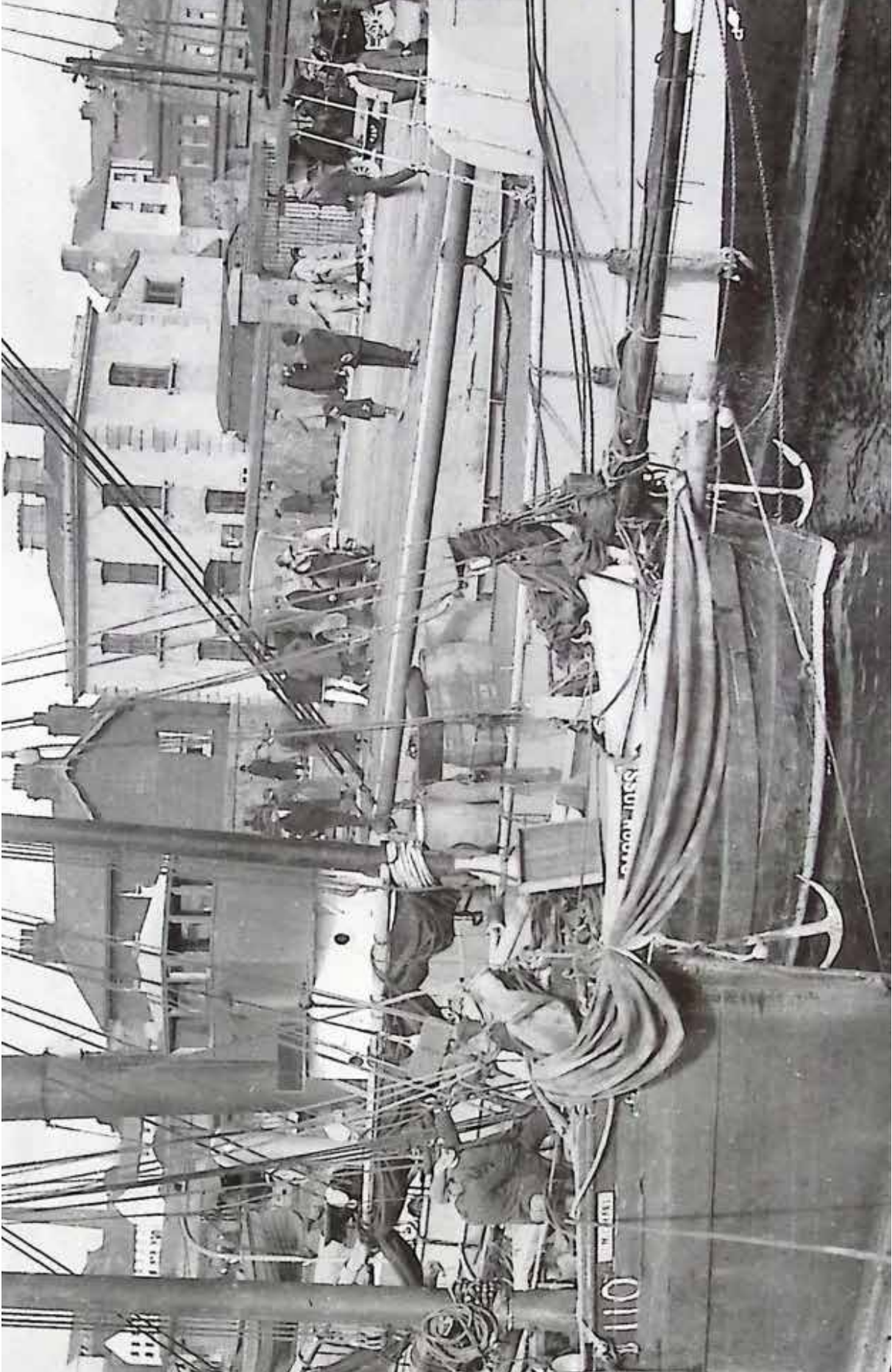
The outcome of the mayor’s recommendation is unknown, as the records of the Land Commission remain closed at this time to researchers.⁸ However, there is ample evidence in other sources that political influence and interference did frequently direct its work. Indeed, the presumed documented extent of such interference in the Land Commission archive is likely one of the reasons for which it has been so long restricted.

By the late 1980s, the Land Commission had acquired and distributed 2.34 million acres (two-thirds of it under the terms of the 1923 Land Act and subsequent legislation), involving around 248,000 families. It was formally dissolved in 1999, but its legacies are everywhere felt. There is much truth in Dooley’s assessment that its work constituted ‘a social engineering project of historic magnitude’, the impact of which on ‘Irish rural society was matched only by that of the Catholic Church’.⁹

Notes

- 1 Limerick Archives, Mayors of Limerick City/Limerick County Council, Correspondence: Letter Books, L/FR/MY/2/1/5.
- 2 Quoted in Terence Dooley, ‘Land and politics in independent Ireland, 1923–48: the case for reappraisal’, *Irish Historical Studies*, 34 (2004), pp 175–197, at p. 177.
- 3 Dáil Éireann Debates, vol. 3, no. 17, 28 May 1923.
- 4 This, Hogan conceded, was ‘an enormous loan, when compared with ordinary development, say, with the development of the Shannon, a gigantic scheme, but at the outset which is only going to cost about five million pounds’. *Ibid.*, vol. 10, no. 18, 26 March 1925.
- 5 Dooley, ‘Land and politics’, p. 185.

- 6 Lawless, who died in 1928, remained of notorious repute locally for his eviction of around 400 people from his lands in Murroe in April 1882. See Mark Tierney, *Murroe and Boher: the history of an Irish county parish* (Dublin, 1966), pp 162–70. See also Tom Holmes and Martin Duffy, *The Murroe County Limerick Evictions, 1882* (forthcoming, 2025).
- 7 Thomas Toomey, *The War of Independence in Limerick, 1912–1921* (Limerick, 2010), pp 585–7. William’s brother, James, and later William himself, unsuccessfully applied for dependents’ allowances consequent on John’s death under the terms of the Army Pensions Acts. See Military Archives, Ireland, Military Service Pensions Collection, REF 1D251: John Frahill.
- 8 A decision to release the Land Commission’s 11 million records was taken in spring 2024. However, they are not expected to be available to researchers for at least fifteen years.
- 9 ‘The Last Land War’, Centenary supplement to *Irish Independent*, 8 August 2023, p. 2; idem, ‘Land and politics’, p. 182.



Limerick Docks, c. 1924 (Courtesy Sean Curtin)

‘The German Shannon or the Irish Rhine’: Press Report on German Shannon Scheme Workers, and Letter from Siemens-Bauunion to the Department of Justice, 1929¹

On 13 August 1925, the Irish Free State government signed a £5.2 million contract with the German firm Siemens-Schuckert to deliver the first phase of the Shannon Hydroelectric Scheme. This project, which included the construction of a weir at Parteen, fifteen kilometres of canals, four reinforced concrete bridges, and a power station at Ardnacrusha, was described by the *Limerick Leader* as ‘a momentous one ... almost certain to be the means of revolutionising the whole industrial life of Ireland’, and its completion and handover to the new state-run Electricity Supply Board in summer 1929 did have an immediate economic and social impact.² In a country in which electricity was previously restricted to large cities, it inaugurated the first national grid in Europe, delivering power to homes and businesses across Ireland and accounting for 80 per cent of total supply by 1935. The Shannon Scheme was also a political triumph, ‘part of a legitimating process for the [Cosgrave] government’ portraying Cumann na nGaedheal as the party of vision and progress, willing, unlike Fianna Fáil, to move the country beyond the divisions of the recent past.³ The undertaking of one of the most extensive civil engineering projects of its era, which was viewed internationally as a model for large-scale electrification schemes, could also be seen as a legitimization of the statehood/sovereignty accepted under the terms of the Treaty – what Kevin O’Higgins (in a Cumann na nGaedheal manifesto for the 1927 general election) termed ‘a vindication of Irish Nationalism, [of] all of our struggles to secure mastery of our own house’.⁴

Such high-flown rhetoric about the Shannon Scheme did obscure problems on the ground. These chiefly related to its Irish unskilled workers, primarily industrial action (including strikes) over pay, and a scarcity of accommodation that saw some staying in animal outhouses and barns. Tensions also arose over the importation of workers from Germany, where the high unemployment and general economic uncertainty of the Weimar period cast the Shannon Scheme as an attractive opportunity. These men, favoured by Siemens for managerial and engineering roles because of their familiarity with German industrial work culture and practice, frequently clashed with the Irish workmen under their charge whom they saw as more ‘used to the rhythms and lower intensity of agricultural labour’ than large-scale industrial works.⁵ The Irish, meanwhile, recurrently complained about their ill-treatment (including unfair dismissal) at German hands. So frictional did relations become that the scheme’s chief electrical engineer, Frank Rishworth, counselled Siemens in February 1927 that it would ‘certainly lead to greater efficiency if the Irish workers are treated sympathetically by the German foremen and engineers ... Irish workers will not be bullied, but they are easily handled if they are

The IRISH Die WA

A Pictorial Record
a Special "Sp



RECEIVING CERTIFICATES OF HEALTH: Emigrants from the Free State receive their health cards before sailing from Queenstown to America. Ireland seems even less likely to retain its population under the Free State Government than she did when under England's dominion. In consequence, the U.S. police force will be as well filled as heretofore with suitable material.



WESTWARD HO!
States—the land which
in the Free State—er



GERMANY IN SOUTHERN IRELAND: The scene in the little German colony of Ard-na-Croaha, near the great Shannon power works. At a distance of from four to five miles from Limerick town and close to the great Shannon power scheme is the German colony of Ard-na-Croaha.



RHINE MAIDENS ON THE SHANNON: Two little girls from the German colony imported to put through the Shannon scheme with characteristic efficiency.

Two facets of present conditions in the Irish Free State are illustrated here from pictures obtained during the last few days by a special "Sphere" Commissioner. They illustrate firstly the continuous emigration which is now going on, chiefly from the big southern port of Queenstown,

whence Irish men and women are seeking the American continent. The upper picture of the latest departures from Queenstown. "Land of Gold and Greenbacks" was very



**FAR FROM
RHINE**
German bo



GERMAN
methods of

THE FREE STATE in 1929: A BRIGHT LIGHT on SHANNON.

Record of Conditions in Southern Ireland Obtained by
"The Sphere" Commissioner During the Last Few Days



EMIGRANTS FROM THE EMERALD ISLE; A group on the tender bound for the Cunard liner *Ascania* en route for Canada, whither many Irishmen and women are heading. The women are far more neatly and smartly dressed than the men, and they give the doubtless erroneous impression of springing from a better class than their male relatives

Irish emigrants, bound for the United States, offers them opportunities unknown hitherto, and they are seen to disembark on the tender at Queenstown.



FROM THE BANKS OF THE SHANNON, BUT STILL HAPPY: A housewife cooking by the Shannon



THE GERMAN SHANNON, OR THE IRISH RHINE: Two housewives pause for a chat during the course of the morning. On each side of the little doorway of these one-story timber houses one may read such German names as Schmidt, Schatz, and Helmers—strange sights in the country of the O'Briens and the Callahans



WORKERS IN IRELAND: On the way to work at the great Shannon power scheme. German workmen and engineers pass along the Limerick high road side by side with Irish workers. The efficiency of the German engineers have staggered the somewhat indolent natives, and special measures had to be enforced by the German overseers to ensure the labour being adequately done. The scheme, nearing completion, will be a boon to the Free State if the populace is sufficiently wealthy to utilize its electricity

better economic conditions on the continent were all taken during one of the last batches of pilgrims to the Free State. This batch of pilgrims to the Free State were well conditioned as far as

outward appearance went. This applied especially to the womenfolk, who in many cases were very neatly dressed. Only one or two of the emigrants happened to fit in with the conventional picture which an Anglo-Saxon mind would conjure up, but just at present the season of

emigration is not at its fullest. Numbers will increase tremendously during February. Leaving Queenstown, "The Sphere's" Commissioner passed to the neighbourhood of the great Shannon power scheme, which is to convey electrical energy over a very large part of the Free State.

SIEMENS-BAUUNION

G. m. b. H. - Kommanditgesellschaft
Constructors of the River
Shannon Power Works

Telegraphic-Address :
Siemensbau Limerick

Telephone :
Nr. 422, 423, 424

Bankers :
National Bank Limited, Limerick

Strand Barracks,
LIMERICK, 11th Jan. 1928.

File Nr. Oz/v.Br/Ka.



The Secretary,
Department of Justice,
Dublin.

A Chara,

With reference to your letter of the 3rd Jan. 1929 under ref. 221/920 we beg to inform you that we have repeatedly issued instructions to our employees to report to the Garda of the district in which they are residing the date of the proposed departure. We regret if these orders are not properly carried out, but as you will understand, we cannot be held responsible for men who have already ceased working with us and who have refused to obey our orders.

With reference to the 2nd paragraph of your letter, it appears that this would not concern us, as we have no employees without a fixed address and who travel continuously from place to place by reason of their employment. All alien employees working with us are actually staying near their respective Building Sites, i.e. Limerick, Ardnacrusha, Clonlara or O'Briens Bridge.

We

We may mention that such travelling employees might be with Messrs. Siemens-Schuckertwerke, A.G., Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin, and working in connection with the erection of the various lines spreading all over the country.

Sinne le mess,

SIEMENS-UNION
S. M. & H. Kommandit-Gesellschaft
Constructors of the Five Shannon Power Works

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treated with moderation'.⁶ Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the *Illustrated London News* press report on Ardnacrusha's new 'German colony' presented here, published in January 1929, takes the German view, claiming that 'the methods of Teutonic efficiency have staggered the somewhat indolent natives, and special measures had to be enforced by the German overseers to ensure the labour being adequately done'.

More importantly, the report provides an insight into expatriate life in what it termed 'the German Shannon, or the Irish Rhine', where around one thousand Germans were employed between 1925 and 1929. Unlike Irish workers, they were fully quartered, most in the 'German camp' at Ardnacrusha – single men in dormitories in prefabricated huts, married men in the purpose-built German style accommodation such as the one storey timber houses shown here, and larger two storey buildings comprising four individual self-contained units. As Sorcha O'Brien has observed, this accommodation 'would have reduced the culture shock of arriving in an unfamiliar culture for many of these workers and their families', as did the construction of a dedicated school in which their children continued their German education.⁷ The images in this report also illustrate the intracommunal socialisation that O'Brien has noted in German Shannon Scheme photographic collections, viz. 'the friendships and camaraderie of the overseas worker [and, here, their families], cut off from both their place of origin and the local people by linguistic and cultural barriers.'⁸

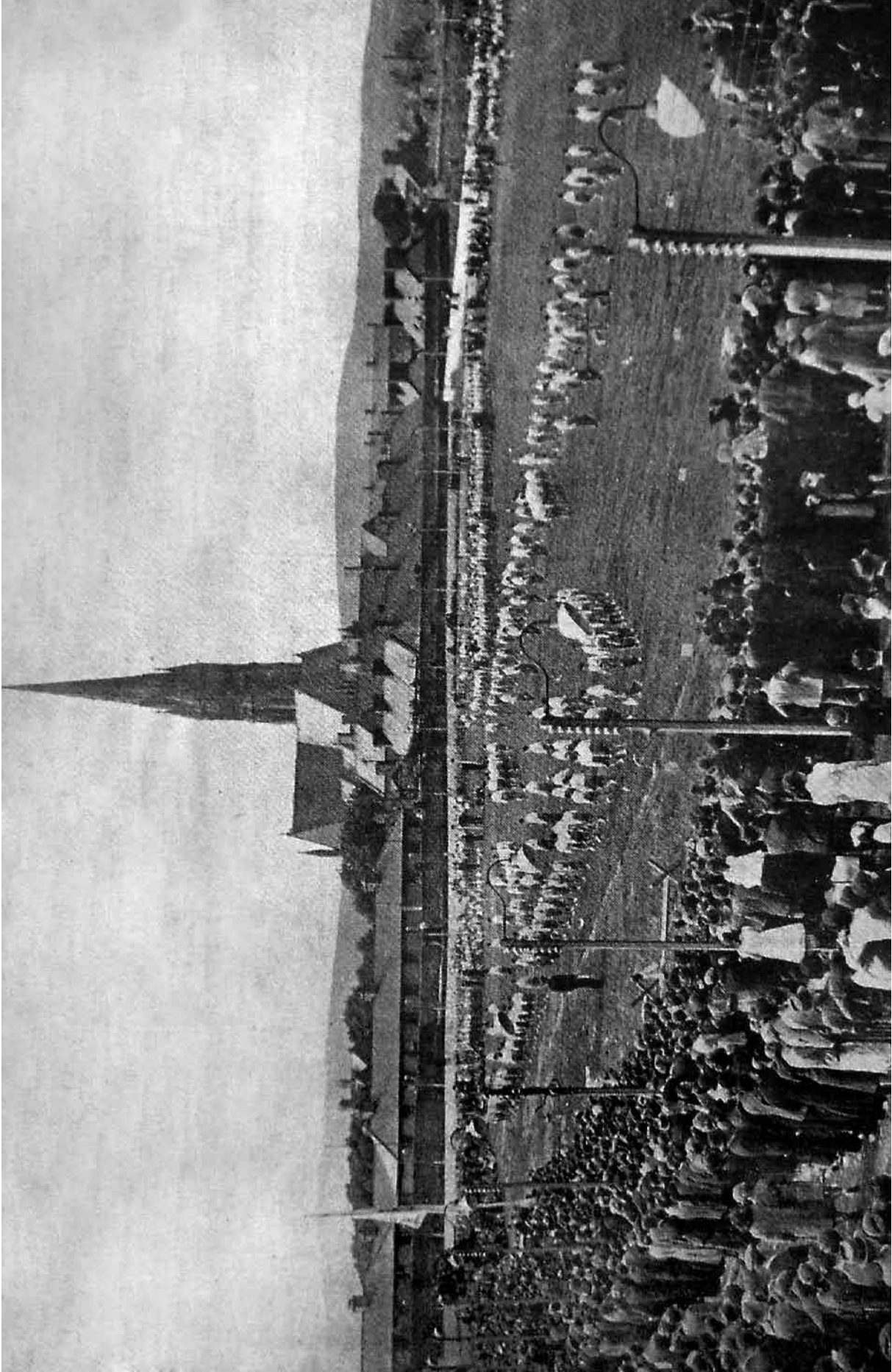
The creation of a 'German Shannon/Irish Rhine' between 1925 and 1929 did cause some concern in an insular Irish Free State. Immigration was then tightly controlled under the Aliens Order of 1925, which stipulated that aliens entering the state to take up employment had to be licensed by the Department of Industry and Commerce and register their movements with local Gardaí. The Garda Síochána in Limerick and Killaloe, under whose remit the monitoring of the Shannon Scheme's German workers in this respect fell, became increasingly annoyed by violations of the order – primarily the failure of many workers and/or their dependents to register their arrival or to report their departure – and in January 1929 the Department of Justice asked Siemens-Bauunion (the Siemens-Schuckert subsidiary which undertook construction on company projects) to instruct its employees to comply. The written response of Siemens-Bauunion presented here (part of a departmental file on breaches of the Aliens Order by German Shannon Scheme workers) evinced irritation at the implicit reproach and disavowed responsibility for the order's enforcement, or for Germans employed by its parent company who routinely travelled around Ireland as part of their work.

Siemens-Bauunion acceded to a subsequent request to furnish the Limerick and Killaloe Gardaí with lists of its German employees, together with the dates on which their employment would end. The Gardaí were instructed to use these lists 'to keep in touch with the aliens to ensure that they left the Saorstát' after their contracts expired. The restrictive immigration policy that this demonstrates continued into, and throughout, the 1930s (including a new Aliens Act in 1935), when its application to German – largely Jewish – refugees had tragic consequences

for some.⁹

Notes

- 1 *Illustrated London News*, 19 January 1929; National Archives/JUS/2014/85/852 – Letter from Siemens-Bauunion to the Department of Justice, 11 January 1928. *Reproduced by kind permission of the Director of the National Archives of Ireland.*
- 2 *Limerick Leader*, 4 July 1925.
- 3 Andy Bielenberg, ‘Seán Keating, the Shannon Scheme and the art of state-building’ in Andy Bielenberg (ed.), *The Shannon Scheme and the electrification of the Irish Free State: an inspirational milestone* (Dublin, 2002), pp 114–37, at p. 125. Ardnacrusa was briefly the largest hydroelectric dam in the world, superseded by the Boulder/Hoover Dam in the 1930s.
- 4 Quoted in McKayla Sutton, ‘“Harnesses in the service of the nation”: party politics and the promotion of the Shannon Hydroelectric Scheme, 1924–32’ in Mel Farrell, Ciara Meehan, Jason Knirck (eds), *A formative decade: Ireland in the 1920s* (Sallins, 2015), pp 86–107, at p. 89.
- 5 Sorcha O’Brien, *Powering the nation: images of the Shannon Scheme and electricity in Ireland* (Newbridge, 2017), p. 114.
- 6 Quoted in Michael McCarthy, *High tension: life on the Shannon Scheme* (Dublin, 2014), p. 66. Rishworth was professor of civil engineering in University College Galway.
- 7 O’Brien, *Powering the nation*, p. 116.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 120.
- 9 See Katrina Goldstone, ‘“Benevolent helpfulness”? Ireland and international reaction to Jewish refugees, 1933–9’ in Michael Kennedy and Joseph Morrison Skelly, *Irish foreign policy, 1919–1966: from independence to internationalism* (Dublin, 2000), pp 116–36.



Christian Brothers Sexton Street school drill at the Markets Field, c. 1920s (Courtesy Sean Curtin)

IV

Sport and Recreation

10

‘Games of the People’: Images of Rugby and Rowing in Limerick City, 1926–1928

Sports were central to social and recreational life in Limerick city in the early years of the Irish Free State and most localities (and certain professions) had their own clubs. Thomas Keane has termed it ‘a city of contrasts’ in a sporting context. For while it had enthusiastically embraced the GAA in the 1880s and was, by the mid-1920s, home to several long-standing and successful hurling and football clubs, so-called ‘garrison games’ such as soccer, hockey, and cricket were also widely popular outside of their traditional Protestant-loyalist base.¹ For example, there were six hockey clubs and five soccer clubs in Limerick city by the early 1930s (the latter then very much a working-class game) while cricket was amongst the sports played at the Ranger’s Club in Boherbuoy.

The two most popular non-Gaelic sports in Limerick city in the mid-1920s were rugby and rowing. Rugby had been imported into Ireland through Trinity College Dublin in the mid-nineteenth century and introduced into Limerick by Sir Charles Barrington of Glenstal.² There – uniquely in Ireland – rugby quickly took root in working-class communities to become ‘the game of the people’ through the establishment of clubs such as Garryowen FC and Shannon RFC in the mid-1880s, and Young Munsters which, formed in the mid-1890s, held its first official AGM in 1901.³ These clubs became badges of local identity. Shannon RFC, founded primarily by pig buyers, was the St Mary’s parish club, and its role as a ‘nursery’ for Garryowen (the city’s only senior club at this time) saw the latter become ‘synonymous for many years’ with ‘the Parish’ as well.⁴ Meanwhile, Young Munsters, which likely had links to the Royal Munster Fusiliers and trained at the ‘Bombing Field’, Prospect, was the club of Boherbuoy.⁵ Rugby’s predominance in working-class communities was facilitated, first by the decline in hurling and football precipitated by the Parnellite split of the 1890s,⁶ and then by the GAA’s ‘ban’, rules introduced in 1902 prohibiting members from watching or playing ‘garrison’ or ‘foreign’ games. The popularity of rugby saw widespread resistance to the ‘ban’ among working-class GAA members in Limerick, who routinely switched codes and played under pseudonyms to circumvent it. Many, though, made a choice in favour of rugby and three Boherbuoy hurling clubs ultimately disappeared because of the impact of the ban.⁷ Rugby was also played at Sexton Street CBS. So popular did rugby become that there were twelve clubs (three senior and nine junior) in the city by 1933.

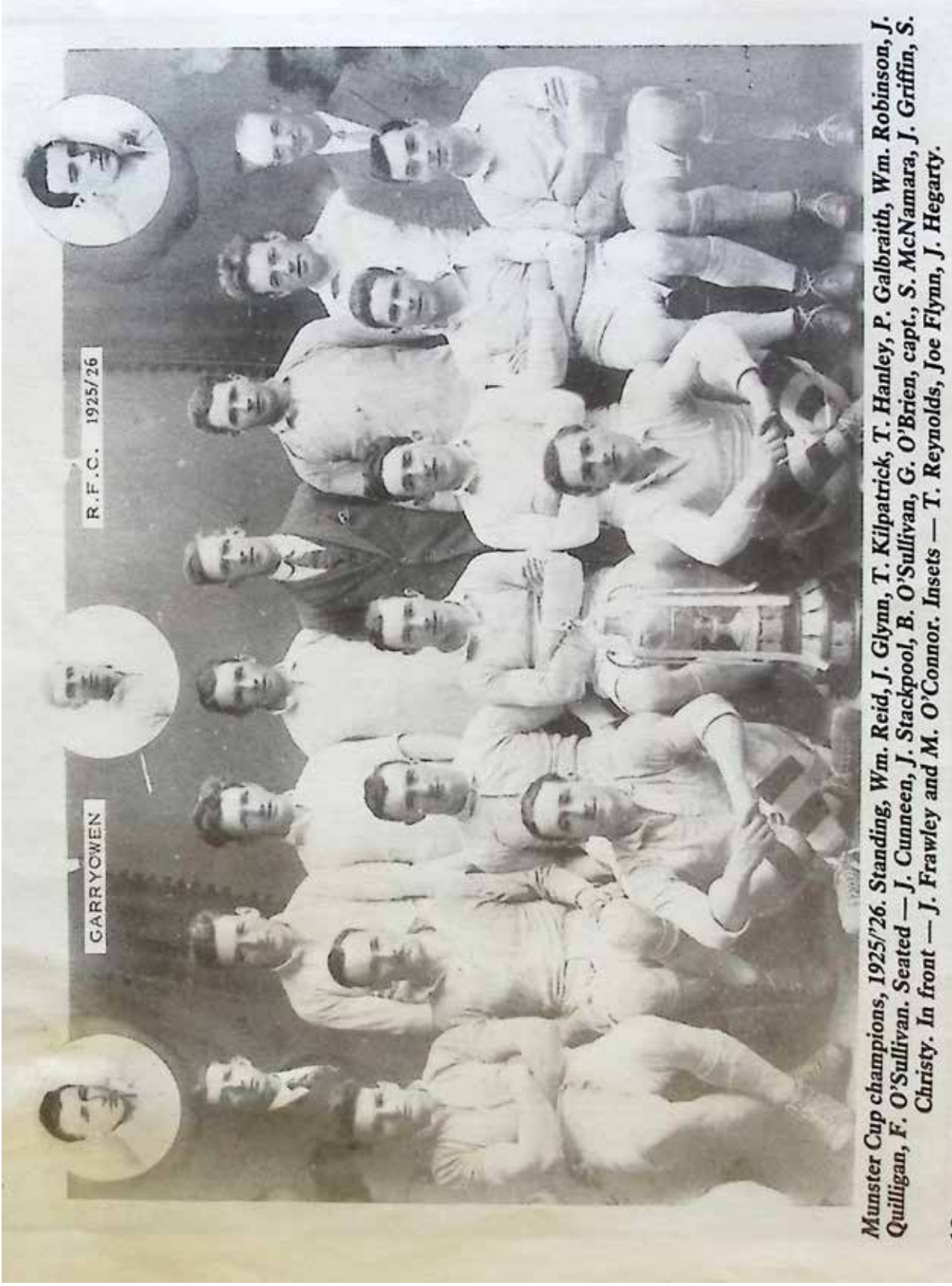
In terms of achievement on the field, Garryowen FC was the standout success. It won its first Munster Senior Cup in 1899 and would go on to win it on seventeen other occasions in the subsequent twenty-five years. The photograph of the Garryowen 1926 Munster Cup

winning team presented in this section (Fig. 6) attests to its continued success into the post-Civil War period; this was the club's third win in a row. Garryowen also came close to winning the Bateman Cup (an inter-provincial knockout competition inaugurated in 1922), losing the 1925 and 1926 finals by three points and five points respectively. Young Munsters, which had achieved senior status in 1923 and beat Garryowen in the 1927 Charity Cup final, did win the Bateman Cup in 1928, having beaten Cork Constitution in that year's Munster Senior Cup Final at Limerick's Markets Field on 31 March. Developed as a ground for Gaelic games, the Markets Field was also the home of Garryowen FC since 1886, and hosted Munster Cup games as Fig. 7 demonstrates. (Shannon RFC won the junior cup there in 1924 and 1925). It was also used for other sporting occasions (Fig. 8).

While boat racing of various kinds formed part of recreational life in Limerick city for centuries, rowing as a competitive sport was introduced into the city with the formation of Shannon Rowing Club in 1866.⁸ Limerick Boat Club (LBC) was founded four years later, and came to have a significant impact on the local scene. A self-consciously elite and loyal association of overwhelmingly Protestant professionals and businessmen, it immediately instituted an annual Limerick Regatta. This followed the established amateur definition in place at the time which effectively excluded working class men. However, unlike elsewhere, rowing democratised relatively quickly in Limerick. Athlunkard Boat Club was established in 1898, St Michael's Rowing Club in 1899,⁹ and St John's Temperance Society also formed a club in 1905.¹⁰ Although these clubs 'would have had strong working-class backgrounds, [they] integrated seamlessly into the sport.'¹¹ The Protestant and loyal character of LBC did change over time as more middle-class Catholics enrolled, and the 1920s and 1930s saw the gradual 'deconstruction of [its] British imperial identity [albeit] within the comfort zone of its rules'.¹²

The historian of LBC, Tony Tynne, described the 1920s as 'probably the defining decade of the club in terms of competitive racing'. Although 'more severely impacted than other clubs by the Great War' – five of twenty-eight members who enlisted were killed – it was by then 'a serious contender at most regattas' and could 'compete successfully on the national stage'.¹³ LBC crews won seven of ten finals contested in 1925 (including the Subscribers Cup for junior eights and the Murphy Challenge Cup for junior fours at Limerick Regatta, and the Lee Challenge Cup for underage fours at its counterpart in Cork), and its maiden and junior crews enjoyed several successes in 1926. However, 1927 was to be what Tynne termed 'the golden year' for LBC when the crew pictured in Fig. 9 took 'the big pot' – the trophy awarded to the winners of the highly prestigious Irish Amateur Rowing Union Senior Eights Championship at Cork Regatta.¹⁴ (Athlunkard Boat Club came in second).¹⁵ This photograph underscores the changing religious, rather than class, composition of LBC in the immediate post-independence period; at least four of this crew were Catholics, but all were middle class.

The extracts from the Limerick Regatta programme for 1927 (Figs. 10 & 11) highlight male dominance in rowing in the period in question. While Limerick women did engage in



Munster Cup champions, 1925/26. Standing, Wm. Reid, J. Glynn, T. Kilpatrick, T. Hanley, P. Galbraith, Wm. Robinson, J. Quilligan, F. O'Sullivan. Seated — J. Cunneen, J. Stackpool, B. O'Sullivan, G. O'Brien, capt., S. McNamara, J. Griffin, S. Christy. In front — J. Frawley and M. O'Connor. Insets — T. Reynolds, Joe Flynn, J. Hegarty.

Fig. 6 (Courtesy Eoghan Prendergast and with thanks to Jack Bourke)

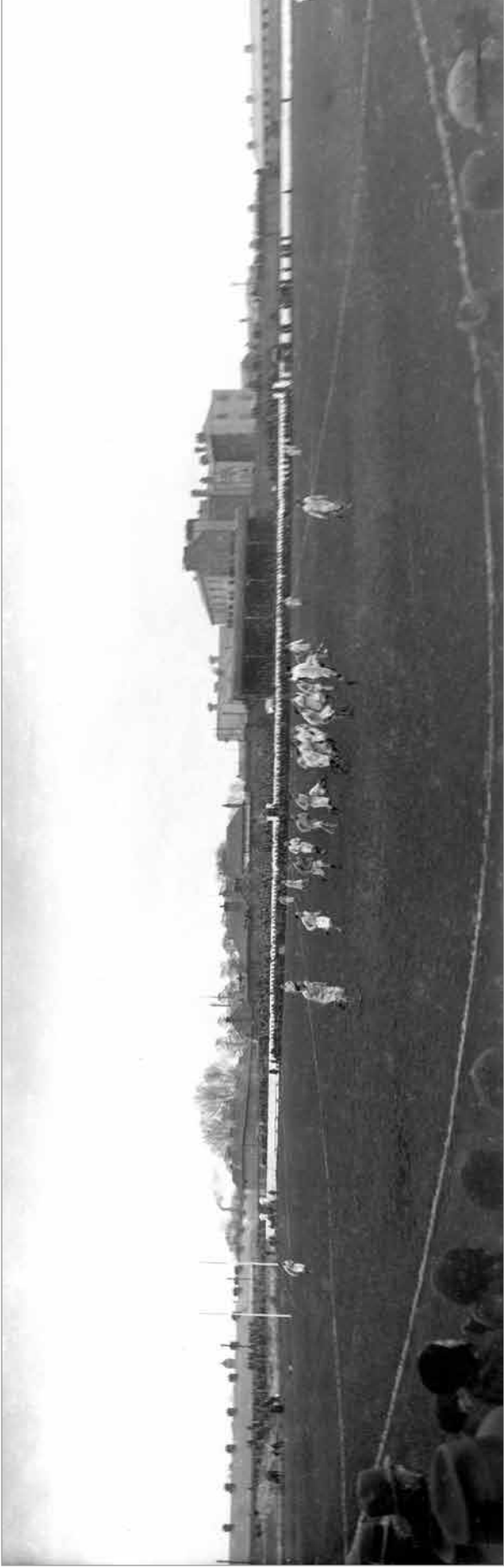


Fig. 7: Rugby game at the Markets Field (Courtesy Sean Curtin)



Fig. 8: Athletics event at the Markets Field, 1928 (Courtesy Sean Curtin)



Fig. 9: Back row: K.T. Rea (5), W.W. Stokes (3), W.L. O'Donnell (cox) J.M. Harkness (4), M.W. McGuire (6), Bruce Murray (coach)
Front row: W.F. Treacy (7), T.E. O'Donnell (stroke), J.F. Ewart (bow), J.F. Stearn (2) (Courtesy Brian Sheppard)

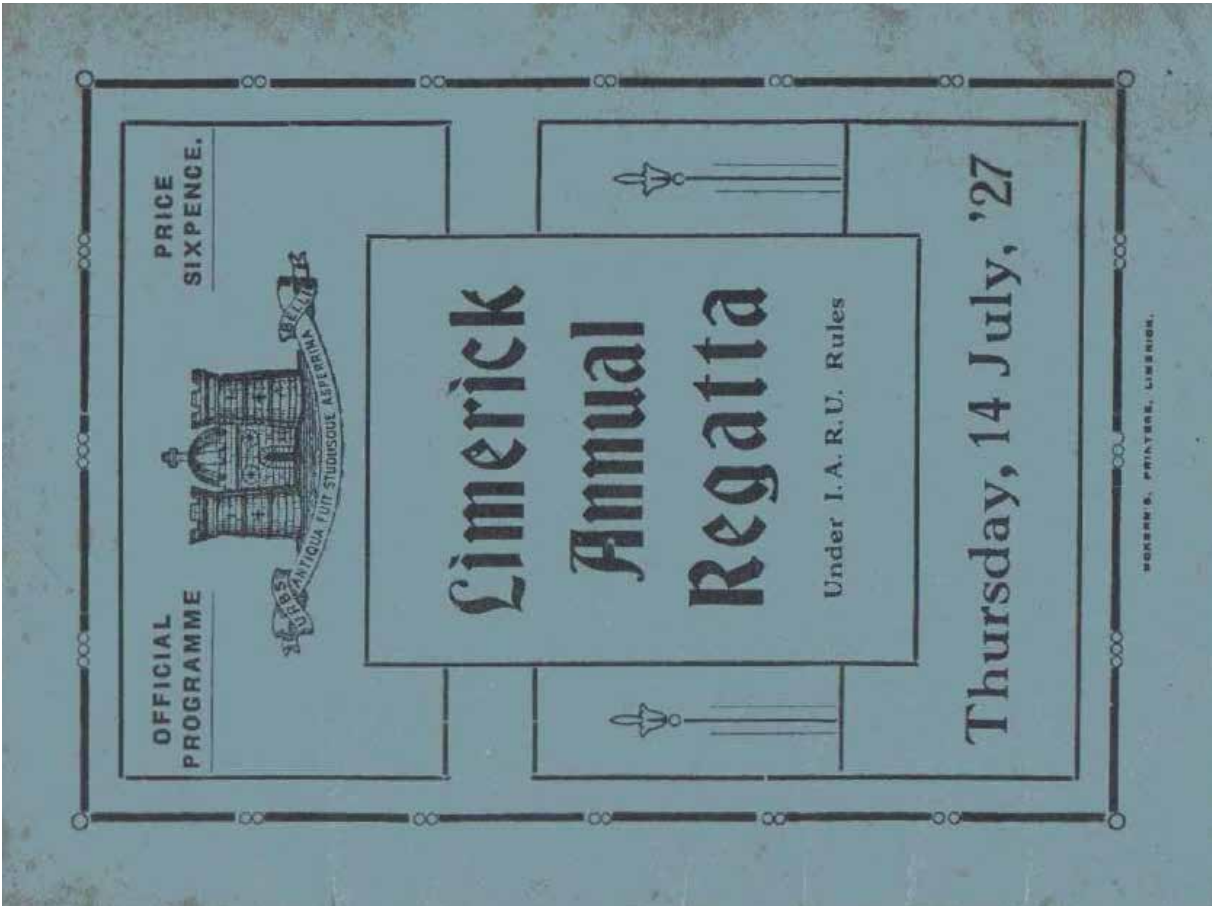


Fig. 10: (Courtesy Kieran Kerr)

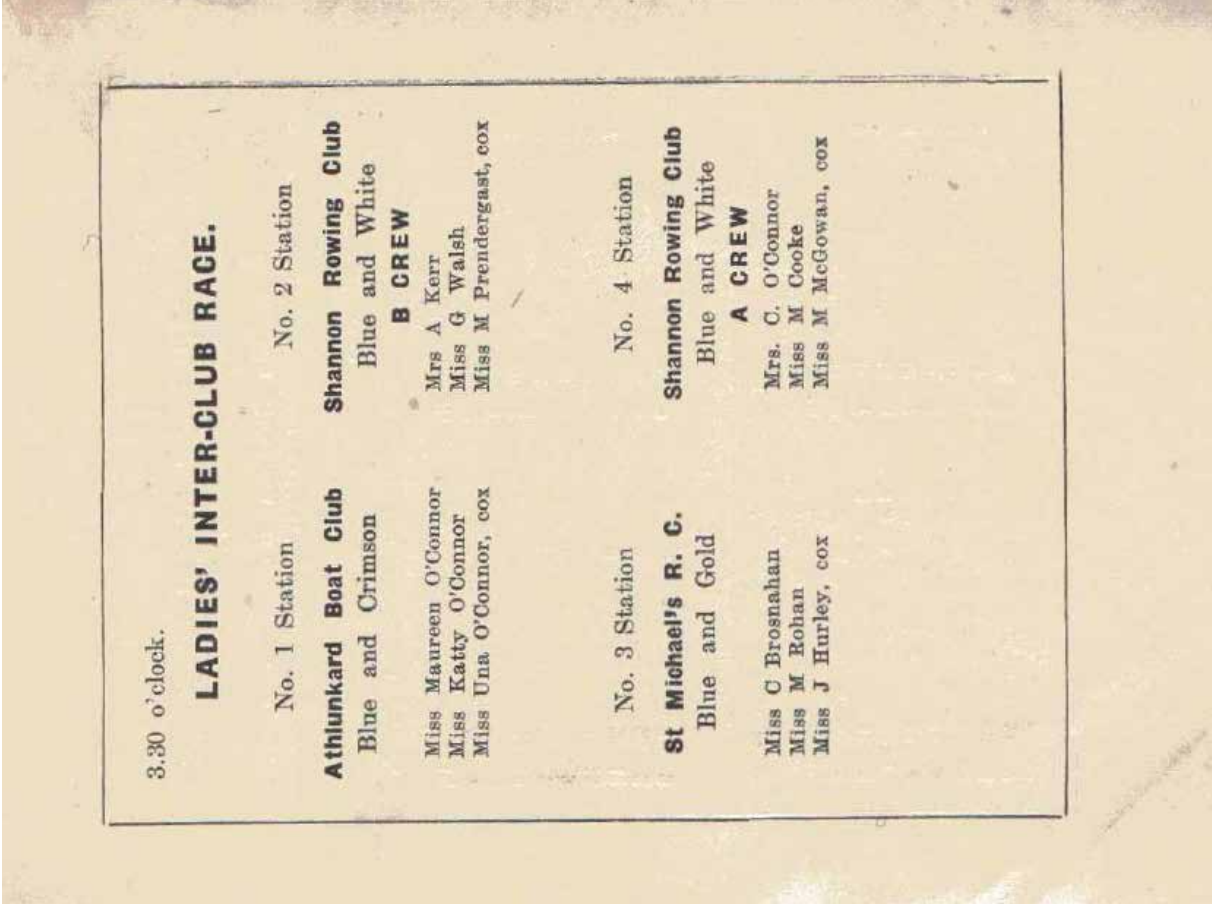


Fig. 11: (Courtesy Kieran Kerr)

sporting activities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they were usually informal, non-competitive affairs. The female inter-club coxed pair race advertised there was the second of its kind at Limerick Regatta (the first being in 1926, when five crews competed), but is thought to have been ‘more of a novelty with little training involved’.¹⁶ This race was run again in 1928, when just three crews took part, but it was dropped from the programme thereafter. The next women’s rowing event was not offered until 1974.

Notes

- 1 Thomas Keane, ‘Class, religion and society in Limerick city, 1922–1939’ (unpublished PhD thesis, Mary Immaculate College, 2015), p. 81.
- 2 Barrington, who had captained TCD’s rugby team between 1867 and 1869, founded the Limerick County Rugby Football Club in 1876.
- 3 Mick Doyle, ‘Game of the people’ in Jim Kemmy (ed.), *The Limerick anthology* (Dublin, 1996), pp 214–16.
- 4 Charles Mulqueen, *Limerick’s rugby history* (Limerick, 1978), p. 6. Shannon RFC remained a junior club until the 1950s.
- 5 So-called as the British Army had used it as an explosives rage in the pre-state period.
- 6 The GAA strongly supported Parnell.
- 7 Keane, ‘Class, religion and society’, pp 78, 90. The ‘ban’ remained in force until 1971.
- 8 Kieran Kerr, *Limerick Regatta: a century and a half of boat racing on the Shannon* (Limerick, 2019), p. 9.
- 9 St Michael’s Rowing Club was established by St Michael’s Temperance Society ‘to promote health and vigour amongst its members’ and as a ‘means of keeping the young men of the Society together, especially during the summer season’. Kieran Kerr, *Band of gold: the history of the St Michael’s Rowing Club and its temperance origins* (Limerick, 2016), p. 32.
- 10 The club changed its name to Curraghgour Boat Club in 1929 and withdrew from competitive boat racing in 1932.
- 11 Kerr, *Limerick Regatta*, p. 11. Athlunkard Boat Club was founded by pig buyers in St Mary’s parish.
- 12 Keane, ‘Class, religion and society’, p. 134. Typical of these were the Ebrills, successful solicitors and auctioneers who were also members of the Arch-Confraternity. Three members of this family joined the LBC, in 1894, 1895, and 1908.
- 13 Tony Tynne, *On Wellesley Pier: the history of Limerick Boat Club* (Limerick, 2021), p. 42.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- 15 The race, run on 13 July 1927, was delayed until the afternoon as a mark of respect to Kevin O’Higgins, whose funeral was the same day.
- 16 Kerr, *Limerick Regatta*, p. 11.

‘Limerick Failed to Provide Proper Nets’: Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Gaelic Athletic Association Central Council, 1928¹

In 1926, William Patrick ‘Liam’ Clifford (1876–1949) was elected as the ninth president of the GAA. The second Limerick native to hold the position, Clifford had a long involvement in the organisation of Gaelic games, having served as chair of the Limerick County Board between 1921 and 1939. In 1924, he was elected to Central Council, the association’s governing body, and was later chair of the Munster Council between 1932 and 1936.

Prior to the foundation of the GAA in 1884, Limerick had a ‘deep and powerful’ tradition of hurling and in 1885 and 1886 several clubs grew up in the city and county, with at least fourteen affiliated in the city alone. Football grew alongside hurling – and Limerick, represented by the Commercials club, won the first All-Ireland Football Championship in 1887 – but it was hurling which drew the greatest number of players and spectators.² The continued success of the GAA was not inevitable, and Limerick was among the counties that saw a significant decline in the number of active clubs as the GAA was perilously close to disappearing altogether amidst lengthy internal disputes in the 1890s. But by the early twentieth century, the association – closely linked with the rise of cultural and advanced nationalism – was benefitting from substantial newspaper coverage and a wider growth in interest in spectator sports.

At the 1924 Annual Congress, the big issue for debate was the ‘ban’, of which Liam Clifford was a strong proponent. When Commercials proposed a motion to support the removal of the ban in advance of the 1924 congress, he told a special meeting that it was ‘time that Limerick expressed its opinion on that important question’ and argued that the removal of the rules would ‘give unlimited sway to those who were out to Anglicise Ireland.’ ‘Time after time’, he continued, ‘Limerick had borne the brunt of the fight against the forces of Anglicisation. They should not be led away by the propaganda of the “Independent”, or by what Cork or anyone else did; they in Limerick would stand alone and do their duty.’³ The motion was defeated by seven votes to seventeen. At the 1926 county convention, however, there were thirty-four votes in favour of abolition against twenty-eight for retention, a result Clifford considered ‘rather unfortunate’.⁴

The document presented here comes from the recorded minutes of the GAA Central Council, and highlights some of the practical challenges – notwithstanding the growth and development of the games over the previous thirty or so years – that faced the amateur association when organising inter-county matches during Clifford’s presidency and in the early twentieth century more generally. The minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 1928 first record an (unsuccessful) objection raised against an earlier decision made by Clifford, as chair, on the

outcome of an All-Ireland Junior Football Championship match. They then detail an objection by Galway to the official result of a recent National Hurling League tie against Limerick. The match had been played at the Markets Field and finished with a one-point victory for Limerick, denying Galway the opportunity to catch Tipperary at the top of the nine-team league over the last round of games due for January 1928.⁵ The objection was upheld and the points awarded to Galway, but Tipperary were ultimately crowned champions. At this point, the National Hurling League was still an experimental competition. The first iteration had taken place with seven teams across 1925/6 and was not repeated in 1926/7, but an expanded version was run in 1927/8.

The Limerick senior hurling team had seen significant success in the late 1910s and early 1920s, winning All-Ireland titles in 1918 and again in 1921 (the former final played in 1919 and the latter in 1923 when they were the first team presented with the Liam McCarthy Cup), and contesting eight consecutive Munster finals between 1917 and 1924. Limerick refused to field for the delayed 1923 All-Ireland Hurling Final, fixed for 29 June 1924, as a protest against the continued internment of anti-Treaty IRA members (the county committee claimed that it was ‘fully committed’ to fielding ‘but the players were influenced, and warned not to travel’).⁶ When the final was played in September 1924, Galway won and a (short) period of relative decline followed. While Limerick were out of the running for honours by the time they played Galway in December 1928, the *Limerick Leader* reporter saw encouraging signs: they had ‘done very well in the competition, and in almost every game infused new blood into the team and with such success that in the 1928 Championship we can look forward to good results.’⁷ The optimism was misplaced, as Limerick lost their first match of the 1928 Munster Senior Hurling Championship (a straight knock-out competition) to eventual All-Ireland champions Cork by two points, before losing to Waterford by six points in their first match in 1929. Limerick would, though, go on to win five National Hurling League titles in a row from the 1933/4 season. Inspired by the legendary Mick Mackey, Limerick won four Munster Championships and played in four All-Ireland finals in the same period, winning in 1934 and 1936.

Notes

- 1 Gaelic Athletic Association Museum (GAA Museum), Central Council Minute Book, 1925–1929, CC/01/03.
- 2 Paul Rouse, *The hurlers: the first All-Ireland Championship and the making of modern hurling* (London, 2018), pp 169–70.
- 3 *Limerick Leader*, 14 March 1924. The proposal by Commercials was motivated by a desire to advance Gaelic football (‘Limerick was mostly a hurling county, and little help was given to football’). It was argued that with the ban removed football would progress and ‘leave Rugby behind.’
- 4 *Limerick Leader*, 6 February 1926. The motion for abolition was proposed by the Pallas, Treaty, Young Ireland, and Claughan clubs, with a counter-motion proposed by St Ita’s Hurling Club, Ashford.
- 5 *Limerick Leader*, 5 December 1928. Not all games were played and Kilkenny eventually withdrew from the competition.
- 6 Minutes of a special meeting of the GAA Central Council, 28 June 1924 (GAA Museum, CC/01/02).
- 7 *Limerick Leader*, 5 December 1928.

Special Meeting of the Central Council was held at Croke House, 164 Clonilla Road, on Saturday 14th January, 1928, Mr. W. J. Sifford, President, presiding.

The following Council Members were present: Trustees T. E. Luthelland, L.C. Cork; and P. M. Breen, Wexford. Leinster: M. O'Shea, V.P., Leix; Sean Ryan, Dublin; T. Walsh, Kilkenny; T. Lalor, Kildare; Munster: J. O'Brien, V.P., Clare; P. McGrath, Tipperary; R. Fitzgerald, Kerry. Connaught: Sean H. O'Suane, V.P., L.C., Mayo; I. Farrell, Roscommon; R. Pally, Roscommon. Ulster: Genl. S. O'Luffy (Chief Commissioner Garda Síochána), Chairman; B. C. Fay, Cavan; Central Colleges Council: Mr. S. H. O'Sullivan, Kerry. Handball Association: Sean O'Mahon, Dublin; and Mr. I. J. O'Toole, Secretary.

Mr. Ryan inquired if the last meeting of the Council was legal in view of Mr. Hurley, Cork, being present as proxy for Mr. Murphy although not being a member of Munster Council. The Secretary stated his attention had been drawn to the matter by Mr. McGrath, Secretary Munster Council, who wrote:

"I noticed that a J. Hurley attended from Cork. Is this right? If so, he is not entitled to attend as proxy not being a member of Munster Council."

The Chairman ruled that inasmuch as Mr. Hurley did not vote on any question the meeting was perfectly legal.

The Secretary stated he merely placed No. 2 Kerry v Kildare on Agenda pending the Chairman's ruling on the question of the legality of the meeting.

The Minutes of previous meeting were taken as read and signed.

The objection lodged by Mayo against Cavan in the Semi-final of the Junior All-Ireland Football Championship was withdrawn.

Mr. McGuire, the Mayo Co. Secretary stating that the witnesses in the case had declined to attend, although permission had been granted by General O'Luffy.

Mr. Lalor moved the following notice of motion:

- "Take notice that I, or some one acting for me, will at the next meeting of the Central Council move
- That the decision of the Chairman of the Central Council at the meeting held on Saturday 3rd December, 1927, awarding the Semi-final of the Junior All-Ireland Football Championship played at Thurles, Sunday 30th October, 1927, be rescinded on the following grounds:
- That the Chairman had no power under Rule 8, page 75, Official Guide, 1926-27, to award the match to Kerry.
 - That the Chairman had no power to award the match to Kerry inasmuch as the list of players handed by Kerry to the referee was not on Irish watermarked paper, see rule 8, page 31, Official Guide, 1926-27.
 - That the Chairman in depriving Kildare of the match did not take into consideration that the violation of Rule 8, page 75, Official Guide, 1926-27, by Kildare was through no fault of theirs, it being due to the miscarriage of arrangements made by Central Council,

The chairman ruled the first count out of order, and declined a suggestion of Mr. Ryan (Dublin) that the question should be referred to the Council. The chairman stated that he was following precedent.

As regards the second count, the chairman said the question about the paper was a matter that had not been brought to the notice of the Council before. The chairman and other members were of opinion that it was not an Irish water-marked paper and the Chairman ruled that Kerry lose the match.

Mr. Fitzgerald expressed dissatisfaction, and said it should be definitely ascertained whether it was an Irish water-marked paper, but he had stated at the previous meeting, Kerry did not want a replay, but were willing to replay Kildare.

The Chairman said Kildare could have travelled to Thurles by an early train on the morning of the match with Kerry, but Mr. Igher contended that Kildare availed of the arrangements made by the Central Council, which broke down. The Chairman said he would insist on having the rule requiring punctuality by teams enforced.

Galway lodged an objection against Kildare in the National Hurling League match played at Kildare on 6th December as follows:

On behalf of the Galway Hurling Team, and Galway County Board G.A.A., I claim the points of the Kildare v Galway National Hurling League match played in Kildare on December 6th.

The following are the points on which the claim is based:

- (a) Kildare team failed to take the field at the appointed time namely 3 o'clock. It was 16 minutes past 3 when they arrived, thus violating Rule 8, Page 78 of Official Guide, which states that a team, failing to take the field at the time appointed, in a League fixture, forfeits the match even though winners on the score; also violating Rule 2 of Constitution, of Draft Scheme of Hurling League Competitions, which states, "That the Nat. League Competitions must comply with the general rules governing the G.A.A."
- (b) Kildare failed to provide proper nets for the game thus violating Rule 11 of Draft Scheme, which requires that "The Home County shall make all arrangements and be responsible for the proper equipment of the ground. The nets provided shall be the ball to pass through them, several times during practice before the match and at least twice during the match. One of these was allowed, and another was disallowed for no reason."
- (c) Kildare failed to supply the Referee with a duplicate list of players, and the Referee therefore failed to supply Galway, with the Kildare list, as is required by Rule 15 of Draft Scheme, which states that "In all National League matches, a list of players in duplicate must be handed the Referee, before the matches begin, one copy to be given to the opposing team."
- (d) Two goals were scored by Galway, which were not allowed. One had just crossed the goal-line, when driven out and another went right through the net. This gave rise to much dissatisfaction, as the goals if allowed, and about one of which I have not the slightest doubt, would have given victory to Galway.
- (e) The Referee violated Rule 145, Page 145, of Official Guide, which states "That a Referee having given a decision after consulting his whistle, cannot under any circumstances alter it." Mr. O'Connell on the field demanded, and received from the Referee, his decision of the match. The decision was that Galway won.

These are the points on which we base our claim, and we are about to enter for an expedition hearing of the objection as it will greatly influence our match with Kerry on the 18th inst.

analysis has not required for 20.

(See note) also, to share.

Buncliff,
D. via G.C. I. No. Co. in Dublin

The Chairman on the reading of the referee's report "here-
by" which was reported on taking the field 12 minutes after
the hour fixed, upheld the Galway objection and awarded the
match and points to Galway.

INTER PROVINCIAL CHAMPIONSHIP:

The following dates and venues were arranged:

HURLING

Feb. 18th Munster v Connacht at Tralee 3-12 p.m.

Mr. Sean Hobbins, referee, with 4 Offical officials.

FOOTBALL

February 19th Munster v Connacht at Limerick, 3 p.m.

Mr. O'Sullivan, referee, with the following officials: Messrs.
J. Clabson, T. E. Ryan, J. Daveron, J. Smith, J.J. Galahan,
T. Lohar.

February 26th, Munster v Ulster at Croke Park, 3-30 p.m.

Mr. T. Burke, referee, with the following officials:
Messrs. J. Ryan, T. Lalor; J. O'Hanlon, M. O'Neill; J.D. Brown;
Sean O'Neill.

ALL-IRELAND JUNIOR HURLING FINAL:

26th February, Meath v Galway at Croke Park, 3 p.m.

Mr. T. Small, referee, with the following officials, Messrs.
Mr. O'Sullivan, J. McCarthy, B. Fitzgerald, Sean Coonan, Seamus
Gilheany, Sean McKeown,

NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE:

Febv. 5th Kerry v Wexford at Tralee.

Mr. J. A. Beckett, Cork, referee with 4 Cork officials.

COLLEGE COUNCIL:

In connection with the Munster v Connacht fixture at Tralee
on 18th February in the Inter-Provincial Championship, the
College Council have arranged for a Munster v Connacht Football
match in the College Inter Provincial Championship to proceed
the Hurling match fixed for 3-12 p.m.

A discussion arose as to the two Inter Provincial Finals
being played at Croke Park on St. Patrick's Day, some Council
Members suggesting that one of the fixtures should be made for
Cork.

Mr. Fay proposed, Mr. Mulholland seconded, that both
fixtures be played at Croke Park. - Passed.

NATIONAL HURLING AND FOOTBALL LEAGUE, 1928.

The following sub-Committee were appointed to revise
rules governing the League Competitions for 1928:

Messrs. P. D. Breen, P. O'Keefe, B. C. Fay, General
O'Sullivan, S. I. Ruane.

12

‘A Terrible Calamity, Too Dreadful to Contemplate’: Annexes to Evidence Provided to the Inquest into the Dromcollogher Cinema Disaster, 1926¹

The history of cinema in Limerick dates to May 1897 when a ‘moving picture’ was shown at the city’s Theatre Royal and, by the 1920s, it had become a hugely popular recreational practice. Purpose-built ‘picture houses’ such as the Garryowen Cinema Hall (1919), the Abbey Kinema (1922), and the Grand Central Cinema (1922) catered for Limerick city audiences, while travelling cinema operators such as J.J. Hurley from Bruff brought cinematography shows to public halls throughout the county. Hurley’s vivid description of ‘cinema entertainments’ that he produced in Dromcollogher in the mid-1920s gives a sense of the excitement they brought:

At 7.30 we open and they troop in, up the wooden steps, old men and women, boys and girls ... When the orchestra plays popular airs they all sing. There’s silence during the pathetic parts of the drama and a mighty cheer at anything exciting. The hearty laugh at the comics would do one good to hear. All titles (i.e. reading matter on screen) are read loudly by all. They cheer and clap at the finish, and troop out of the hall, laughing and joking, one large united family.²

Hurley’s recollections are poignant, as they were published in the immediate aftermath of the Dromcollogher cinema fire disaster of 1926. Having observed the commercial success of Hurley’s screenings, a local businessman, William Forde, decided to produce his own shows in the village. Devoid of expertise or experience, he partnered with a Cork projectionist, Patrick Dowling, and purchased a second-hand cinematograph machine. Following a successful trial run in late August, they advertised a public screening of two films for 9pm on 5 September in Dromcollogher’s Church Street village hall, a makeshift public space comprising the partially floored upper storey of a hardware shop’s storehouse, accessed by a wooden ladder attached to the building’s outside wall. A wooden partition along the right of the auditorium right-angled two and a half metres from the back wall to create a dressing room for performers, and electricity was provided by cable from a dynamo on a lorry parked outside. On the night in question, Forde found that two of three lamps intended for public lighting were not working, so he used candles in their stead. In circumstances still unclear, one of those placed on a table on which the highly flammable film reels were stacked set them alight. The fire quickly spread and, in what the chairman of Limerick County Council termed ‘a terrible calamity, too dreadful to contemplate’, forty-eight of an estimated 150 attendees lost their lives.³

The documents presented here, which form part of the Department of Justice file on the

Annexa 13.

Names of persons who perished in the Drumcollogher
Disaster.

1. Nora Long, Drumcollogher, aged 60 years, spinster.
2. Thomas Buckley, Drumcollogher, 60 years, Ex-School Teacher.
3. William Savage, Drumcollogher, 54 years Farmer and Butcher.
4. William R. Ahern, Drumcollogher, 31 years, Publican.
5. Mrs. Francis Mcauliffe, Drumcollogher 45, Publican's wife.
6. Mary Mcauliffe, Drumcollogher, 16, daughter of No.5.
7. John Mcauliffe, Drumcollogher, 14, son of No.5.
8. Jeremiah Buckley, Drumcollogher, 45, School teacher.
9. Mrs. Ellen Buckley, Drumcollogher, 40, wife of No.8.
10. Bridie Buckley, Drumcollogher, 11, Daughter of No's 8 & 9.
11. Kate Wall, N.S. Inspr. England, 42, Sister of No.9.
12. Nora Kirwin, Drumcollogher 17, Servant of No.8.
13. Margaret Kirwin, Kells Drumcollogher 15, Dairy man's daughter.
14. Bridget Sheehan, Drumcollogher, 13 Postman's daughter.
15. May O'Brien, 24, Shopkeeper's daughter, Drumcollogher.
16. Mrs. John Egan, Drumcollogher, 46 Shoemaker's wife.
17. Patrick O'Donnell, Drumcollogher, 50, Labourer.
18. Mrs. Annie Fitzgerald, Drumcollogher, Labourer's wife.
19. Margaret Fitzgerald, Drumcollogher, 12 daughter of No.18.
20. Daniel Fitzgerald, Drumcollogher, 9, Son of No. 18.
21. Mrs. Maurice Collins, Drumcollogher 45, R.T.
22. Robert Walsh Drumcollogher, 45, R.T.
23. Mrs. Ellen Madden, 65, Drumcollogher, Huxter.
24. Mrs. Mary A. O'Callaghan, Drumcollogher 62, shopkeeper's wife.
25. Miss M. Mary Hannigan, 46 adolphus st. Denford, London.
26. Eugene Sullivan, Drumcollogher, 11, schoolboy.
27. Daniel Moran, Drumcollogher, 11, schoolboy.
28. Anthony McCarthy, 30, Drumcollogher, Hackney Driver.
29. William Quirke, Drumcollogher, 19, Carpenter.
30. Miss M. B. O'Brien, Kells Drumcollogher, 53, Farmers wife.
31. Nellie J. O'Brien, Kells Drumcollogher 19, Daughter of No.30.
32. Mrs. Mary M. Barrett, Carroward, Drumcollogher, 40 years Labourer's wife.
33. Nellie Barrett, Carroward, 9, child of No.32.
34. Thomas Barrett, Carroward, 11, Child of No.32.
35. Maurice Hartness, Gardenfield Drumcollogher 14, Labourer's son.
36. Mrs. Mary Turner, Drumcollogher, 73 Labourer's wife.
37. James Quaid, Gardenfield Drumcollogher, 36, Farmer.
38. Miss M. Sullivan, Drumcollogher, 21, Farmer's daughter.
39. Miss M. Sullivan, Drumcollogher, 19, sister of 38.
40. Violet Irwin, Feenagh, 18, daughter of assistant Co. Surveyor.
41. Mrs. Kate Collins, Gardenfield, Drumcollogher 52, Farmer.
42. Kitty Collins, Gardenfield Drumcollogher, daughter of 41.
43. James Kenny, Drumcollogher, 13, Labourer's son.
44. John Kenny, Drumcollogher, brother of No.43.
45. Beta Noonan, Gardenfield, Drumcollogher, 17, Domestic Servant.
46. Edward Stack, Listowel Co. Kerry 23, Servant boy to Edmond Sullivan, Mondellihy, Drumcollogher.

disaster, are annexes to evidence heard at the inquest which opened in Dromcollogher courthouse the following day, 6 September. The list of forty-six victims comprises those who perished on the night; two others – James Kirwan, a fifty-year-old labourer, and Thomas Noonan, aged seven, subsequently succumbed to their injuries.⁴ It underscores the extent of the tragedy in terms of both the youth of so many who died (over half were twenty-five years or younger, sixteen of them minors), and its impact on individual families: for example, school teacher Jeremiah Buckley died together with his wife, daughter, brother, and sister-in-law, while three mothers perished, each alongside two of their children. The sketches of the scenario assist an understanding of why so many fatalities occurred: the positioning of the table on which the fire took hold between the audience and the narrow door which provided the hall's sole point of egress; the small size of the barred windows at the back of the building through which dozens of people consequently tried to escape; and the presence of haycocks (which quickly caught fire) underneath them. They essentially pictorialise Liam Irwin's description, in his highly detailed study of the disaster, of 'a structure clearly quite unsuitable for use as a hall for public gatherings, having a narrow steep ladder/stairs, lacking adequate exits and being constructed of materials that were easily combustible'.⁵

The funeral mass, attended by W.T. Cosgrave, took place on Tuesday, 7 September, after which Limerick county secretary John Quaid oversaw the laying of forty-five of the victims in a communal grave in Dromcollogher churchyard, his own brother James amongst them.⁶ Due to an insufficiency of coffins, some were buried in large wooden boxes in which bacon had been imported from the US. The following Sunday, parish priest John Begley told his congregation that 'whatever happened there was pure accident in the Hands of the Almighty. There was no one guilty of any offence.'⁷ The hall had, after all, hosted public entertainments without incident for over five years. The state solicitor disagreed, however, and charged Forde, Dowling, and the owner of the hall, Patrick Brennan, with manslaughter on account of their 'criminal neglect' of fire safety regulations introduced consequent to the Cinematograph Act of 1909 – regulations of which the Garda Síochána had explicitly apprised Forde in advance of the screening. There was no fire-fighting equipment in the hall on the night (such as buckets of water and sand, and wet blankets), and the film reels and the projector itself were fully exposed.⁸ The hall was also overcrowded, many sitting on planks placed across boxes, the top of the partition wall, or standing at the back. The three men were tried at Central Criminal Court in November. The jury quickly acquitted Brennan but could not reach a verdict on Dowling and Forde. In February 1927, the charges against them were dropped.

Relief funds to assist survivors set up by the Cosgrave government and the mayor of Limerick, Paul O'Brien, raised over £12,000, including donations of £100 from Bannatyne's and 10 guineas from the Limerick branch of the British Legion. Payments from the fund continued until 1958. The site of the disaster lay derelict until it was purchased by a local committee over two decades later and gifted to Limerick County Council for the construction of a public library

(ANNEXE 2.) FRONT AND REAR ELEVATIONS Church St. Hall. DRAWN COLLETTOR.

Fig. C. Front Elevation

Fig. D. Rear "

A on Fig. D. Shows windows 3' x 3' with bars indicated by arrows.

A₁ on Fig. D. .. window of dressing room.

B on Fig. C. Shows entrance door 6' x 4'. Can Fig. C. Show old damaged window.

D on Fig. C. .. hall door about 6' x 3' into ground floor. E on Fig. C. Shows sliding door.

F on Fig. C. Shows stairs to entrance door erected at an angle of about 50°.

G. - Fig. C. - position of long, narrow

in yard in front of hall.

Fig. C.

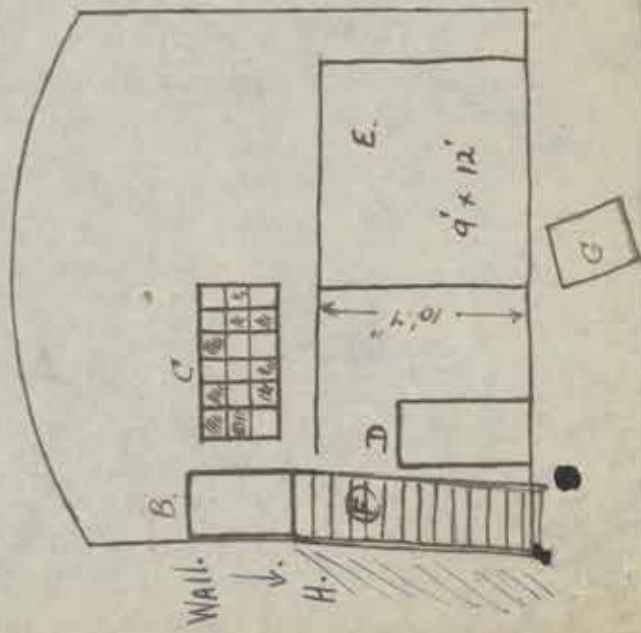
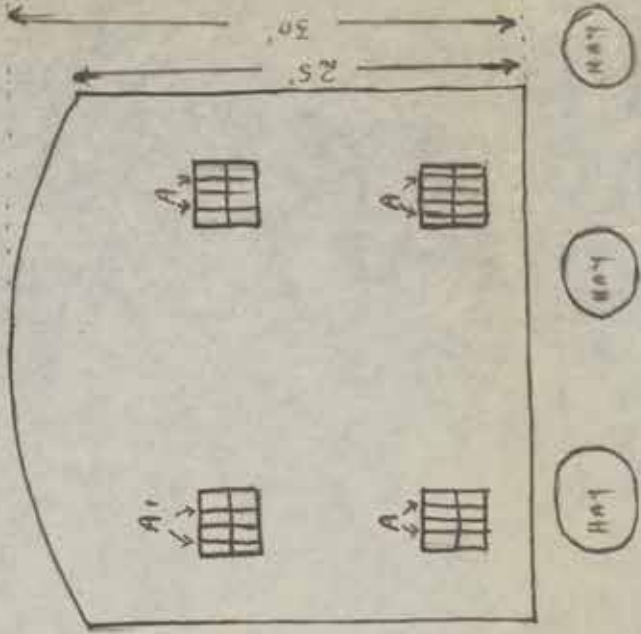




Fig. A.

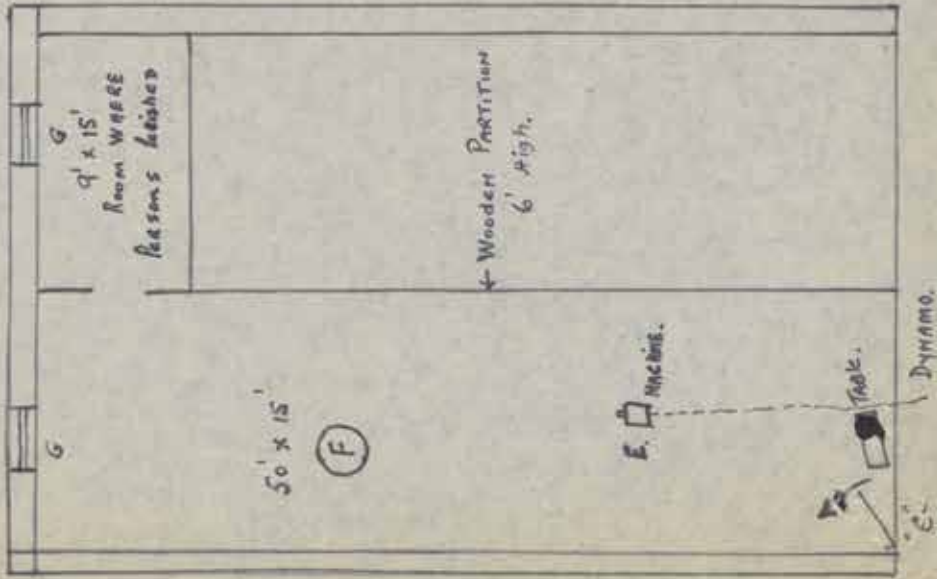
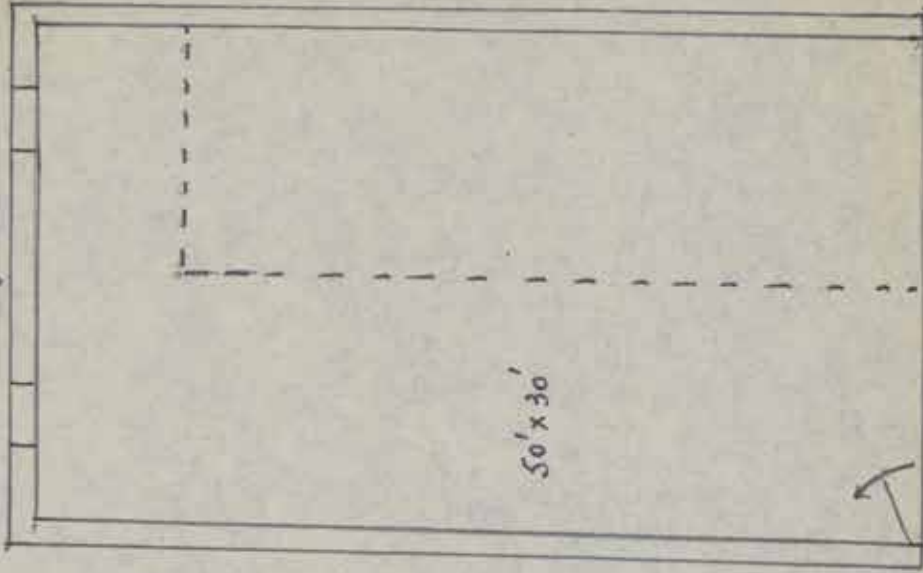


Fig. B.



PLAN of Church St. HALL.

DRUM COLLOGHER.

Fig. A ... 1st Floor Plan.

Fig. B ... Ground Floor Plan.

C. in fig A shows ENTRANCE DOOR.

D. Position of Table holding films.

E. ... OPERATOR + MACHINE.

F. ... Centre of Audience.

G. ... Two WINDOWS EACH 3' x 2 1/2'

in memory of the dead. Dromcollogher Memorial Library opened on 12 May 1953 and remains in service today.

Notes

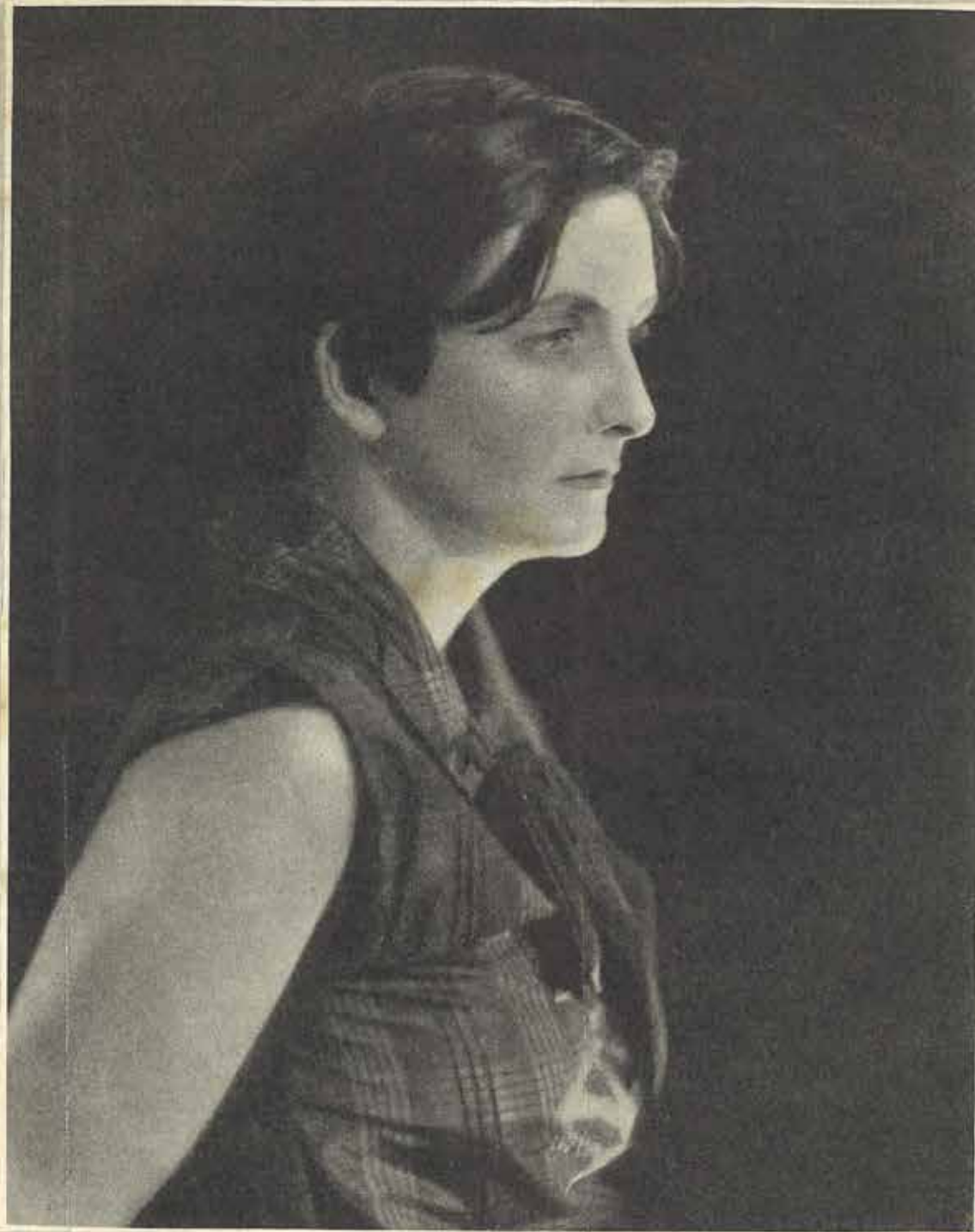
- 1 National Archives/JUS/H/290/80 – Cinematograph Entertainment Disaster at Drumcollogher. *Reproduced by kind permission of the Director of the National Archives of Ireland.*
- 2 *Cork Examiner*, 16 September 1926.
- 3 Limerick Archives, Limerick County Council minute books, LK/MIN/14, 11 September 1926.
- 4 Kirwan's daughter, Margaret, (no. 13 on the list) also died.
- 5 Liam Irwin, 'The calamitous burning': the Dromcollogher Disaster of 1926', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 50 (2013), pp 241–65, at p. 243.
- 6 James Kirwan was interred in this grave, following his death one week later.
- 7 *Limerick Leader*, 14 September 1926.
- 8 Under the terms of the act, projectors had to be situated in fire resistant enclosures.



Classroom in Mary Immaculate College, 1917

V

Culture and Education



P12/248(2)

**THE YOUNG AUTHORESS OF "DISTINGUISHED VILLA": MISS KATE O'BRIEN,
WHOSE FIRST PLAY HAS SUCCEEDED AT THE LITTLE THEATRE.**

On a certain Sunday evening during the general strike, the Repertory Players gave a performance of a new play, by an unknown author, which greatly impressed all who witnessed it, but which almost entirely escaped public attention owing to the absence of newspapers. Shortly afterwards, however, the Little Theatre fell vacant, and Mr. José G. Levy decided to try out the play which had seemed so promising. So it was that Miss Kate O'Brien's "Distinguished Villa" came to the West End for a run, and the critics giving it a good send-off, it has been doing good business ever since. Miss O'Brien, who is only twenty-seven, is the latest recruit to the brilliant band of Irish dramatists. She has travelled a good deal in Europe and America, and is now secretary and publications editor to the Sunlight League.

‘The Latest Recruit to the Brilliant Band of Irish Dramatists’: Press Notices for the London Run of Kate O’Brien’s *Distinguished Villa*, 1926¹

The career of one of Limerick’s most celebrated writers of the twentieth century, Kate O’Brien (1897–1974), was launched in the summer of 1926. Born in Limerick city, O’Brien – a sister-in-law to Stephen O’Mara – was the seventh of ten children of a prosperous horse dealer, Thomas O’Brien. She was educated at Laurel Hill, run by the French Faithful Companions of Jesus order of nuns, after which she went to University College Dublin to study English literature in 1916. O’Brien graduated three years later and relocated to London. There she worked as a journalist and teacher, before moving to Bilbao, Spain in 1922 to take a job as a governess, which gave her a lifelong love for the country. She returned to London one year later and married a Dutch journalist, Gustaaf Reiner, but they separated after less than one year – both were homosexual. In 1924, O’Brien took a job as secretary and editor at the Sunlight League which, founded two years previously, promoted sunlight and clean air as health therapies for working-class children.

It was while working there that a friend of O’Brien’s, Veronica Turley, bet her £1 that she could not write a play in one month. She won the wager with the three-act *Distinguished Villa*, which explored the impact of a liberal female lodger on the lives of a conservative, lower-middle-class couple in contemporary Brixton.

Forty years later O’Brien would describe it as ‘a young, over-written play, very tragic, very kitchen sink, over-romantic’. Yet it did, she believed, have ‘some merit’ and this was recognised by the London theatre world at the time.² It was first performed on 2 May 1926 by the Repertory Players, an amateur company which staged a Sunday night series of one-off productions at the Aldwych Theatre in Covent Garden. There were no press reviews due to the calling of the 1926 General Strike by the Trade Union Congress the next morning. But this performance attracted favourable attention on the night and the play opened at the Little Theatre on the Strand on 13 July with a professional director and cast. It went on tour in England in February 1927 and played in Dublin’s Abbey Theatre in January 1929.

The press notices presented here, published in the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* and *The Sketch*, were among several reviews of the London run of *Distinguished Villa* carried in British newspapers and magazines. The former was presumably clipped from the paper by O’Brien herself, and is part of a collection of press-cuttings in the Kate O’Brien Papers, which were deposited in Special Collections and Archives at the Glucksman Library, University of Limerick by O’Brien’s nephew, Arthur Hall, in 2002. Like these, most reviews of the play were extremely positive; yet the tribute O’Brien most valued was a telegram from the playwright, Seán O’Casey: ‘Dublin ventures to congratulate Limerick’. However, some British

Plays of the Moment: "Distinguished Villa," at the Little Theatre.



THE AFFECTION-STARVED NATTY FINDS SYMPATHY WITH FRANCES: MR. IVOR BARNARD AND MISS CLARE HARRIS.



THE TRAGIC FINALE: JOHN MORRIS (WILLIAM STACK) PREVENTS MABEL (MISS UNA O'CONNOR) FROM ENTERING THE KITCHEN WHERE NATTY HAS COMMITTED SUICIDE.



MABEL HEMWORTH ARRANGES HER LODGERS' LOVE AFFAIRS: L. TO R., ALEC (HENRY HOARE), FRANCES (CLARE HARRIS), MABEL (UNA O'CONNOR), AND GWENDOLINE (GILLIAN LIND).

"Distinguished Villa," by Kate O'Brien, the young Irish playwright, has just been produced at the Little Theatre, after having been given in the spring by a Sunday play-producing society. It is an interesting piece of work. Mabel Hemworth, the châteline of "Distinguished Villa," Brixton, is the epitome of acid gentility, and her husband, Natty, has been starved for want of affection all their married life. The arrival of Frances, the charming lodger, gives him an inkling of what life might be with a sympathetic companion. Troubles then overtake all the Brixton circle. Gwendoline loves Alec not wisely but too well, and when John is accused of being the cause of her trouble, he is quixotic enough to marry her. Natty seeks the happiness denied him at home by going in for a common intrigue, and the play ends with his suicide.—[Photographs by Saks.]



THE CHÂTELAINES OF "DISTINGUISHED VILLA": MISS UNA O'CONNOR AS MABEL HEMWORTH.

reviewers took issue with what they saw as the condescension of her depiction of English suburban life and, stung by such criticism, she looked to Ireland's middle class for her subject matter thereafter. Her next project, she told a journalist, would be an 'Irish play', although not one 'of the usual type. All Irish people are not peasants you know'.³ This second play, *The Bridge*, opened at the Arts Theatre Club in May 1927 but it was not a success.

Distinguished Villa had, however, established O'Brien as a professional writer. In January 1927, she was invited to join the writers' association, PEN, which included George Bernard Shaw, Joseph Conrad, and H.G. Wells amongst its members and the play's commercial success allowed O'Brien to leave her job at the Sunlight League. Her financial independence was further facilitated by an advance for a novel from Heinemann some months later and it was as a novelist rather than a playwright that she subsequently made her career. *Without My Cloak* was finally published in 1931; it was an immediate bestseller and a critical success, winning both the Hawthornden and James Tait prizes for fiction in 1932. This first novel introduced the perennial themes of O'Brien's fiction: the rhythms of middle-class life in Limerick (fictionalised in her novels as Mellick), extra-marital relationships and same-sex desire, and the 'unfreedom' of women in Irish Catholic bourgeois society. Her unflinching approach to these issues saw her eventually fall foul of the Censorship of Publications Board and two of her novels, *Mary Lavelle* (1936) and *The Land of Spices* (1941), were banned, the latter on account of one line.

Notes

- 1 ©Special Collections and Archives, Glucksman Library, University of Limerick: Kate O'Brien papers, P12/248/2.
- 2 Quoted in Eibhear Walshe, *Kate O'Brien: a writing life* (Dublin, 2006), p. 38.
- 3 *Evening Herald*, 17 July 1926.

‘It Will be a Matter for Your Own Committee as to Whether You Conform to This Regulation’: Letter from Limerick City Council Scholarships Committee to the Town Clerk, 1924, and Syllabus for Limerick County Council Secondary Scholarship Scheme, 1924¹

The cultural policies of the Cumann na nGaedheal governments of the 1920s ‘sought to demonstrate that the new state was coterminous with Irish nationalist aspirations’.² The cabinets included a number of Irish-Irelanders – most notably Minister for Education Eoin MacNeill and Postmaster General J.J. Walsh – and W.T. Cosgrave himself believed it necessary ‘to mark out the Gaelicisation ... of our whole culture ... in an attempt to make our nation separate and distinct’.³ Under this aspect it granted tax exemptions to the GAA (which, as Paul Rouse has noted, had ‘in its language and actions ... adopted a trenchantly nationalist position’ after 1922), and ‘revived’ the Tailteann Games.⁴ Most significantly, it strove to further resuscitate the Irish language, which less than 20 per cent of the population could then speak.⁵ The 1922 Irish Free State Constitution declared Irish ‘the National language’ and it was designated a core subject at primary level in the same year. MacNeill extended this to all schools in 1924, and a pass grade in the subject subsequently became a requirement in state examinations. Another passionate Irish language advocate, Minister for Finance Ernest Blythe, funded both An Gúm, a state printing press which published Irish-language works, including school textbooks, and *Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe*, a subsidised Irish-language theatre which opened in 1928. In addition, Cumann na nGaedheal made entry into the civil service conditional on proficiency in Irish (assessed through examination), and this was later extended to local authorities.

The party’s Irish language policy was not without controversy, particularly amongst the Irish Free State’s Protestant population. Protestants had dominated the Gaelic League in its early years but had become alienated from the organisation in the two decades prior to independence on account of its increasingly nationalist and Catholic complexion.⁶ Few objected to the Cosgrave government’s promotion of the language per se and some, such as the Church of Ireland bishop of Dublin, J.A.F. Gregg, urged Protestants to accept the new regulations, arguing that they ‘should not lose the solid and real benefits which lay ready in their hands, while criticising details which were not of equally fundamental importance’.⁷ However, a large majority objected to the degree of compulsion now involved. In 1922, the *Church of Ireland Gazette* complained that making the language a core subject in primary schools was very widely regarded as ‘a retrograde step’ as it could ‘never become the tongue of the vast majority of the Irish race whose lot is cast in the great English-speaking communities across the seas’, and the perceived impact of compulsory Irish on imperial opportunities became a

constant refrain in the mid-1920s.⁸ For example, the *Irish Times* denounced it as a ‘petty policy of parochial Ireland’, which by setting ‘a language barrier between our small island and the rest of the world’, would deny Irish people ‘that scope for the winning of wealth and fame which the stage of the British Empire affords’.⁹ Faced with such opposition, and mindful of religious minority convictions, the Department of Education did allow Irish language policy to be diluted in practice in Protestant schools.

Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh has argued that the Irish Free State ‘simply adopted the strategies for Gaelicisation already formulated by the Gaelic League’ and this was certainly true in the case of local government jobs.¹⁰ The League had long campaigned for Irish language tests in such appointments and had successfully lobbied Limerick Borough Council to introduce one for ‘all clerical offices in [its] gift’ in 1904/05.¹¹ Irish was also a requirement for the council’s university and secondary student scholarship schemes, instituted in 1915 and 1921 respectively. These scholarships, which were administered by a special committee which met two to three times a year and awarded through exam, were intended to assist students without the private means to pursue a post-primary education. Limerick County Council ran a near-identical scheme and, in the mid-1920s, joint examinations were held.

Then, the primary schools in which candidates for the secondary scholarship schemes were based were required to have ‘adopted the New Educational Programme as modified by the Limerick County Committee of the Gaelic League’, to be using Irish as their official language, and teaching it for a minimum of one hour a day.¹² Furthermore, the secondary schools selected by candidates had to offer both Gaeilge and Irish History as subjects.¹³ The syllabus presented here is that for the examination for Limerick County Council’s scheme for 1924 (when ten secondary scholarships were offered to the value of £40), and it provides an insight into the centrality of centrality of the Irish language to the curriculum. Gaeilge was one of just three ‘essential subjects’ in which a pass (50 per cent) was required – as was Irish History and Geography – while the literature prescribed for the English exam was largely Irish, as was one of the Latin texts.

The letter from Limerick’s University and Secondary Scholarships Committee to the city council’s town clerk demonstrates the way in which, as with Protestant schools, some flexibility with Irish language regulations was allowed. The eligibility criteria for the university scholarship stipulated a pass in Irish in the qualifying exam and scholarship holders were required to ‘show continued proficiency in Irish, attend classes in Irish for two years, and satisfy the Professor of Irish in the University of their proficiency.’¹⁴ This letter, however, indicates that in cases like Patrick Lynch’s, where ‘exceptionally good’ examinations were made, the requirement to pass Irish was not absolute as the city council did ultimately decide in his favour and he went on to study Commerce in UCD.¹⁵ That the latitude shown to Lynch was not singular was demonstrated by the case of William Ebrill, the sole applicant for a university scholarship four years later. Then, the committee reluctantly decided that they had no power to make an

SYLLABUS.

The following is the List of Subjects for Examination:—

Essential Subjects.

1. Gaedilge (200 marks).
2. History and Geography of Ireland (200 marks).
3. Arithmetic (200 marks).

Optional Subjects.

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 4. English (150 marks). | 8. French (100 marks). |
| 5. Algebra (100 marks). | 9. Nature Study (100 marks). |
| 6. Geometry (100 marks). | 10. Domestic Science (100 marks). |
| 7. Latin (100 marks). | |

Each Candidate must take (a) Irish; (b) History and Geography of Ireland; (c) Arithmetic; (d) Any three of the optional subjects.

An Gaedilge.

Oral Examination (100 marks).

1. Conversation on some of the following topics:—
Salutations, Health, Illness, Hunger, Thirst, Food, Drink, School, Numbers, The Clock, Money, Buying and Selling, Divisions of Year (month, day etc.).
2. To read correctly a passage from the first 5 chapters of Béarna and answer easy questions on the same.
3. To recite about 50 lines of Irish Poetry.

Written Examination (100 marks).

1. To write a letter or easy essay.
2. To answer in Irish easy Grammar questions suggested by prescribed Author.
3. To answer easy questions on the subject matter of prescribed Author.

History and Geography of Ireland.

1. History—
 - (a) Makers of Irish History.—Concannon.
 - (b) Irish History Reader Complete.—Christian Brothers.
2. Geography—
Ireland: with special reference to Physical Features, Productions, Historical Aspects. 100 marks will be assigned to History, and 100 marks to Geography.

Arithmetic.

The first Four Rules (simple and compound), Decimals and Vulgar Fractions, with simple problems thereon, the Unitary Method, Percentages, Simple Interest, Simple Rectilineal Areas.

English.

1. Literature:—
 - Prose—(a) The Flight of the Eagle.—S. O'Grady.
 - (b) Old Celtic Romances Part I, by P. W. Joyce.
 - Poetry—Ideal Poetry.—(Rev. J. Kingston).
 - Only Anglo-Irish Poems required.
2. Grammar including Parsing and Analysis.
3. Simple Essay based on the scenes or incidents in the Literature or History Course.
4. Recitation of fifty lines of Poetry.

Algebra.

Symbolical Expressions and first Four Rules, Easy Equations and Problems thereon, Easy Factors, Elementary and Easy Fractions.

Geometry.

The subject matter of the First Book of Euclid, including easy deductions and practical exercises on the same.

Latin.

1. Grammar and Composition approximately equivalent to that contained in Ritchie's First Steps in Latin.
2. Celtica.—(Rev. T. Corcoran, S.J.)
3. A passage of the standard of Celtica for translation from Latin into Irish or English.

French.

1. To answer in French easy Grammar questions suggested by Picture Paths to French—Mansfield.
2. To answer easy questions on the subject matter of prescribed Author.
3. To write an Essay on an easy subject or to describe a picture.

Nature Study.

- 1 Examination of a single plant and its parts.
- 2 Flowers—their structure and uses.
- 3 Fruits—Disposal of seeds and uses of fruits.
- 4 Winter Twigs and Buds.
- 5 Seeds and Germination.
- 6 Work of roots, stems and leaves.
- 7 Plant propagation.
- 8 Recognition of common wild flowers, shrubs and trees, with their Irish and local names.
- 9 Climate and weather. Weather Charts.
- 10 Construction and uses of barometer and thermometer, hydrometer, and rain gange.

Domestic Economy.

- 1 General—Elements of Sanitation in the dwellinghouse. Principles of personal cleanliness. Disposal of refuse and dangers of dust and dirt. Principles of care of, and cleaning of, articles of household use. Homely weights and measures. Arrangement of daily and weekly work in small houses. Buying of supplies and apportionment of expenditure. Elementary principles and practice of First Aid treatment of cuts, bruises and burns, and care of sick persons in the home.
- 2 Cookery—Principles and practice of simple home cookery as taught to sixth and seventh classes in primary schools.
- 3 Laundry—Principles and practice of simple home laundry as taught to the sixth and seventh classes in primary schools.
- 4 Needlework—Plain needlework, cutting and knitting as taught to sixth and seventh classes in primary schools.

MAURICE FITZGERALD,
Secretary to Committee.

October, 1st 1924.

ELIZABETH CUSACK.

On the proposition of Father Wall seconded by Mr. O'Leary it was resolved:—

"That the supplementary grant of £10 permitted by Article 1 of the Scheme be granted to Elizabeth Cusack whose parents are in very poor circumstances."

MAURICE FITZGERALD,
Secretary to Committee.

L. R. Roche N.
12-1-25

B. Laffan
20.12.24

Limerick County Scholarships Committee.

MAURICE FITZGERALD,
Secretary to Committee

Secretary's Office,

82 & 83 O'Connell Street, Limerick.



S'Éilipéat an Pócaí agus
r'Éilipéat an Peap

25th July 1924.

My Dear Town Clerk/

I append hereunder the marks obtained by Thomas F. Madigan and Patrick J. Lynch, the 2 students who competed for the City Scholarship under the County Council Scheme. A student to qualify for scholarship must have obtained, at least, 50% in Irish and History & Geography, and 30% in the remaining subjects. The first named student, T. F. Madigan, while scoring the lesser number of marks, satisfied the requirements of the Scheme in its entirety, but Lynch failed to get the necessary 50% in Irish. Of course, it will be a matter for your own Committee as to whether you will conform to this regulation. They have both made exceptionally good Examinations

Faithfully yours,

Maurice Fitzgerald

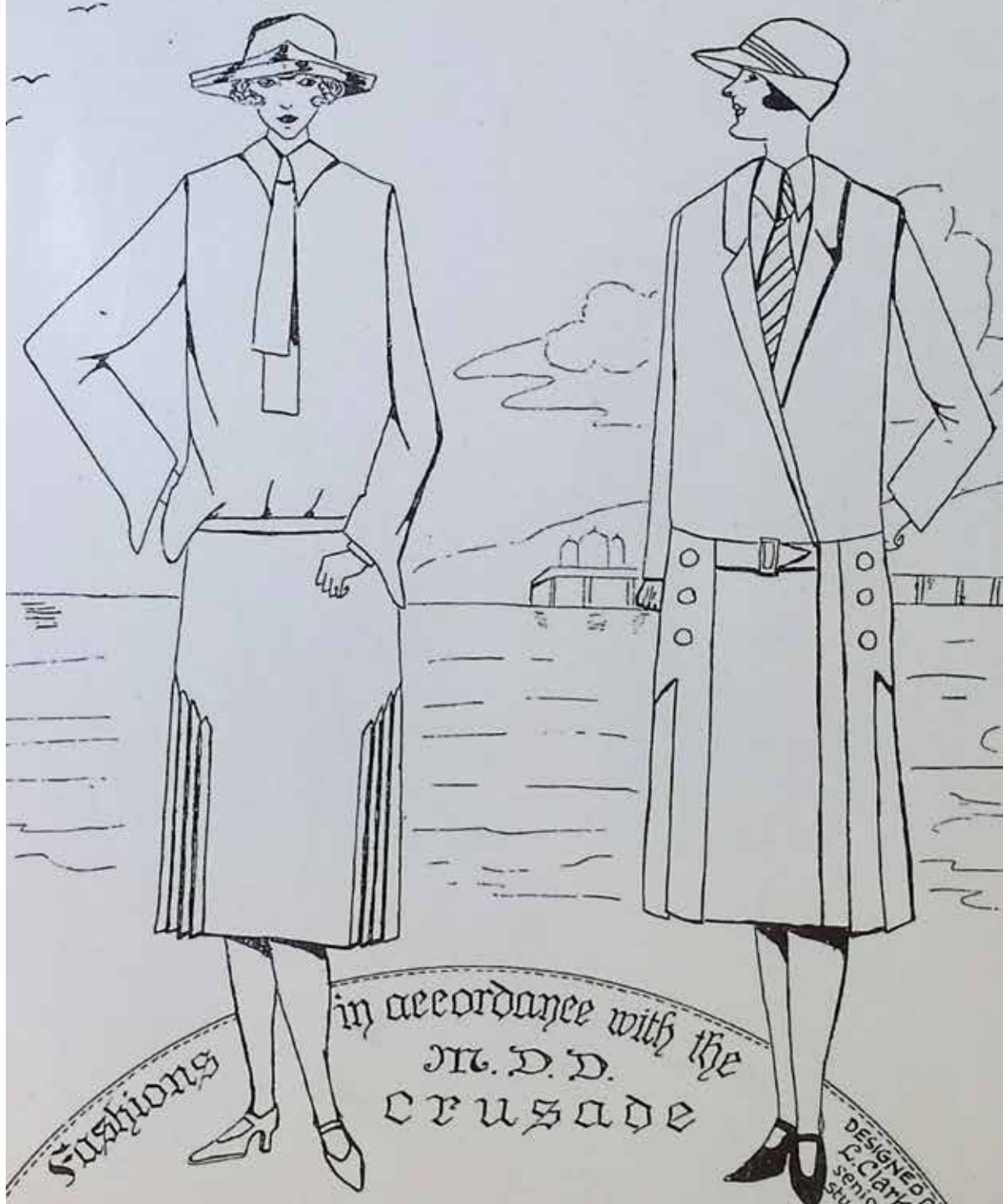
Secretary to Committee

W.M. Nolan Esq.,
Town Clerk - Town Hall
Limerick

award on account of his failure in Irish, but unanimously agreed ‘to refer the facts to the [city] Council to exercise their discretion in the matter if they thought fit.’¹⁶

Notes

- 1 Limerick Archives (LA), Limerick Council Special Committee Meeting Minute Books: Scholarships Committee, L/SMIN/11/1/55; LA, Limerick County Council minute books, LK-MIN-13/46–7.
- 2 Mel Farrell, *Party politics in a new democracy: the Irish Free State, 1922–37* (Cham, 2017), p. 110.
- 3 Dáil Éireann Debates, vol. 5, no. 2, 30 September 1923.
- 4 Paul Rouse, *Sport in Ireland: a history* (Oxford, 2015), p. 274.
- 5 The 1926 census recorded approximately 544,000 declared Irish speakers, comprising 18.3 per cent of respondents.
- 6 This was emblematised by Douglas Hyde’s resignation as president in 1915.
- 7 *Limerick Chronicle*, 26 June 1926.
- 8 *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 10 March 1922.
- 9 *Irish Times*, 27 October 1926.
- 10 Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, ‘The Irish-Ireland idea: rationale and relevance’ in Enda Longley (ed.), *Culture in Ireland: division or diversity? Proceedings of the Cultures of Ireland Group, 27–28 September, 1991* (Belfast, 1991), pp 54–71, at p. 63.
- 11 Thomas Keane, ‘Class, religion and society in Limerick city, 1922–1939 (unpublished PhD thesis, Mary Immaculate College, 2015), p. 222.
- 12 LA, LK-MIN-13/45.
- 13 ‘Official’ was defined as the use of Irish for roll calls, orders, and prayers.
- 14 LA, L/SMIN/11/1/11–12, ‘Scheme for University Scholarships in the County Borough of Limerick’.
- 15 *Limerick Leader*, 7 August 1926. Lynch, from Mulgrave Street, had actually achieved a higher aggregate examination score than Thomas Madigan.
- 16 LA, L/SMIN/11/1/76. The consideration of Ebrill’s case also indicates that the restriction of university scholarships to those without sufficient private means to attend was not hard and fast by this time. Ebrill was the son of a prosperous Limerick city auctioneer.



Fashions

*in accordance with the
M. D. D.
crusade*

*DESIGNED BY
L. Clarke
senior
student
1926
1927*

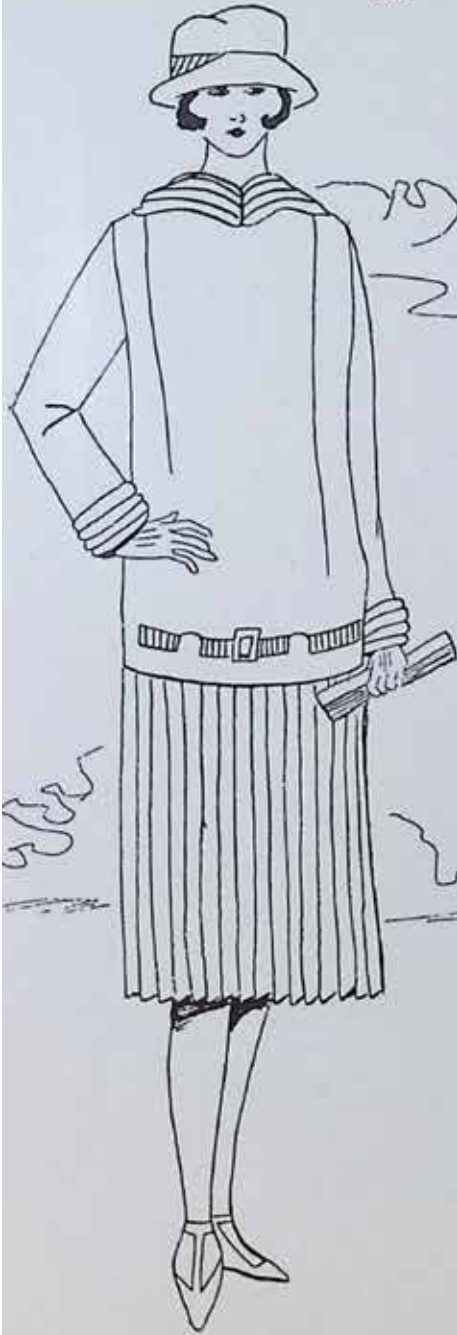
‘If Our College Had Nothing More to Boast of in the History of its Existence’: Articles on the Mary Immaculate Modest Dress and Deportment Crusade in the *Mary Immaculate Training College Annual*, 1929¹

By 1929, Mary Immaculate College was a well-established teacher training college for Catholic women on Limerick’s South Circular Road. Established in 1898 following a request to the Commissioners of National Education two years previously by Bishop of Limerick Edward Thomas O’Dwyer, the college took in its first enrolment in 1901 and was officially opened the following year under the Sisters of Mercy. Students undertook a two-year training programme (comprised of a ‘junior’ and ‘senior’ year), combining academic study with supervised teaching practice, to prepare them to teach in Irish primary schools. From the turn of the twentieth century, the curriculum included study of a wide range of subjects – including singing, needlework, elementary science, cookery, geometry, physical drill, and courses on the theory and practice of teaching – alongside three terms of teaching practice. The college had a strong tradition of teaching and promoting the Irish language, and this received greater emphasis after the foundation of the Irish Free State. From 1922, Irish was a compulsory subject for entry into teacher training and most lectures in the college were delivered in Irish. All pupils in primary schools, in turn, would receive one hour of instruction in Irish with infants taught entirely through Irish.²

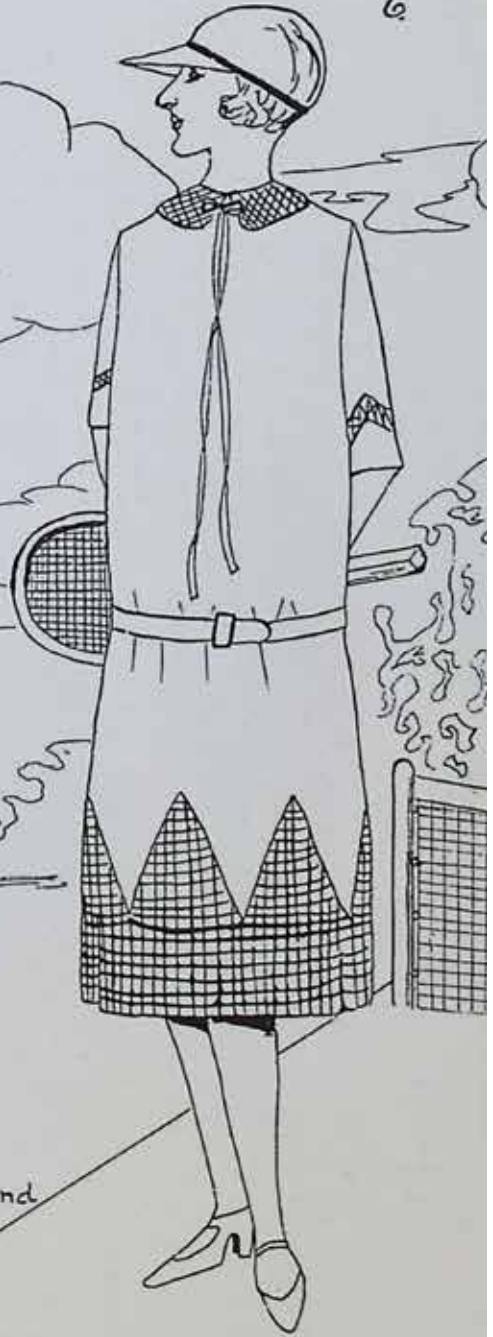
The first edition of the *Mary Immaculate Training College Annual* was published in 1927 by then-current students with the aim of keeping the ‘big family’ of alumni ‘in touch with one another and with their College’. It contained reports and notices on the academic, sporting, and cultural activity of the college over the previous year, new trends and developments in education, as well as prose, poetry, and prayers contributed by past and current students. The *Annual* also reflected the strong Catholic ethos of the college and its devotion to Mary Immaculate, who, as a foreword to the first edition described, ‘since the opening of the College, has so manifestly taken it under her care and blessed it with success beyond all anticipation’. The final issue was published in 1962.

The 1927 edition of the *Annual* included an article entitled ‘Wanted – A New Woman’. The piece presented a fiery diatribe against the ‘Modern Woman’, who ‘poses before the public either as a would-be-man or an unwomanly woman’, and even in ‘Catholic Ireland’ remained ‘deaf to the frequent denunciations of immodest fashions made by the Pope, the Bishops and Clergy during the last ten years.’ It then asserted that it was time for ‘a Crusade to resave Irish maidenhood from the grip of a pagan world’. Who better to carry out such a crusade, it was suggested, than ‘those to whom the education of the rising generation is entrusted?’ To that end,

5



6



Seaside

and

Sports.

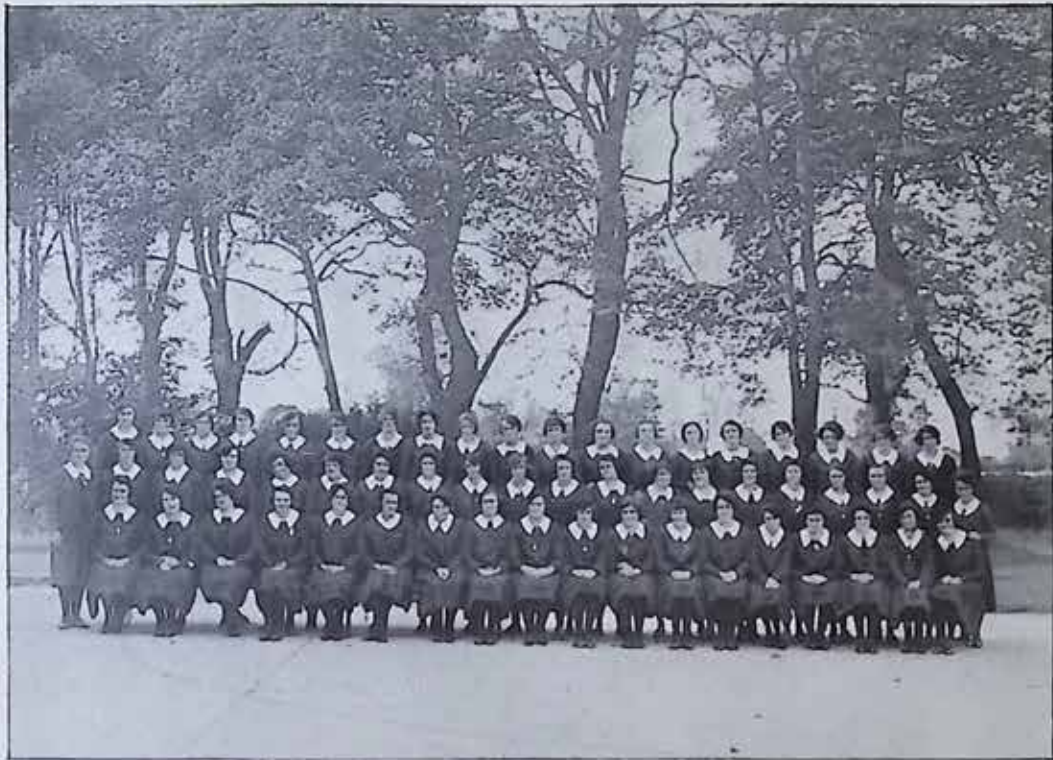
the Mary Immaculate Modest Dress and Deportment Crusade (MDDC) was formed by senior students in the college. It imposed a series of rules on its members, regarding dress (stipulating minimum lengths for sleeves and dresses and banning ‘suggestive’ cuts and materials, including ‘shades in stockings that suggest the nude’) and deportment (including abstention from drinking, smoking, and loud or ‘irreverent’ exclamations in public, and avoidance of ‘suggestive or immodest’ dancing and ‘improper’ films and shows.) Members were further encouraged to impress the rules upon the children under their care and to wear the ‘badge of the Crusade’. Suggested appropriate fashions were also included for readers, some examples of which are presented here.³

Over the following year the MDDC had grown, as the 1928 *Annual* boasted, into a ‘national movement’.⁴ The Lenten pastorals delivered by the Catholic bishops in February 1928 were filled once again with warnings about the dangers of immodest female dress and the MDDC was specifically welcomed by the Bishop of Clogher.⁵ On 19 May 1928, the promoters received a telegram from Bishop of Limerick David Keane confirming that Pope Pius XI had imparted Apostolic Benediction on the Crusade and its members.⁶

The article from the 1929 issue of the *Annual* reproduced here highlights the continued enthusiasm for the MDDC among Mary Immaculate College students (its founding members all since graduated) and further growth outside of the college – rising to some 12,000 members. The success of the campaign is here part of a wider ‘great year’ for the Catholic Church, with the signing of the Lateran Treaty between the Holy See and the Kingdom of Italy (the ‘Settlement of the Roman Question’ ending the annexation of the Papal State in Rome and creating the Vatican City State), Pope Pius’ golden jubilee, and in Ireland the centenary of the Catholic Emancipation Act (which removed most of the remaining restrictions formerly imposed on Irish and British Catholics).

The *Annual* and the MDDC both reflect the strong connections between faith and education in 1920s Limerick. Women made up two thirds of the teaching profession nationally and with the vast majority of teachers in the Irish Free State educated in three Catholic, all-female training colleges, the church ‘had the power to regulate and restrict, to dominate and dictate women teachers’ lives not only in the wider community but indeed from within the education system itself.’ The MDDC was one response to a wider concern, led vocally by the pope and the Catholic hierarchy, about how ‘modern’ women dressed, carried themselves in public, and the supposedly corruptive influence of modern trends in music, dance, and entertainment. The so-called ‘flapper girl’, ‘with her shingled hair and knee length dress’, was seen to embody ‘vice, immorality, sexuality, and disobedience’ and the antithesis of the ‘chaste and obedient ideal of Catholic womanhood’. In newly independent Ireland, she was seen as posing a threat to the very survival of the state itself.⁷

The students who formed the MDDC, and those who joined, might thus be seen as



The Seniors, 1928-1929

A GREAT YEAR

With hearts responsive
And enfranchised eyes,
We thank Thee, Lord.

—OXENHAM.

A GREAT year for the whole Catholic world has just closed—the year of the Settlement of the Roman Question and the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of our Holy Father; a great year for Ireland—that of the glorious events that marked the Centenary of Catholic Emancipation; a great year for the College—the year which brought it such a gracious reply from the Holy Father to the message sent to him by the members of the M.D.D.C. for his Golden Jubilee.

The message ran as follows:—

MOST HOLY FATHER,

Humbly prostrate at the feet of Your Holiness, we, the members of the Irish Modest Dress and Deportment Crusade,

desire to express our homage and our sincere and very deep gratitude for the favour Your Holiness bestowed on our campaign by graciously imparting the Apostolic Benediction to its members and promoters.

The happy result of this paternal act of Your Holiness has been a remarkable increase of membership. The Crusade was started some two years ago by sixty Students of Mary Immaculate Training College for Teachers, Limerick, who took the step out of a desire to respond to the appeal of Your Holiness for the inauguration of Modesty Campaigns. We know that it will be a joy to you, Holy Father, to see that this humble beginning has developed into a national movement which continues to grow in membership. Close on twelve thousand women and girls have already enlisted themselves under the banner of Mary Immaculate with a view to preserving the beautiful ornament of modesty for which the women of our race have been ever proverbial.

Numerous schools throughout the country have established children's branches of the Crusade, under the name of the Children's Guild for the Promotion of Modesty, the object being to keep alive and cultivate in the rising generation that instinct of modesty which the tenets of modern society are threatening to extinguish.

Finally, Most Holy Father, we respectfully tender to Your Holiness our joyous congratulation on the Golden Jubilee of your Priesthood and on the Treaty effected with the Italian Government, vindicating the rights of the Holy See.

In conclusion, we beg Your Holiness to impart once more the Apostolic Benediction to all the members and promoters of our Crusade and to the Students and Staff of Mary Immaculate Training College, Limerick, in which it was initiated.

The following is the Holy Father's gracious reply to the above, transmitted by His Eminence Cardinal Gasparri:—

DAL VATICANO,

November 11th, 1929.

Secreteria di Stato
di Sua Santità.

DEAR MEMBERS,

The Holy Father was very grateful for your expression of homage and devotion and of congratulation on his Golden Jubilee. His Holiness was pleased to learn

of the remarkable increase in membership in the Irish Modest Dress and Department Crusade.

His Holiness gladly renews the Apostolic Blessing to all the members of the campaign for the preservation of Christian modesty.

Very sincerely Yours in Christ,

(Signed) P. CARD. GASPARRI.

To the Members of the Irish Modest Dress and Department Crusade, Mary Immaculate Training College, Limerick.

The year 1929 has been in every way a great one for the M.D.D.C. In addition to the remarkable increase of membership referred to in the Holy Father's message, it has seen the setting up of local branches of the Crusade.

Surely every Convent that has a Sodality of Children of Mary ought to endeavour to combine with it a branch of the M.D.D.C. Children of Mary who would refuse to join it would be misnomers.

Past Students will, it is hoped, take part in this grand movement, which originated in their College, by not only joining themselves, but also by establishing the Children's Guild in their schools.

Apropos of Emancipation Year, it is pleasing to be able to record that the Liberator's great-grand-daughter is a member of the Crusade, and has set it up in the National School near Derrynane Abbey, of which she is manager.

Full particulars of the Campaign may be had from the College.



receivers of the dominant discourse as it applied to women in Catholic Ireland. This was a discourse that could be manifested against women in a range of violently coercive and oppressive ways. But in this case, they might also, as Úna Ní Bhroiméil has pointed out, be seen as educated, aware women possessed of a reasoned voice and given agency through the Crusade; not simply ‘compliant subjects receiving and transmitting the mores of the patriarchal church’, but ‘confident crusaders at the vanguard of the church’.⁸

Notes

- 1 Mary Immaculate College Library, Limerick. Quote from *Mary Immaculate Training College Annual*, 1928, p. 13.
- 2 Brian Hughes, Úna Ní Bhroiméil, and Benjamin Ragan (eds), *Studying revolution: accounts of Mary Immaculate College, 1918–1924* (Limerick, 2020), pp 28–37.
- 3 *Mary Immaculate Training College Annual*, 1927, pp 35–41.
- 4 *Mary Immaculate Training College Annual*, 1928, p. 13
- 5 *Irish Independent*, 20 February 1928.
- 6 *Mary Immaculate Training College Annual*, 1928, p. 14.
- 7 Úna Ní Bhroiméil, ‘Images and icons: female teachers’ representations of self and self-control in 1920s Ireland’, *History of Education Review*, 37/1 (2008), pp 4–15, at pp 5–6.
- 8 *Ibid*, p. 14.



Mary Immaculate College senior class, 1923/4. (Courtesy Mary Immaculate College)

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**An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir,
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