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# Organised Labour in Limerick City, 1810- 1899

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## Abstract

This monograph identifies and describes the nineteenth century workers of Limerick who established and maintained societies, representing both individual occupational groups and multi-occupational alliances. The study defines the class identity of these organised workers, and the background and outlook of their local political opponents, describing popular political causes from the perspective of the organised workers. The nature of these organised labour societies, how they were formed and how they functioned, is examined in the context of similar societies in Ireland, Britain and beyond. The overall purpose of this thesis is to reveal how the urban Irish worker viewed the world around him.

# Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, by me or any other person, for the purpose of obtaining any other qualification.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the help from the many people I was in contact with during the course of my study. It is quite likely that I have forgotten somebody and if I have, I humbly apologise, I can assure everyone that any error was not intentional. In no particular order, I wish to sincerely thank:

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# Introduction

## Outline of study

This study charts the political evolution of organised labour in nineteenth century Limerick. It is best described as a history from below and traces the relationship between workers, public men, religious identity, religious authorities and popular political and social movements. It also examines how these workers, artisans for the most part, combined for their own self-interest, the nature of these organisations, how they policed their own members, their relationship with employers and the scope of their ambitions. Invariably, the question of class – how the concept influenced the organised workers of the city and how it was defined – is addressed to a relevant extent.

In the context of this thesis, organised labour is defined as the phenomenon whereby groups of workers collaborate for their own collective self-interest by forming representative bodies. Although most modern authors define the terms as applying solely to groups of employees, this thesis does not exclude labour groups that included small employers. To approach the subject of organised labour objectively, we must first acknowledge that workers have chosen to organise themselves for their mutual benefit throughout the world and also that this social phenomenon has emerged independently at different times in different places. In the Irish context, as O'Connor has pointed out, it cannot be assumed that the early journeymen combinations of the eighteenth century, the localised trade unions and trade councils of the nineteenth century, and the national labour movement of the twentieth century are all part of one lineage nor that they were necessarily aware or appreciative of those who had travelled the same path before them.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Emmett O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland* (Dublin, 1992), p. 3.

I first encountered organised labour in Limerick as I was researching my Master of Arts thesis which focused on clubs and working-class society in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Limerick. During the course of this study it quickly became obvious that organised labour groups played a major role in the city in a political and social context and yet there was no secondary material satisfactorily explaining who these groups were or, more particularly, when and how they arose. Work by authors such as Cahill, Crean and Collins addressed the subject of Limerick labour to a degree but these studies were confined to limited time periods and all of them described Limerick labour in the twentieth century and were exceptionally hazy in describing the previous history of this movement.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to these modern works, primary source material portrayed organised labour groups who used archaic language to identify themselves, frequently made confused reference to their past and appeared to be overly conscious of class divisions within the broad working-class community (particularly the skilled-unskilled divide). This thesis is an attempt to throw some light on these topics, to provide a reference for future scholars of nineteenth century Limerick and also to add to an understanding of Irish labour history in general. In the latter sense, this thesis is a response to the contention made by M.A.G. O'Tuathaigh in 1982, and numerous micro-historians since then, that 'general statements need to be tested by local studies.'<sup>3</sup>

The chronological parameters of the study, 1810-1899, were decided upon at the beginning of my study. As I initially approached the topic of nineteenth century Limerick labour, I was assured by many from within the modern trade union movement that 1810 marked a definite point of origin and I had already identified 1899 as a suitable point of conclusion as

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<sup>2</sup> Liam Cahill, *Forgotten revolution: Limerick soviet 1919: a threat to British power in Ireland* (Dublin, 1990), *passim*; Tom Crean, *The labour movement in Kerry and Limerick 1914-21*, Ph.d thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 1996, *passim*; Pat Collins, *Labour, church and nationalism in Limerick, 1893-1902*, unpublished M.A. thesis, University College Cork, 1984, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> M. A. G. O'Tuathaigh, 'Ireland 1800-1921', Joseph Lee (ed.) *Irish Historiography, 1970-79*, p. 91; Andrew I. Port, *History from below, the history of everyday life, and microhistory* [http://www.academia.edu/14753670/History\\_from\\_Below\\_the\\_History\\_of\\_Everyday\\_Life\\_and\\_Microhistory](http://www.academia.edu/14753670/History_from_Below_the_History_of_Everyday_Life_and_Microhistory) accessed 10 Dec 2016.

I felt it marked the point at which the organised labour community appeared to take control of local government and evolve from being political outsiders to becoming power players (see Chapters One and Seven for further discussion of this). It transpired that all of these contentions were somewhat flawed but I decided to retain the time frame as it was suitably removed from the what O'Connor described as the 'heroic phase of struggle between 1907 and 1923' from which all other periods suffer by comparison, and from the equally overwhelming 1789-1803 period.<sup>4</sup>

### Limerick city: 1810-1899

In contrast to the many market towns that developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Limerick was a city with a Hiberno-Norse origin. It consisted of an old town that had a largely medieval street structure and a new town dating to the late-eighteenth century that was built according to a grid plan.<sup>5</sup> The old-town had a north-south main street axis featuring mainly three-storey tenemented Dutch-gabled houses in a poor state of structural repair with a warren of unsanitary lanes, typically with small single or two storey buildings, running from both sides of this street axis.<sup>6</sup> Limerick ceased to be a walled city in 1760 and the latter part of the century was marked by rapid economic and physical expansion as a large section of marsh land adjoining the city (known as Prior's Land) was drained and developed. The newly developed area became known as Newtown Pery, featured Georgian architecture and became the dominant commercial and economic hub of the city.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to the rapid physical and economic expansion, political reform appeared painfully slow and throughout the

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<sup>4</sup> Emmett O'Connor, 'A historiography of Irish labour', *Labour history review*, vol. 60, no. 1 (Spring 1995), p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> Judith Hill, *The building of Limerick* (Cork, 1991), pp 11-143; Brian Hodkinson, 'The Medieval city of Limerick', Liam Irwin, Matthew Potter and Gearoid Ó Tuathaigh (eds), *Limerick: history and society* (Dublin, 2009), pp 17-40.

<sup>6</sup> John McGrath, Sociability and socio-economic conditions in St. Mary's parish, Limerick, 1890-1950, unpublished M.A. thesis, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, pp 218-301.

<sup>7</sup> The name Newtown Pery referred to the fact that the Pery family, later Earls of Limerick, owned the majority of the development land. Hill, *The building of Limerick*, pp 11-143.

1700s political power in the city of Limerick was tightly controlled by small consolidated groups, typically centred on particular family networks.<sup>8</sup> By the nineteenth century the political scene in the city was dominated by the struggle between the Vereker-Smyth-Prendergast family, who controlled the corporation, and the propertied and commercial class of the city (this is discussed in greater detail in Chapters One and Six).<sup>9</sup>

### Why organised labour and why Limerick?

Organised labour history is just one component of the broader school of labour history. Labour history itself is generally defined as being a study of the working class, class relations and the development of left-wing political movements. Radical history or the history of ideas is often assumed to be closely related to labour history although there is generally an attempt to make some distinction between the two whilst allowing for a degree of overlap. Organised labour histories often do not fit neatly within the parameters of labour history which was (for much of the twentieth century) expected to follow an agenda with E. J. Fry contending in 1961 that:

Labour history is controversial because it breaks new ground. Its practitioners are frequently committed in that they study the past in order to understand the present and thereby shape the future,

and further commenting that impartial histories were ‘gutless.’<sup>10</sup> Histories of individual unions which often employed a rather bloodless, empirical methodology were the most obvious

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<sup>8</sup> The Roche family group had the dubious honour of ruling the city for the first half of the 1700s until power passed from them to the Smyth-Vereker-Prendergast group in the 1760s. This later group were also the hereditary heirs to the lordship of Gort. Matthew Potter, *The government of the people of Limerick: the history of Limerick Corporation/City Council, 1197-2006* (Limerick, 2006), pp 195-203.

<sup>9</sup> Potter, *Government of the people of Limerick*, pp 183-239.

<sup>10</sup> E. C. Fry, “Symposium: What is Labour History?”, *Labour History*, No. 12 (May, 1967), pp 61-67.

examples of where organised labour history differed in approach from labour history.<sup>11</sup> This dichotomous approach to labour history first developed in the nineteenth century when political theorists first became interested in using labour history to further their own theories. Labour unions generally portrayed their bodies as having a long and unbroken history and were keen on presenting as many medieval charters, banners and regalia as possible to support these claims. Researchers such as the Webbs (both committed Fabians carrying out research at the end of the nineteenth century) were consistently dismissive of such histories and sought to find evidence to prove that class consciousness amongst the labouring class had developed in the nineteenth century (see Chapter One for more discussion of this) and this approach set the tone for much of what was to follow.<sup>12</sup> In the Irish context, nineteenth century organised labour offers little for left-leaning political theorists with no obvious emergence of a proletariat to satisfy a Marxist interpretation. Disappointingly, this period has received poor treatment from labour historians who have – more often than not – tied their studies to James Connolly's socialist world view. This has resulted in a need to make judgement calls on the various periods of Irish labour typified by the view that the medieval guild system had its merits and the era of James Larkin and James Connolly marked a great awakening but the nineteenth century – specifically pre-1890 – ‘old’ unions were particularist and defeatist bodies besmirched by entrenched localism and a reluctance to amalgamate.<sup>13</sup>

Whilst Emmet O'Connor's earlier work was occasionally guilty of many of the historiographical pitfalls alluded to above, his 1995 critique of Irish labour historiography

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<sup>11</sup> Two excellent examples here are the context of Irish labour history are John Swift, *History of the Dublin Bakers* (Dublin, 1948) and Charles Callan, *Painters in union: The Irish national painters' and decorators' trade union and its forerunners* (Dublin, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Malcolm Chase, *Early trade unionism: fraternity, skill and the politics of labour* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp 10-13.

<sup>13</sup> William Delany, *The green and the red: revolutionary republicanism and socialism in Irish history: 1848-1923* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 2001), p. 318.

offers some of the clearest indications of how to rectify such problems.<sup>14</sup> Many of the mistakes of the past resulted from the fact that British labour history was relatively well established by the time scholars consistently began to study Irish labour and there was often an assumption that a similar approach could be employed despite the fact that the two islands contrasted so sharply in terms of industrial strength, demographics and popular politics. O'Connor encapsulated this point well by commenting that the Irish labour history community invariably 'borrowed its myths from Britain and searched for Irish comparisons with the "forward march."' <sup>15</sup> This problem was further compounded by the fact that many of the earliest scholars to investigate Irish labour were themselves British or American. We must, of course, acknowledge James Connolly's role in all of this as he was the first to present Irish labour history using an evolutionary model which began with the 'Celtic Communism' of the Gaelic past – the notion of a historic Germanic or Slavic commune had previously being concocted by Marxist myth-makers – before moving onto the United Irishmen, William Thompson, the Ralahine co-operative, 'socialistic teachings of Young Irelanders' and the presence of Marxism in Ireland.<sup>16</sup> His treatment of national leaders such as O'Connell borrows heavily from the polemics of John Mitchel and, whilst the conclusions reached are not entirely incorrect, there is too much reliance upon specific events or isolated rhetoric and little attempt to include general context.<sup>17</sup> Connolly's deserved place in Irish labour historiography becomes clearer

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<sup>14</sup> O'Connor's studies of Waterford, specifically, and Ireland as a whole are built upon the premise that bodies representing solely the wage-earning class can be traced to roughly the 1810-1830 period and were clearly differentiated from the employer led guilds. His work also suffers, despite his best efforts to the contrary, due to the fact that the period under investigation is too large and the nineteenth century suffers in comparison to the twentieth in terms of scholarly treatment. O'Connor, *A labour history of Ireland*, *passim*; Emmett O'Connor, *A labour history of Waterford* (Waterford, 1989), *passim*; O'Connor, 'A historiography of Irish labour', pp 21-34.

<sup>15</sup> O'Connor, 'A historiography of Irish labour', p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> Antony Black, *Guild and State: European political thought from the twelfth century to the present* (London, 2009), p. 192.

<sup>17</sup> James Connolly, *Labour in Irish history* (Dublin, 1917), pp 7-15, 96-103. The "Celtic Communism" theory is discussed by Fintan Lane with reference to the broader context of Irish labour historiography and is expounded upon and fiercely defended by Peter Berresford Ellis in their respective works on the subject. Fintan Lane, 'Envisaging labour history: some reflections on Irish historiography and the working class', Niamh Puirseil, Fintan Lane and Francis Devine (eds), *Essays in Irish labour history: a festschrift for John and Elizabeth Boyle* (Dublin, 2008), pp 13-14; Peter Berresford Ellis, *A history of the Irish working class* (London, 1996), pp 11-28.

when we acknowledge that his work is best described as propaganda set amid the early-twentieth century struggle for the hearts and minds of the Irish population when new traditions, and accompanying histories, were being developed. It was a counterbalance to the purely nationalistic and ethno-nationalistic dogma of the day and, needless-to-say, part of the wider attack upon British imperialism and the wider social and socio-economic legacy of ‘British rule’ through the centuries. When we regard Connolly purely as a man of his time who was attempting to make an immediate impact, then his historical works can be well regarded, not so much for the historical methodology but instead for the questions they asked of the Irish population(s) of the day regarding their traditions and their world view. It did, however, create a problematic template for Irish labour historiography and heralded a teleological treatment of nineteenth century Irish labour which was subsequently studied through the prism of Connollyism. The early dawn of Irish labour history – marked by the publicised works of Ryan and Clarkson – followed Connolly’s lead to a large extent and when the historical subject was revisited in the 1970s with the works of Andrew Boyd (1972) and Peter Berresford Ellis (1972), the cult of Connolly appeared to have grown stronger although the quality of research was often admirable.<sup>18</sup>

There were attempts around this period to separate radical history from labour history and there was even an attempt to focus purely on organised labour and the nineteenth century artisan. The best example here was Fergus D’Arcy’s unpublished 1968 thesis investigating Dublin artisans in the nineteenth century; an early example of a ‘history from below’ approach

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<sup>18</sup> Jesse Dunsmore Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism in Ireland* (New York, 1925); W.P. Ryan, *The Irish Labour Movement from the Twenties to our own day* (Dublin, 1919); Andrew Boyd, *The rise of the Irish trade unions, 1729-1970* (Dublin, 1976); C. Desmond Greaves, *The life of James Connolly* (London, 1972); Berresford Ellis, *A History of the Irish Working Class*. O’Connor gives a fully comprehensive summation of writings, published and unpublished, on Irish labour prior to 1970. Fintan Lane’s work which charts the course of Irish labour historiography is slightly less comprehensive than O’Connor’s but is superior in describing the immediate impact that each body of work had. For example, many of the early works cited by O’Connor existed only in pamphlet form until later in the century and Clarkson’s work was ‘almost impossible to obtain in Ireland.’ O’Connor, ‘A historiography of Irish labour’, pp 21-34; Lane, ‘Envisaging labour history’, pp 9-25.



being utilised. D'Arcy's approach was best exemplified by his critique of Rachel O'Higgins's thesis 'Ireland and Chartism' which he described as a fine example of labour history whilst cautioning that 'while being a notable contribution to Irish labour history, its concern is not with the working classes, but with a group of thinkers which tried in vain to influence them.'<sup>19</sup> This succinctly put and vital point failed to elicit a satisfactory response in the context of nineteenth century organised labour although the burgeoning Irish Labour History Society (ILHS) – closely affiliated at this stage with the Irish trade union movement – did veer away from the more agenda-based radical historians. The journal of the ILHS, *Saothar*, did much in the 1980s and 1990s to define Irish labour history and the impressive works produced by Boyle (1988), O'Connor (1989 and 1992) and Cronin (1994) all helped improve and expand the discipline. Cronin's work on Cork is the best example of a labour history from the point of view of the ordinary (skilled) workers with the only downside being the fact that it has not been replicated in the form of a national study.<sup>20</sup> Boyle's study was exceedingly thorough and featured exhaustive detail but was focused almost exclusively on Belfast and Dublin. Although Boyle somewhat unwisely devoted an entire chapter to the ephemeral presence of the Marxist International Working Men's Association in Ireland, the work nevertheless was one of the first to focus overwhelmingly on organised labour groups.<sup>21</sup> O'Connor's work suffers from the excessively long time period he chooses to investigate and, despite his best intentions, his conclusions regarding the years prior to 1890 are often incorrect and his insistence that urban trade unionism became increasingly marginalised after the Great Famine and the defeat of 1848 does not fit with the evidence or assumes that labour occupied an inordinately strong position

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<sup>19</sup> Fergus D'Arcy, Dublin artisan activity, opinion and organisation, 1820-1850, unpublished Master of Arts Thesis, University College Dublin, 1968, iii.

<sup>20</sup> The main work referred to in this case is Maura Cronin, *Country, class or craft: the politicisation of the skilled artisan in nineteenth century Cork* (Cork, 1994).

<sup>21</sup> John Boyle, *The Irish labor movement in the nineteenth century* (Washington D.C., 1988), *passim*.

prior to the 1840s. It still remains, however, an excellent reference for all students of Irish labour history.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the undoubted quality of these publications in the late 1980s and early 1990s, they did not spark a meaningful surge of scholarly interest in organised labour although labour history as a whole has developed somewhat in the meantime. Fintan Lane has authored and edited a respectable body of work investigating the concept of class and tracing the development of class conscious politics in nineteenth century Ireland.<sup>23</sup> Equally, John Cunningham and Michael Huggins have both taken the approach championed by E. P. Thompson, modified it and applied it to nineteenth century Irish society.<sup>24</sup>

In spite of the efforts of these authors, there are still vital aspects of nineteenth century labour that are unexplored. Invariably, many of these unexplored topics are indicative of ‘primitive’ urban cultures and political thought. The undoubted links between Ribbonism and other pre-famine secret societies on the one hand, and urban labour on the other are only hinted at by a few authors and are largely ignored by the majority of scholars. The indistinct transitionary period between guilds and unions has not been properly studied with the notable exception of John Hogan’s unpublished Master’s Thesis and one *Saothar* article he co-authored.<sup>25</sup> The entire subject of guilds as a form of organised labour appears to have been

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<sup>22</sup> O’Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland*, *passim*.

<sup>23</sup> Fintan Lane and Donal O’Drisceoil (eds), *Politics and the Irish working class* (Dublin, 2005); Niamh Puirseil, Fintan Lane and Francis Devine (eds), *Essays in Irish labour history: a festschrift for John and Elizabeth Boyle* (Dublin, 2008); Fintan Lane, *In search of Thomas Sheahan: radical politics in Cork, 1824-1836* (Dublin, 2001); Fintan Lane, *The origins of modern Irish socialism, 1881-1896* (Cork, 1997).

<sup>24</sup> John Cunningham, ‘Popular protest and a ‘moral economy’ in provincial Ireland in the early. century’, Niamh Puirseil, Fintan Lane and Francis Devine (eds), *Essays in Irish labour history: a festschrift for John and Elizabeth Boyle* (Dublin, 2008); John Cunningham, “‘Compelled to their bad acts by hunger’”: Three Irish Urban Crowds, 1817-45’, *Éire-Ireland*, Vol. 45, 1 & 2, Spring & Summer 2010, pp. 128-151; Michael Huggins, *Social conflict in pre-famine Ireland: the case of County Roscommon* (Dublin, 2007); ‘Captain Rock, Captain Swing: “primitive” rebels and radical politics in Britain and Ireland, 1790 – 1845’ in C. Litzberger and E. Lyon (eds), *The human tradition in modern Britain* (Lanham, 2006), pp 63-80.

<sup>25</sup> John Hogan, *From guild to union: The Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers’ Trade Union, in Pre-independence Ireland*, unpublished M.A. thesis, Dublin City University, 2001; John Hogan and Gary Murphy, ‘From guild to union: the evolution of the Dublin Bricklayers’ Society, 1670-1888’, *Saothar, Irish Journal of Labour History*, Vol. 26, 2001, pp 17-24.

shunned by Irish labour historians although Sean Daly did tackle the subject in the appendices of his 1978 work on Cork labour (this study is discussed further in Chapter 1).<sup>26</sup> Much of the scholarship investigating these blank spots of Irish labour have come from historians removed from or on the periphery of the Irish labour history community and include Jacqueline Hill's study of Dublin guilds, Thomas Dooley's account of the 1899 municipal election and Paul Pickering's article on the Boards of Trade of the 1840s.<sup>27</sup> The relative neglect of economic nationalism by historians in the context of the Repeal movement was captured perfectly by Paul Pickering's statement that although 'campaigns to revive Irish manufacturing got started in almost every decade following the Union' this fact has 'attracted little attention from historians.'<sup>28</sup> In contrast, Pickering was able to mention the majority of the principal works on nineteenth century Irish labour that did not mention this topic at all. This trend – more than likely a product of intellectual bias and a belief that nationalism and labourism are natural enemies – becomes evident if we compare the coverage that the Irish Working Men's Association (a popular nationalist organisation established in 1869) and the International Working Man's Association have both received. Both groups were politically active in the early 1870s and both arguably featured an equal number of Irish workers; the latter group was undoubtedly part of a more ambitious and seminal political movement but this does not explain how it so completely dwarfs the former group in terms of historical coverage.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Sean Daly, *Cork, a city in crisis: a history of labour conflict and social misery, 1870-1872; vol. 1* (Cork, 1978), pp 252-314.

<sup>27</sup> Jacqueline Hill, 'Artisans, Sectarianism and politics in Dublin, 1829 – 48', *Saothar*, vol. 7, 1981, p. 12-27; Thomas Dooley, *Irishmen or English Soldiers?: the times and world of a southern Catholic Irish man (1876-1916) enlisting in the British army during the First World War* (Liverpool, 1995), p. 87; Paul Pickering, "'Irish First': Daniel O'Connell, the Native Manufacture Campaign, and Economic Nationalism, 1840-44', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Winter, 2000), pp 598-616.

<sup>28</sup> Amongst the relevant works referenced by Pickering was Cadoc Leighton's thirty-nine page book on the subject along with added mentions of Maura Cronin, Jacqueline Hill and G O'Brien who mention the Boards briefly. Pickering, "'Irish First': Daniel O'Connell, the Native Manufacture Campaign, and Economic Nationalism, 1840-44', p. 598.

<sup>29</sup> Whereas the International is thoroughly covered by the principal labour historians such O'Connor, Lane, Cronin and, most particularly, Boyle; the Irish Working Man's Association is only briefly mentioned by a small number of authors, see Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, pp 65, 155, 185; Neill P. Maddox, 'Commemorating the siege: the Williamite marching tradition in nineteenth century Derry', *History Studies: University of Limerick*

To summarise the above historiographical observations; there simply has not been a proper debate held within the Irish labour history community and it occupies a marginal position in the wider Irish history community, particularly with regard to coverage of nineteenth century Ireland. This peripheral position does not reflect the evidence available to the historian – whilst Maurice O’Connell’s study of the correspondence of Daniel O’Connell presents a ‘Liberator’ who frequently had dealings with and concerns regarding urban organised labour groups, key studies of O’Connell by Nowlan and Geoghegan only briefly mention this aspect of O’Connellite politics. This is not a criticism of these author’s research but more a reflection of the fact that Irish labour history has produced no concise narrative of the relationship between O’Connell and organised labour groups from which mainstream historians could draw.<sup>30</sup> Writing in 1995, O’Connor attributed the lack of revision and internal debate to the fact that concerns regarding the ‘the Troubles’ and the influence of Soviet Russia both stifled debate in the 1970s and 80s. There was, however, no great post-1990s emergence of value-free scholarship on the subject and, writing in 2013, Lane gave a more accurate summation of the problem stating that the incestuous relationship between the trade union movement and the Irish Labour History Society stifled debate and produced ‘sanitised’ biographies.<sup>31</sup> Lane contended that, in the Irish context, the very term ‘labour history’ was misleading – something which Charles Callan (a member of the Irish Labour History Society since its early years) affirmed in conversation with this author.<sup>32</sup>

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*History Society Journal*, Vol. 6, 2005, p. 24; Seán Daly, *Cork: a city in crisis* (Cork, 1978), pp 5, 83, 95, 246; Boyle, *The Irish labor movement in the nineteenth century*, pp 84-84. Using the Irish Newspaper Archive search engine to search for the term “working men’s association” within the years 1869-75 generates more hits that relate to the Irish rather than the International group and this is probably reflective of the immediate impact that each group had in Ireland, see Irish Newspaper Archives, <http://archive.irishnewsarchive.com/> accessed 30 July 2015.

<sup>30</sup> D’Arcy and O’Higgins cover certain aspects of this relationship in the case of Dublin whereas Cronin as looked at the situation in Cork but, as yet, there is no publication looking at the phenomenon on a national level. Rachel O’Higgins, ‘Irish trade unions and politics, 1830-50’, *The historical journal*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1961), pp 208-217.

<sup>31</sup> Lane, ‘Envisaging labour history’, pp 9-25.

<sup>32</sup> Conversation with Charles Callan after Limerick Labour History Conference, 8 Nov 2014.

## The case of Limerick

In general, nineteenth century Limerick has been ignored by labour historians to date. Overall, what work has been done in the area can be summarised as an unintentional by-product produced by studies of either the medieval guild system or the city's twentieth century trade union tradition.<sup>33</sup> Given the particular premise involved with either approach, both often fail to accurately describe the critical aspects of organised labour in the period covered by this thesis. The fact that the local labour bodies continued to describe themselves as 'guilds' throughout the nineteenth century has tended to confuse scholars of the medieval guild system and Herbert's study of the 'guilds of Limerick' attempted to describe the economic forces that killed the guild system in the eighteenth century before hesitantly, and somewhat contradictorily, describing the continuation of such bodies in the first few decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup> Pat Collins was one of the first academics to investigate nineteenth century Limerick labour with his 1984 study of the 1893-1902 period.<sup>35</sup> Relying almost solely on primary material, as no useful secondary material existed, the work was an admirable foray into the field although he was able to give little historical context to the labour groups in question since no satisfactory studies of their past existed.

Whilst Limerick's nineteenth century labour history was poorly covered, the city has been well served by local historians with the work produced by the *Old Limerick Journal* deserving special mention in the context of this thesis and the *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, also worthy of mention. The former was founded by the socialist politician Jim Kemmy but was relatively free of left-wing bias and in its early days more closely resembled a collection of reminiscences, folk histories and re-workings of Maurice Lenihan's *Limerick: Its history and antiquities*. It consistently grew in strength and, in time, produced a number of

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Herbert, 'Trades Guilds of Limerick', *North Munster Antiquarian*, No. 3, Spring 1941, pp 121-134.

<sup>34</sup> Herbert, 'Trades Guilds of Limerick', p. 126.

<sup>35</sup> Collins, Labour, church and nationalism in Limerick, *passim*.

articles relevant to this study including monographs looking at the coopers, coachbuilders and housepainters of Limerick as well as the 1899 Limerick Labour Party.<sup>36</sup>

### **Limerick: Social and political background and definitions of class.**

Much of the terminology that pertains more to the twentieth century is largely omitted from the present work, particularly terms such as ‘trade union’ or ‘unionised’ which were not in use for most of the time period under investigation (this is discussed thoroughly in Chapters One and Three). In many cases the term ‘guild’ is used to reflect the language that labour groups were using; it is not always an approximate indication of the nature of these labour bodies. The main labour council referred to in this work is the Congregated Trades of Limerick and this grouping is frequently referred to here as ‘the trades’ for the sake of brevity. The term ‘working class’ is used sparingly to avoid confusion and the term ‘tradesman’ is largely avoided in preference to the term ‘artisan.’ This latter term generally refers to a skilled worker who has served an apprenticeship; the majority of artisans referred to in this work were wage earners but the term does not necessarily exclude employers who emerged from the wage-earning class. To avoid confusion, the terms ‘working artisan’ or ‘operative’ are used to signify a wage earner as opposed to the literal term ‘working employer.’

Before we proceed to the principal subject of this thesis, organised labour in Limerick, we need to detail the social classes above it. The main body of this thesis discusses organised labour groups in the context of local class structures, structures of local government and enduring political alliances and traditions – all of which need to be introduced here and will be briefly referred to throughout the thesis. Whilst the trades’ relationship with the landed class

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<sup>36</sup> Charles Callan, ‘A tale of two unions: John O’Ryan and the Limerick Operative House Painters’ Society, 1908’, *Old Limerick Journal*, vol. 38, Winter 2002, pp 41-48; Morgan McCluskey, ‘The coopers of Limerick: a craft of the past’, *Old Limerick Journal*, vol. 36, Winter 1999, pp 42-44; Bernard Reaney, ‘A Limerick coachmaker and trade unionist, 1833-34’, vol. 16, Summer 1984, pp. 26-29; Enda McKay, ‘Limerick Municipal Elections, January 1899’, *Old Limerick Journal*, vol. 36, Winter 1999, pp 3-10.

does feature, the main body of evidence – especially relating to a political context – relates to their relationship with a class which can be loosely defined as the ‘liberal political class’ of the city. For the sake of clarity the term ‘liberal’ is not capitalised unless specifically referring to Liberal political party. The local ‘liberal political class’ was certainly not a homogenous group but can largely be defined as the moderately reformist middle-class who contributed significantly to political discourse in the city and, with a few exceptions, dominated the nomination process for parliamentary elections between the 1830s and 1880s, after which franchise reform rendered the Conservative/Unionist opposition impotent and political nominees were appointed by centralised committees in Dublin (see Chapter Seven). Despite the emergence of successive political movements and campaigns during this period – Repeal in the 1830s and 40s, Independent Opposition in the early 1850s, the Liberal party alliance in the late 1850s and 1860s, and the Home Rule movement of the 1870s – there is overwhelming evidence of continuity in terms of the class and sentiment of the parliamentary nominees. Indeed, the language – particularly the term ‘liberal’ – used by the solicitor John Dundon in 1879 when he asked an assembled crowd to vote for the ‘liberal Home Rule candidate Daniel Fitzgerald Gabbett’, very much echoed the tone and language used by solicitor William Howley four decades earlier in 1837, when he sought to rouse support for David and William Roche (Repealers) ‘for representation of the City, on the liberal interest.’<sup>37</sup> Liberalism, in this context, was an Irish political tradition as defined by Biagini:

It stretched back to Daniel O’Connell, and Irish Catholic MPs were among the first to appropriate the term Liberal [original capitalisation retained here] in the political sense

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<sup>37</sup> *Limerick Star*, 21 July 1837; *Munster News*, 17 May 1879.

at a time when ‘Reformers’, ‘Radicals’ and ‘Whigs’ were the labels preferred by British MPs.<sup>38</sup>

Apart from the obvious macro-political significance, the Act of Union was important in a practical sense as it saw 236 borough MPs (including 2 for Trinity College, Dublin) and sixty-four county MPs replaced by thirty-six borough MPs (including one for Trinity College) and sixty-four county MPs. The potential for radical politics to emerge diminished with this change but, more than that, the ambitions of landed patrons was, in many cases, now thwarted by a number of small cliques who jealously guarded political control over boroughs the length and breadth of the country.<sup>39</sup> This new political environment gave rise to a new paradigm whereby the ruling borough cliques relying on freeman voters were pitted against a coalition of liberal Protestants, Catholics and landed elites with Jupp summarising the situation by saying, ‘Protestant parties that were opposed to the prevailing corporation interest had every reason to develop an alternative electoral system.’<sup>40</sup> Enthusiasm amongst Catholic freeholders first grew in Cork, Waterford, Drogheda and Galway between 1807 and 1812 and it was at this point that Catholic artisans, particularly in the case of Galway, first began to appear as a lobby group.<sup>41</sup>

By the 1810s in Limerick, reformists were sporadically mustering under the auspices of the Independent reform and Catholic Emancipation campaigns and it is here that we get the first insight into the class of public men who sought the support of the Limerick trades. This ‘Independent’ reform movement was part of the national ‘moderate reform movement’ characterised by Jennifer Ridden as a group which aimed at creating a moral elite that included

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<sup>38</sup> Eugenio F. Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism 1876–1906* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 116. See also Fergus O’Ferrall, ‘Liberty and Catholic politics, 1790-1990’, in Maurice O’Connell, *Daniel O’Connell, political pioneer* (Dublin, 1991) pp 35-56.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Jupp, ‘Urban politics in Ireland, 1801-1831’, David Harkness and Mary O’Dowd (eds), *The town in Ireland* (Belfast, 1981), pp 103-116.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p. 114.

<sup>41</sup> Jupp, ‘Urban politics’, pp 117-118.



members of both the Catholic and Protestant elites and professional groups and rejected the notion of an elite defined in religious terms. Ridden and Potter make it clear that this group can clearly be differentiated from the Catholic empowerment movement: the ‘Independent’ movement was generally urban, ‘inclusive and pluralist in religion and culture’ and driven by *noblesse oblige*, whereas the later O’Connellite movement, whilst at least nominally seeking to achieve a spirit of co-religious fraternity, certainly sought to replace the Protestant political hierarchy with a Catholic one.<sup>42</sup> If we analyse the Limerick public men most actively engaged with local politics in the 1810s we find that about one-third of them were solicitors, one third were merchants (including drapers) and the rest were bankers, small traders (grocers, publicans) and small manufacturers.<sup>43</sup> The reform movement in the city was certainly not homogenous at this point and the Independents and the Catholic Emancipation campaigners must be approached separately, but there was significant cross-pollination between the two campaigns and the majority of those who were active as Independents were also Catholic Emancipation supporters.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Jennifer Ridden, ‘Irish reform between 1798 and the Great Famine’, edited by Arthur Burns and Joanne Innes, ‘Rethinking the age of reform’, pp. 273-281; Jennifer Ridden, *Making good citizens: national identity, religion, and liberalism among the Irish elite, c. 1800-1850*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1998, p. 8, Matthew Potter, *William Monsell of Tervoe* (Dublin, 2009), p. 16-18; Richard English, *Irish freedom: the history of nationalism in Ireland* (London, 2006), p. 150; Lawrence J. McCaffrey, ‘Components of Irish nationalism’, Thomas E. Hachey and Lawrence J. McCaffrey (eds), *Perspectives on Irish nationalism* (Kentucky, 1989), p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> Limerick City Library, Limerick City Trades Register 1769-1925

<http://www.limerickcity.ie/webapps/tradesreg/RegisterEntry.aspx?ID=20914> accessed 21 May 2014; Francis Finegan, ‘Sir John Howley: 1789-1866’, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 40, No. 157, March, 1951, pp. 97-107; *Freeman’s Journal*, 1 Sept 1812; *Limerick Chronicle*, 23 June 1841, 5 Nov 1991; *Limerick Gazette*, 10, 28 July 1812. For an indication of who in Limerick was financially sponsoring Catholic Emancipation campaigner Fr. Richard Hayes, see *Freeman’s Journal*, 4 April 1818 and for more information on Hayes and his campaign, see Des Keenan, *Ireland 1800-1850*, Chapter 6 <http://www.deskeenan.com/2irchap6.htm> accessed 21 May 2014. The independents of the 1830s included John Boyse, solicitor; John Tuthill, Chandler; William Roche, banker; Thomas Roche, banker; Francis Mahony, linen manufacturer; the Howley family, solicitors; Pat Wm. Creagh, linen draper; Edmund Ryan, master Cooper and merchant; Michael Arthur, grocer; and the Harvey family, primarily millers and merchants.

<sup>44</sup> A rough indication of who supported the independent movement can be gauged from the list of those who voted for John Tuthill in 1817, see *A history of the proceedings at the particularly interesting election for a member to represent the city of Limerick in parliament : containing a full and impartial report of the speeches of the candidates & electors, their places of residence and the quality in which they voted : to which is annexed a copy of Mr. Tuthill's petition to parliament against the legality of the sheriff's return : interspersed with a variety of interesting matter and arranged, so as to give it not only a local, but general importance* (Limerick,

The social profile of the principal patrons and nominees of the parliamentary contests in the liberal interest became decidedly altered after Thomas Spring Rice's departure – in the face of growing O'Connellism and an increased appetite for Repeal – from the Limerick constituency in 1832 (Thomas Spring Rice's relationship with the trades of Limerick is discussed fully in Chapters One and Four). After this the local landed magnates offered far less help to the local liberal campaigners and the core group of politicised members of the middle-class bore the organisational responsibilities with occasional input from outsiders such as Tom Steele, T.M. Ray and, not least, Daniel O'Connell.<sup>45</sup> The merchant and professional classes which had been politically ignited during the Independent Reform movement of the 1810s were, under O'Connell's direction, joined in the political clubs and nomination meetings by many of the local Catholic parochial clergy. It is at this point we can speak with some certainty of a class of men from the aforementioned groups, generally Catholic with the occasional liberal Protestant, who constituted the local liberal political class. Though this 'liberal' identity – for the most part linked with Catholic empowerment – undoubtedly attained a tangible quality in the succeeding decades, there was more than a hint of cultural appropriation surrounding the term in the 1820s and 1830s. Hegg's work differentiates this form of liberalism from the Protestant Whig liberalism of the preceding decades and contends that in the Catholic context, liberal meant O'Connellite, and the term was merely 'a name that was given to them largely by the Irish pro-Catholic press, which was designed to place them in political opposition to Irish conservatives', and she quotes O'Ferrall who locates the birth of liberal Catholicism in the 1820s when aggressive and yet non-violent Catholic reformers coalesced around O'Connell.<sup>46</sup>

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1817). For a rough guide to who supported and contributed to the Catholic Emancipation campaign see, *Freeman's Journal*, 4 April 1818.

<sup>45</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 20 Sept, 11 Nov 1842, 1 July 1845.

<sup>46</sup> Hegg, 'The nature and development of liberal Protestantism in Waterford, 1800-42', p. 5; R. F. B. O'Ferrall, 'The growth of political consciousness in Ireland, 1823-47: a study of O'Connellite politics and political

Political meetings were often held under the auspices of middle-class dominated parochial or political clubs – such as the Limerick Political Union of the 1830s – and on other occasions they were styled as ‘election committees.’ The presence of the Catholic clergy at these meetings was well and truly established by the 1832 election and they remained ubiquitous from this point until the 1880s, often chairing meetings.<sup>47</sup> The extent of this clerical presence in Limerick appears to have been greater in relative terms than in other Irish urban centres with Hoppen hinting at such an over-representation in the 1850s and Cronin unequivocally stating that the presence of priests at the hustings and in the pre-election nomination process in 1880s Limerick was particularly conspicuous in comparison to the relative absence of such clergy inform Cork election platforms.<sup>48</sup> This clerical influence certainly peaked in 1852 in reaction to the 1851 Ecclesiastical Titles Bill, and local priests were recognised as ex-officio members of the 1852 parliamentary election committee.<sup>49</sup> Liberal Protestants retained a vital role throughout this period as well, and individuals such as William Lane Joynt and William Abraham were crucial intermediaries between the trades and popular political movements from the 1840s to the 1880s.<sup>50</sup> In a comparable situation, liberal

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education’ (PhD thesis, T.C.D., 1978), p. 105 quoted in Hegg, ‘The nature and development of liberal Protestantism in Waterford, 1800-42’, p. 8.

<sup>47</sup> *Limerick Post*, 7 Dec 1832; *Limerick Herald*, 6, 13 Dec 1832; *Limerick Star*, 6 Jan 1835, 21, 25 July, 1, 4, 8 Aug 1837; *Limerick Chronicle*, 2 Aug 1837, 3 July 1844, 30 July, 2 Aug 1851, 7, 10 April, 8 May, 10 July 1852, 13 April 1859, 25, 30 May, 15 July 1865, 10, 12, 14, 17 Nov 1868; *Limerick Standard*, 4 Aug 1837, 24 June 1841; *Limerick Reporter*, 25, 29 June 1841, 25 June, 5 July 1844, 8 June, 20, 23 July, 6, 10 Aug 1847, 22, 29 July, 1, 8 Aug, 21 Nov 1851, 13 April 1852, 2, 9 Feb, 9 April 1858, 17, 20 Nov 1868; *The Nation*, 14 Aug 1847, 17 April 1852, 22 July 1865, 5, 8 Sept 1871, 31 May 1879; *Belfast Newsletter*, 1 Aug 1851, 9 Sept 1871; *Munster News*, 30 July, 2 Aug 1851, 17 April, 12 May, 10 July 1852, 18 Oct 1854, 12, 15, 22 May 1858, 20, 30 April 1859, 17, 20 May, 12, 15, 19 July 1865, 18 Nov 1868, 4 Feb 1874, 10, 14, 17, 21, 24 May 1879, 17, 20, 24, 27, 31 Mar, 3, 7 April 1880; *Freeman’s Journal*, 30 Mar 1857, 29 July 1859, 4, 6, 9, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21 Sept 1871; *Nenagh Guardian*, 15 July 1865; *Glasgow Herald*, 9 Sept 1871; Brendan Cahir, ‘Isaac Butt and the Limerick by-election of 1871’, *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1966-67, pp 56-66.

<sup>48</sup> K. Theodore Hoppen, ‘Tories, Catholics, and the General Election of 1859’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Mar., 1970), pp 59-62; Maura Cronin, ‘Parnellism and workers: The experience of Cork and Limerick’, Fintan Lane and Donal Ó Drisceoil (eds), *Politics and the Irish working class* (London, 2005), pp 147.

<sup>49</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 Mar 1852.

<sup>50</sup> Lane Joynt was initially a Young Irelander and later served as mayor of Limerick and Dublin. Abraham was a Home Ruler – later an Irish Parliamentary Party MP – associated with the advanced Nationalist wing of the movement (see Chapters Six and Seven). *Munster News*, 9, 13 Jan 1892; *Limerick Leader*, 4 Jan 1895; *Freeman’s Journal*, 8 April 1848, 1 Dec 1862, 5 Jan 1863; *Limerick Reporter*, 9 Feb 1849; *Limerick Chronicle*, 30 July 1851; *Munster News*, 26 Jan 1856, 3 Jan, 18 July 1863; 14 May, 22 Oct 1879, 9 Oct 1880, 12 Mar 1881, 20 June, 4 Nov 1885.

Protestants in Cork and Waterford were confronted with a changing political landscape with many choosing a subordinate role in a Catholic-led liberal movement rather than total marginalisation.<sup>51</sup> In Limerick, local Protestant liberals remained a part of the liberal political class even in the clerically dominated 1850s and 60s although one letter writer in 1865, using the simple non de plume ‘A Liberal Protestant’, alleged that although liberals of his religious persuasion still played an active part in local political campaigns, the nomination process was now entirely in the hands of the Catholic clergy even when the candidates were Protestant.<sup>52</sup> Newspaper owners and editors also became part of this group of political organisers and after 1841 there was a very large overlap between the mainly liberal town councillors and the political organisers and facilitators with whom the trades had to interact in political matters, local and national.<sup>53</sup>

The most consistent issue faced by the local liberal political class was the shortage of potential parliamentary candidates. This, of course, was not a shortage of men with the right political attitude or capabilities, but rather a shortage of men with the right property qualifications and income. Whilst a core group of the local middle-class organised political meetings and election campaigns, these ‘shapers and movers’ at election time rarely graduated to become parliamentary candidates. This was a common pattern in the United Kingdom and Garrard commented that whilst ‘urban squires were seen by those who operated the levers of the party machines as standing central to a web of what we would now call influence politics’

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<sup>51</sup> Hegg, ‘The nature and development of liberal Protestantism in Waterford, 1800-42’, pp 8-30; Cornelius O’Brien, *Cork: history & society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Cork, 1993), pp 768-69.

<sup>52</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 20 May 1865.

<sup>53</sup> For a more in depth look at this Town Councillors of the city see, Mathew Potter, *First citizens of the Treaty City: The Mayors and Mayoralty of Limerick 1197-2007* (Limerick, 2007). Newspaper editors with significant political influence included John McClenahan, Young Irelander and editor of the *Limerick Reporter* in the 1840s; Patrick Lynch, editor of the *Limerick Reporter* and the *Limerick and Clare Examiner* in the early 1840s and mid 1840s respectively and founder of the *Irish American* in New York in 1849; and John McEnery, *Limerick Leader* editor and agrarian agitator in the late 1880s and early 1890s. *Limerick Reporter*, 16 April, 3 Aug 1847; *Armagh Guardian*, 15 January 1849; Laurence Fenton, *The Young Ireland Rebellion in Limerick* (Cork, 2010), p. 33, 153; Robert Ernst, *Immigrant Life in New York City, 1825-1863* (New York, 1994), p. 151; *The Sacred Heart Review*, Volume 5, Number 11, 7 February 1891; Colonial Office Papers 904, Box 20, 710.

they ‘were leading party political and municipal figures, though far less frequently aspirant parliamentary candidates.’<sup>54</sup> In general, the men who sat on Limerick city parliamentary election committees derived their income from commerce, trade and the law and, as such, their business interests often required regular attention. Consequently they were poor candidates for parliamentary office given the time and money that such a role required. These monetary considerations were not an issue for the local reformers prior to 1832 when their parliamentary champion, Thomas Spring Rice (Limerick city MP, 1820-32) was financially supported by three men of substance - his own father, Stephen Edward Rice; his father-in-law, Lord Limerick; and the Marquis of Lansdowne.<sup>55</sup> Whilst the bulk of the local liberal political class switched their allegiance to the O’Connellite candidates in 1832 the aforementioned patrons pointedly refused to follow. From this point onwards, the local parliamentary election committees were required to find a borough candidate with an annual income of £300 a year to qualify but also the means to fund the necessary election costs, which generally ranged between £400 and £1000 in the 1850s.<sup>56</sup> Once all of these considerations were met a new parliamentary candidate required the funds adequate for a parliamentary lifestyle.<sup>57</sup> Most suitable to the role was the middling landlord who did not have a title and who was not part of the established aristocracy but had sufficient income to support a political career. There were at least six Limerick city MPs who fitted this profile between the 1830s and 1870s, particularly the brothers John and James O’Brien (MPs for the city in the years 1841-52 and 1854-58

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<sup>54</sup> John Garrard, ‘Urban Elites, 1850-1914: The Rule and Decline of a New Squirearchy?’, *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 4, Winter, 1995, pp. 588.

<sup>55</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, April 15 1828, Bridget Hourican, ‘Rice, Thomas Spring 1st Baron Monteagle’, in James McGuire and James Quinn (ed.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (Cambridge, 2009), <http://dib.cambridge.org/> accessed 29 May 2014; K. T. Hoppen, *Governing Hibernia: British politicians and Ireland, 1800-1921* (Oxford, 2016), pp 63-66. Spring Rice did ask for some financial help from his local supporters in 1831 and his supporters, including members of the Howley, Barrington and Russell families as well as General Bourke, David Roche and William Roche immediately pledged £450 between them and promised to open a subscription should the need arise, *Limerick Evening Post*, 27, 29 April 1831.

<sup>56</sup> John H. Whyte, *The Independent Irish party, 1850-9* (Oxford, 1958), pp 47-48.

<sup>57</sup> As a guide, by 1828 Spring Rice was receiving approximately £2,000 a year from his father. *Limerick Evening Post*, April 15 1828.

respectively) of County Clare, and Daniel Fitzgerald Gabbett (MP for the city in the years 1879-1885) of Caherconlish, Co. Limerick.<sup>58</sup>

Many of the parliamentarians chosen by local liberal election committees had familial links with the early Independent movement or with merchant families that had come to prominence in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and were, consequently, not of old landed stock. James Kelly (Limerick city MP, 1844-47) came from a prosperous Limerick city Catholic merchant family that had married into the Roche (later bankers) and McNamara merchant families of the city.<sup>59</sup> Daniel Gabbett, grandfather to Daniel Fitzgerald Gabbett MP, was a city solicitor living on the North Strand and a supporter of Spring Rice and the Independents in early nineteenth century.<sup>60</sup> James O'Brien was born in Bank Place, Limerick city in 1807, where his father was described as a 'gentleman.'<sup>61</sup> David Roche (Limerick City MP, 1832-1844), aside from his landed interests, was a prosperous miller and provisions merchant whose family had previously controlled the city corporation in the early 1700s.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>David Roche of Carass House, Ballyouragan, Co. Limerick (Limerick City MP, 1832-1844) who owned approximately 4,000 acres of land in County Limerick; John O'Brien, Elm Vale, Ballynalackan, Co. Clare (Limerick City MP, 1841-52) whose family estate was recorded as being over 5,000 acres in size in the 1870s; James O'Brien, Sergeant-at-law, brother to the aforementioned John O'Brien of Elm Vale, (Limerick City MP, 1854-58); James Kelly of Cahircon, Co. Clare (Limerick city MP, 1844-47) who owned over 2,000 acres in County Limerick and almost 3,000 acres in Kildare and Dublin in the 1870s; Major George Gavin of Kilpeacon House, Co. Limerick (Limerick City MP, 1859-74) who owned 708 acres in 1877; and Daniel Fitzgerald Gabbett of Oldcourt, Caherconlish, Co. Limerick (Limerick city MP, 1879-1884) who owned 1,193 acres of land in Limerick city and county in the 1870s. *Limerick Reporter*, 25 June 1841; *Limerick Chronicle*, 23rd October 1880, 31 December 1881, 9 Aug 1898; Details of James O'Brien's property and rental income thereof are available in the Limerick City Archives, Rentals and Particulars of Sale, 1808-1923, Ref. IE LA P23, Vol. 1, p. 23/6. He owned properties in Ballycullinagh, barony of Corcomroe, and Corofin, Annagh and demesne of Elmvalle in the Barony of Inchiquin, county Clare, Thomond Brewery, Courtbrack, Carr Street (corn stores) and 127-128 George's Street, Limerick City; Landed Estates Database, Roche (Carass), O'Brien (Ballynalackan), Kelly/Roche Kelly, Gavin (Kilpeacon), Gabbett (Strand House), [www.landedestates.nuigalway.ie](http://www.landedestates.nuigalway.ie) accessed 25 May 2014.

<sup>59</sup> Maurice Lenihan, *Limerick; its history and antiquities, ecclesiastical, civil, and military, from the earliest ages limerick* (Limerick, 1866), p. 399.

<sup>60</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 10 Aug 1830; *Limerick Chronicle*, 15 January 1848; Lenihan, *Limerick: Its history and antiquities*, pp 395-96, 469-70. This branch of the Gabbett family are not to be confused with the Gabbett family who lived in the Corbally area, were weir owners and were politically Conservative: see Lenihan, *Limerick: Its history and antiquities*, p. 500; Potter, *First citizen of the Treaty City*, p. 120.

<sup>61</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 31 December 1881.

<sup>62</sup> Potter, *The government of the people of Limerick*, p. 277; Limerick City Library, Limerick City Trades Register 1769-1925 <http://www.limerickcity.ie/webapps/tradesreg/RegisterEntry.aspx?ID=20914> accessed 21 May 2014; *Limerick Chronicle*, 23rd October 1880, 31 December 1881 access 25 May 2014.

These men tended to have moderate, liberal political outlooks and were generally considered to have lukewarm allegiance to the popular political movements (Repeal, Home Rule etc.) of the day.<sup>63</sup>

There were, of course, exceptions to the trend described above. In 1832 and 1852 the local liberal political class nominated William Roche, banker, and Robert Potter, solicitor, respectively – men who came from the same socio-economic background as themselves.<sup>64</sup> In the case of John O’Connell, 1847, and Isaac Butt, 1871, men with no strong connection to the city were returned to parliament as the city’s representatives, but in both cases these men were leaders of national political movements. Similarly, in 1851 English Catholic aristocrat Henry Granville Fitzalan-Howard, the Earl of Arundel and Surrey (the subsidiary title of the Earls of Norfolk who were the principal Recusant family in Britain) was returned despite having no connection whatsoever to the city or to Ireland at all, although in this case the local liberal political class were caught in the political turbulence caused by the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill and allowed religious affiliation to shape their choice of candidate.<sup>65</sup>

Of the thirteen MPs returned between 1832 and 1880 who could broadly be described as ‘liberals’, nine were Catholic, and this reflected the general composition and concerns of the liberal political class of the city responsible for nominating the MPs in question. Social composition can be gauged from a sample of seventy-four individuals who sat on parliamentary election nomination committees between 1832 and 1879, which included twenty merchants or drapers of one type or another, fifteen legal men, eleven Catholic clergymen, nine

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<sup>63</sup> Again the language used to describe these men was typified by the eulogies testifying how James O’Brien, representing Limerick in the 1850s, always acted ‘in the Liberal interest’ and Major George Gavin who succeeded him as being a ‘conscientious Liberal.’ *Limerick Chronicle*, 23rd October 1880, 31 December 1881.

<sup>64</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1800-1922*, p. 292; Limerick trade directories, <http://www.limerickcity.ie/webapps/tradesreg/RegisterEntry.aspx?ID=27908> accessed 25 May 2014.

<sup>65</sup> Dermot Quinn, ‘Howard, Henry Granville Fitzalan-, fourteenth duke of Norfolk (1815–1860)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13916>, accessed 17 Feb 2017.

manufacturers, seven retailers (pawnbrokers, grocers and/or spirit sellers), four agents of one type or another, two auctioneers, two newspaper proprietors, one hotel owner, one secretary of the gas works, one pig buyer and one who was described as a professor and teacher.<sup>66</sup> By and large, Potter described them as moderate Repealers in the 1840s and Catholic Whigs from ‘1850 till 1871’ – although there is an amount of evidence that this analysis could be extended into the 1880s given the extensive support that the same class gave to the decidedly Whiggish MPs, Richard O’Shaughnessy (1874-1883) and Daniel Fitzgerald Gabbett (1879-1885) – and he identified the true turning point as being the 1880s when the corporation became overwhelmingly nationalist.<sup>67</sup> In truth, as Chapters Six and Seven show, the liberal political class rarely sought to use political arguments as a justification for their power. The fact that they were, as Potter stated, ‘a wealthy, concentrated and well-resourced body of merchants and professional men’ was enough to justify their position of power and they acted in perfect accordance with Garrard’s observation that ‘local government was assumed to be just large-scale business.’<sup>68</sup>

The parliamentary nomination process changed from the 1880s onwards and the moderately liberal local landlord no longer featured as a candidate. Important factors explaining the changing relationship between the trades and public men in the 1880s included the centralisation of power by the Irish Parliamentary Party under the leadership of Parnell and the expansion of the electoral franchise in 1884.<sup>69</sup> The latter point, in particular, meant that elections featuring Conservative candidates were no longer close-run affairs and the need for (and ability of) the liberal political class to tightly control proceedings – as they did for the last

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<sup>66</sup> See Appendix three.

<sup>67</sup> Matthew Potter, *First citizen of the Treaty City: the mayors and mayoralty of Limerick, 1197-2007* (Limerick, 2007), p. 83.

<sup>68</sup> Potter, *First citizen of the Treaty City: the mayors and mayoralty of Limerick, 1197-2007*, p. 84; Garrard, ‘Urban Elites, 1850-1914: The Rule and Decemberline of a New Squirearchy?’, p. 588.

<sup>69</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: War, Peace and Beyond* (Oxford, 2010), pp 122-123; James Doherty, ‘Limerick in the general election 1885’, *Old Limerick Journal*, vol. 18, Winter 1985, pp 19-23.



time in 1879 and 1880 (see Chapter Seven) – declined and the need for the trades to present a strong street presence during tight election campaigns no longer existed. From the 1880s onwards the battles between the trades and the local politicised middle class to control political power were mainly fought within political organisations, particularly the National League, rather than on the hustings.<sup>70</sup> As a consequence, whereas the trades had been heavily involved in the political split in the Repeal Party in 1847-48 (see Chapter Four), their withdrawal from the nomination process meant that they were almost entirely non-partisan during the Parnellite split of the 1890s (see Chapters Five and Seven).

The politicisation of the wider Limerick populace, that was so evident from the 1820s onwards, contrasts sharply with the lack of engagement with constitutional parliamentary politics in the first decade or so of the nineteenth century – a phenomenon very much in keeping with the rest of Ireland and, to an extent, Britain.<sup>71</sup> The Vereker-Smyth family that held power at municipal level, successfully controlled the single parliamentary seat from 1802 till 1820 in the face of opposition from the dominant landed interests in the constituency. The first decade of the Union saw uncontested parliamentary elections in the City of Limerick and Jupp refers only to a ‘murmur’ of ‘token opposition’ confronting the Vereker-Smyth faction prior to the 1806 and 1807 parliamentary elections.<sup>72</sup> Organised opposition first became evident in 1812 when Lord Glentworth, son of the Earl of Limerick (the most important local landed magnate), contested the parliamentary election as a representative of the Limerick Independents, standing as a ‘reform’ candidate seeking to displace the existing elite.<sup>73</sup> This Independent reform

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<sup>70</sup> *Munster News*, 13, 17 Dec 1884, 9, 13 Jan, 10, 20, 23 Feb 1885, Sept 9, 25 1886.

<sup>71</sup> Peter Jupp, ‘Government, parliament and politics in Ireland, 1801-41’, in Julian Hoppit (ed.), *Parliament, nations and identities in Britain and Ireland, 1660-1850* (Manchester, 2003), pp 146-148; Hegg, ‘liberal Protestantism in Waterford’, pp 26-28.

<sup>72</sup> P.J. Jupp, ‘Limerick’, *History of Parliament online*, <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/constituencies/limerick> accessed 22 May 2014.

<sup>73</sup> The son of the Earl of Limerick took the subsidiary title of ‘Glentworth.’ The Peerage, <http://www.thepeerage.com/p8242.htm#i82416> accessed 05 Oct 2016; National Library of Ireland, ‘The Limerick papers’, [http://www.nli.ie/pdfs/mss%20lists/121\\_Limerick.pdf](http://www.nli.ie/pdfs/mss%20lists/121_Limerick.pdf) accessed 10 Dec 2016.

movement of the 1810s was the first political movement in the city to elicit the support of the trades, who first developed what could be described as a bloodless pact with Glentworth and the other leaders of the Independents with *quid pro quo* determining the relationship. Though they supported Glentworth from 1812 to 1817, there is little evidence that they had any personal devotion to him and they quickly switched their allegiances in 1817 to John Tuthill (characterised as the favourite of the ‘tradesmen’) who, in turn, was replaced in their affections by Thomas Spring Rice in 1818.<sup>74</sup> The attitude of the artisans of Limerick to constitutional politics during this period was marked by extremely low expectations and there is very little evidence that they sought in any way to direct or influence greatly any of these parliamentary candidates or set the political agenda. The prevailing political apathy was reflected by the extremely low voting numbers, with Glentworth receiving only twenty-seven votes (fifteen freeholder and twelve freeman votes) in 1812.<sup>75</sup> There were accusations by the Independent reformers that the Limerick Corporation was refusing to register freeholds but even if this was the case the numbers involved in the 1812 election were still extremely low. Limerick was not exceptional in this regard: Malcomson maintained that there was a general disregard of Catholic freeholders in Drogheda in the 1793-1810 period with Jupp also describing a mistrust and/or underappreciation of Catholics voters by urban patriciates whereby ‘little opportunity had been taken of the possibility of registering them [Catholics] as freeholders in those constituencies where they formed the majority of the population.’<sup>76</sup> The lack of competition

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<sup>74</sup> *Limerick Gazette*, 13, 23 Oct 1812, 23, 30 June, 3, 10, 17, 24, 28, 31 July 1818; *Limerick Chronicle*, 24 July 1817; Robert Herbert, ‘Chairing of Thomas Spring Rice’, *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, vol. 4, 1945, p. 134; Stephen Farrell, ‘Thomas Spring Rice’, *History of Parliament online*, <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/rice-thomas-1790-1866> accessed 21 May 2014; Ridden, *Making good citizens*, pp 165-66. Tuthill’s personality and place in the local politics mirrors that of Valentine Blake, the Galway parliamentary candidate in 1812. Jupp, ‘Urban politics in Ireland, 1801-1831’, p. 117.

<sup>75</sup> *Elections, Ireland. Returns of the number of electors who polled at the contested elections in Ireland, since 1805; together with the names of the candidates for whom they respectively voted, and the numbers for each candidate; distinguishing, in the cities and counties of cities, the freeholders from the freemen*, p. 16, H.C., 1829 (208), xxii, 1.

<sup>76</sup> Malcomson, *John Foster: the politics of Anglo-Irish ascendancy* (Belfast, 1978), pp 162-182; Jupp, ‘Urban politics in Ireland, 1801-1831’, p. 108.

that prevailed in so many pre-1810 Irish elections was also notable in many British constituencies and was reflective of a wider phenomenon whereby only ruling interest groups were considered at election campaigns.<sup>77</sup> The politicisation of the wider population in the second decade of the century is reflected by the increasing number of freehold votes cast, rising from a mere thirty in 1812, to 320 in 1817, 551 in 1818 and 914 in 1820.<sup>78</sup> The number of freeman votes cast also rose significantly (from 136 to 432) although one must recognise in this instance that many of these votes were cast by non-resident freeman created by the Limerick Corporation under dubious circumstances – a trend that was particularly noticeable in Limerick but by no means unique to that constituency alone.<sup>79</sup> This underhanded method of retaining political power was not confined to the Limerick city constituency and the 1833 commission into municipal affairs in Ireland highlighted how widespread this practice was.<sup>80</sup>

Whilst those opposing the Vereker-Smyth family succeeded in attracting increasingly large numbers of freeholder votes, the Corporation clique more than matched this with the number of freeman votes they could attract/create. This last point was particularly contentious and was, in itself, part of the reason for the increasingly agitated opposition on the part of the reformers. Traditionally one became a freeman by being the son of a freeman, the son-in-law of a freeman or – most significantly for the artisans of the city – by serving a seven-year apprenticeship to a freeman. In reality, these traditional methods of acquiring freeman status had been drastically curtailed by the Corporation clique who made use of irregular municipal

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<sup>77</sup> Jupp's study of Essex offers a particularly good analogy, see Peter Jupp, *British and Irish Elections, 1784-1831* (Newton Abbot, 1973), pp 29-36; Jupp, 'Government, parliament and politics in Ireland, 1801-41', pp 146.

<sup>78</sup> *Elections, Ireland. Returns of the number of electors who polled at the contested elections in Ireland, since 1805*, p. 16.

<sup>79</sup> A number of political interest groups throughout the country sought to gain the support of dubiously qualified voters, particularly freemen who were often referred to as 'running bucks', see Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, p. 121 f.28; Angus Macintyre, *The Liberator* (London, 1965), p. 93; Hegg 'Liberalism in Waterford', pp 69-73. For number of votes cast see Appendix 1. *Elections, Ireland. Returns of the number of electors who polled at the contested elections in Ireland, since 1805*; p. 16.

<sup>80</sup> *First report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the municipal corporations in Ireland*, p. 20-26, H.C. 1835, [23] [24] [25] [27] [28], xxviii, 1; Maura Murphy, 'Municipal Reform and the Repeal Movement in Cork 1833-44', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, vol. 81 (Jan. -Dec. 1977), pp 16-17.

privileges to object to claimants seeking to qualify in the traditional manner. Furthermore, whilst simultaneously preventing these aforementioned claimants, the Vereker-Smyth family made a large number of friends, followers and tenants (their estate was in Gort, Co. Galway) free of the city, sometimes by citing customary rights to explain their actions and at other times by using the 1662 and 1692 Acts for encouraging Protestant strangers and others to inhabit and plant in the kingdom of Ireland.<sup>81</sup> This Act allowed for very liberal interpretation (not all ‘strangers’ made free under this act by the Limerick Corporation were Protestants), as was pointed out by a parliamentary committee in 1843.<sup>82</sup> Some of these abuses impinged directly on the artisans of the city whose increasingly politicised leadership – consisting mainly of prominent coopers from the 1812-1830 period – sought to claim freeman status by servitude (i.e. by completing a seven year apprenticeship to a freeman) and for many of the city’s artisans this served as a political impetus. The practices of the Limerick Corporation were particularly corrupt, even for a time when (prior to the reforms of the 1830s and 40s) unrepresentative, parasitic and oligarchic municipal governments were commonplace. This was indicative of what William Cobbett and other radicals referred to as ‘old corruption’ or ‘the thing’ – a widespread and deeply embedded system that prevailed throughout Britain and Ireland whereby, as Jupp stressed, one or two families controlled municipal and parliamentary politics in the majority of Irish boroughs in the early nineteenth century.<sup>83</sup> In the context of the

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<sup>81</sup> *Act for encouraging Protestant strangers and others, to inhabit and plant the Kingdom of Ireland*, 14-15 Charles II, session 4, c.13, 1662, (Ireland); *An Act for encouragement of Protestant strangers to settle in this kingdom of Ireland*, 4 Will & Mary c.2, 1692 (Ireland), Sec. 1-3; *Report from the Select Committee on the Limerick election; together with the special report from the said committee, and also the minutes of the evidence taken before them*, pp 4, 43, 70, H.C. 1820 (229), iii, 283.

<sup>82</sup> *Reports from committees: seven volumes, admiralty courts, aliens, defamation and libel*, Session 2 February – 24 August 1843, Vol. V, p. 21. The 2<sup>nd</sup> section of this act stipulated that, ‘Protestants, aliens or subjects, who is, are, or shall be traders, artisans, artificers, or seamen, shall, on tendering a fine of twenty shillings to the magistrate of any town corporate or borough, be admitted a freeman on taking the oaths of allegiance and supremacy.’

<sup>83</sup> Philip Harling, ‘Parliament, state and “old Corruption”’: conceptualizing reform, c. 1790-1832’, Arthur Burns and Joanne Innes (eds), *Rethinking the age of reform* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 98. Potter and McNamara acknowledged the ubiquitous nature of ‘old corruption’ but singled out the Limerick Corporation out as being a particularly bad example of local governance, see Potter, *First citizen of the Treaty City*, pp 51-2; Sarah McNamara, *Making the middle-class mind: middle-class culture in Limerick, 1830-40*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, Mary Immaculate College, 2010, p. 26; Jupp, ‘Urban politics in Ireland, 1801-1831’, p. 104-05.

curtailments of their rights, the city's artisans were justifiably aggrieved when working artisans in cities such as Bristol, and some Irish cities to a lesser extent, were still able to enjoy freeman status and consequently, once they served an apprenticeship, had a casting vote in parliamentary elections.<sup>84</sup>

## Methodology

There has been little attempt to place this study in any particular school of history. The stylistic overlaps with Thompson, Hobsbawn and Rudé are obvious but Marxist templates of class have been avoided. This does not indicate any nod to the Annales approach but rather a recognition that most class templates offered by studies of British or European society are not applicable to the Celtic fringe. Rather than fit into any existing school, the purpose of this study was to examine evidence, form conclusions and offer a building block for social and political historians seeking to construct more complete overarching histories.

The object of this thesis is to detail, analyse and comment upon the organisational and political evolution of the skilled trades of Limerick. There is relatively little opportunity to revise or defend any previous studies as the corpus of Irish labour history is not sizeable enough to support such an approach. In the context of nineteenth century Irish labour, there has been no 'history war' style debating of methodologies or any post-modernist assailing of the notion of class. Many of the nineteenth century topics relating to Irish labour, particularly in the urban context, are virgin territory and this this author did not have to negotiate through the various historiographical schools; consequently many of this work's critiques are aimed at studies relevant to labour history outside Ireland.

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<sup>84</sup> Iorwerth Prothero, *Artisans and politics in early nineteenth century London: John Gast and his times* (London, 1981), p. 32; Jupp, 'Urban politics in Ireland, 1801-1831', pp 117-118; Malcomson, *John Foster*, pp 159-190.

The primary sources for this study included trade society ledgers and rule books, the papers of the Chief Secretary's Office, Fenian Papers, parliamentary papers, personal correspondence and, most of all, local newspapers. In the case of newspapers, at the time of writing none of the relevant local Limerick newspapers were digitised (digitisation of the *Limerick Leader* begins at 1905) and so the surviving newspapers were mostly viewed on microfilm although some original copies of the *Limerick Reporter* are available to read in the Limerick City Library. The lack of digitised local newspapers – some national newspapers such as the *Freeman's Journal* and *The Nation* were accessed via the Irish Newspaper Archives website – led to a more thorough understanding of the subject than would have otherwise been the case. Finding the relevant data by way of search engine requires using precise (but sometimes deceptive) search terms, e.g. a search for the term 'trade union' might produce no results whereas the term 'guild' could prove more suitable and only by careful browsing of the relevant sources – which is more thoroughly done via microfilm or hard copy – can one discover the correct terminology. The newspapers themselves varied in usefulness: surviving records for the *Limerick Chronicle*, a paper which gave the Protestant/Conservative/Unionist perspective, span the entire period explored by this study but, whilst it consistently had the greatest distribution of all local newspapers, its target audience was the local Unionist population as well as the army and navy stationed in Ireland and it generally gave selective coverage of local events. In general, the local newspapers which served the Catholic/Repeal/Nationalist interest gave better coverage of local events and the *Limerick Leader* (surviving records start at 1893) gives such thorough coverage of labour groups that the evidence gleaned could potentially overshadow other eras.

Surviving trade ledgers and rule books are, apart from some bakers' records, stored in a well-preserved state in the Limerick Mechanics' Institute despite past rumours that they

were poorly cared for.<sup>85</sup> The President of the Limerick Trades Council, Mike McNamara, was kind enough to allow this author to view the records which were individually, and carefully, photographed and returned to storage so as to ensure preservation. The ledgers offer a detailed glimpse of the inner workings of the trade societies but are almost entirely bereft of political opinion – an omission that raises the strong possibility that individual and trade interests were (despite the evidence of other sources) far more important than politics to the Limerick artisan of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>85</sup> Some of the bakers records were removed by a senior baker in the twentieth century and deposited in the UCD archives alleging that such archival material was not being properly cared for in the Limerick Mechanics' Institute. Frank Prendergast, 'The Mechanics' Institute', Mechanics' Institute Files, Local Studies, Limerick City Library, <http://www.limerickcity.ie/Library/LocalStudies/LocalStudiesFiles/M/MechanicsInstitute/> accessed 10 Dec 2016.

# **Chapter One: Background and origins of the nineteenth century trades of Limerick**



Historical accounts of organised labour in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are most commonly contained in histories of trade unionism, which invariably emphasise a break in tradition – occurring at different times in different places – whereby recognised labour market regulation fell into abeyance and wage-earners began using collective bargaining methods to protect their craft tradition and standard of living. The model presented in these cases describes the disintegration of the guild system, forcing journeymen to combine to preserve their working conditions and wage rates. These journeyman combinations are often presented as proto-unions or an intermediary group – a missing link in an evolutionary model which presents trade unionism as the apex of labour organisation.<sup>1</sup> Other trends in labour history describe organised labour primarily in the context of successive political ideologies. In the case of English unions, labour histories tied to the ebb and flow of ‘Radicalism, Chartism, Co-operation, Socialism’ were questioned by A. E. Musson as early as 1974 when he sought to re-emphasise ‘cyclical factors, because trade-union records demonstrate that the pattern of boom and slump was of greater significance than the more usually emphasised ideological fluctuations.’<sup>2</sup> This aforementioned approach was adopted by Boyd in his mid-1970s examination of Irish labour where he used late eighteenth century republicanism, Chartism and Fenianism to suggest how successive forms of labour mobilisation evolved.<sup>3</sup> Undoubtedly, political context is vital but one needs to be aware of the dangers of overemphasising the impact that politics had on Limerick workmen societies, the surviving ledgers of which were almost absent of political discussion.<sup>4</sup> With regard to the emergence of trade unionism, it is apparent

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<sup>1</sup> Fergus D’Arcy and Ken Hannigan, *Workers in Union: Documents and Commentaries on the History of Irish Labour* (Dublin, 1988), p. 1-3; O’Connor, *A labour history of Waterford*, p. 45; Boyd, *The rise of the Irish trade unions*, pp 7-10.

<sup>2</sup> A.E. Musson, *Trade Union and Social History* (London, 1974), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Boyd, *The rise of the Irish trade unions*, pp 7-63.

<sup>4</sup> Actual political debate is entirely absent from all such nineteenth century ledgers and political activity is occasionally implied by the occasional reference to political events. See Mechanics’ Institute, Ledger 20, Guild of Bakers Minute Book, *passim*; Mechanics’ Institute, Ledger 68, Rule book of the Guild of Housepainters, *passim*; Mechanics’ Institute, Ledger 97, Minute Book of the Guild of Housepainters, *passim*; Mechanics’ Institute of Limerick, Ledger 116, Guild of Stonecutters Minute Book, *passim*; Rules and regulations of the United Smiths Benevolent Sick and Mortality Society, 1861, bound pamphlet entitled *Nineteen Limerick*

that there were several beginnings that one could choose from and undoubtedly unionism began at different times in different areas.<sup>5</sup> Chase mentioned a large number of seventeenth and eighteenth century movements which ‘anticipated’ trade unionism, but cautioned that this approach could be misleading and at worst lead to confirmation bias.<sup>6</sup> Unwin recognised as early as 1904, and Black reaffirmed in 1984, that once any British locality was studied in enough detail numerous antecedents to wage-earner trade unionism could be found in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries when guilds were thought to be dominant.<sup>7</sup> Unwin was likely incorrect in 1904 when he declared that ‘economic conditions will not of themselves produce a trade union’ and emphasised that tradition was imperative.<sup>8</sup> O’Connor more accurately described trade unionism as a relatively obvious idea that did not necessarily need a tradition, and early trade unionists need not have been aware or guided by similar social movements that preceded them.<sup>9</sup> D’Arcy and Hannigan’s brief summary of the origins of trade unionism highlights the eighteenth century instances of workman opposition to the guild and presents journeyman combinations as the sole explanation for the early rise of trade unionism.<sup>10</sup> Boyd, O’Connor and Ryan also present the guild system and early trade unionism as entirely separate systems with O’Connor asserting that in the Waterford context trade societies began in the 1820s independently of any guild influences.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Boyd’s study implies that instances when the guild system broke down in the eighteenth century were indications of where Irish trade unionism began.<sup>12</sup>

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*printings* in the Limerick City Library Local Studies Section, *passim*; Mechanics’ Institute of Limerick, Ledger 77, Guild of Housepainters Minute Book, *passim*; Mechanics’ Institute, Ledger 135, Minute Book of the Limerick Branch of the Stonecutters Union, *passim*; Mechanics’ Institute, Ledger 49, Minute Book of the Guild of Coopers, *passim*; UCD Archives, TUI/1, Minute Book of the Guild of Bakers, *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> Chase, *Early trade unionism: fraternity*, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Chase, *Early trade unionism*, pp 15-18.

<sup>7</sup> Black, *Guild and State*, pp 172-74.

<sup>8</sup> George Unwin, *Industrial organization in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (London, 1904), pp 8-9.

<sup>9</sup> O’Connor, *A labour history of Ireland*, p. 3

<sup>10</sup> D’Arcy and Hannigan, *Workers in Union*, pp 1-3.

<sup>11</sup> O’Connor, *A labour history of Waterford*, p. 45.

<sup>12</sup> Boyd, *The rise of the Irish trade unions*, pp 7-10.

Malcolm Chase in his study of early labour societies contends that the historical significance of guilds has been understated and many historians have been too ready to suggest that nineteenth century organised labour was a reaction to, rather than an evolution from, the guild system.<sup>13</sup> Chase traces this approach to the seminal study of the organised labour carried out by the Webbs (Sidney and Beatrice) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, emphasising the fact that their Fabian Socialist prejudices and opposition to Guild Socialism (a strand of socialism that was influential in the early twentieth century) ensured that the guild legacy was written out of trade union history.<sup>14</sup> Whilst many urban centres offered perfect evidence to support the Webbs' theory, in other cases it was exceptionally difficult to differentiate the guild from the union or to explain why so many local trade unions proudly possessed archaic artefacts (banners, regalia and freedom boxes) that palpably spoke of guild culture. Lujo Brentano writing in 1870, at a time when many still living remembered the period of transition between guild and trade union, lamented the lack of a clear picture: 'All opinions on this point which I have yet met with are vague, and, as I am obliged to say, far from corresponding with reality', before concurring with John Ludlow's assertion that trade unions were the result of the 'capitalist masters withdrawing from the Craft-Guild.'<sup>15</sup> The Webbs were particularly hostile to popular trade histories. Although they noted that the Dublin Bricklayers' Society c. 1890 had in its possession many documents and charters belonging to the original incorporated company of that trade, they refused to believe that there could be any link between a 'mainly Roman Catholic body of wage-earners, dating certainly from 1830' and an

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<sup>13</sup> Chase, *Early trade unionism: fraternity, skill and the politics of labour*, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Chase, *Early trade unionism*, pp 9-10; Alexander Gray, *The socialist tradition: Moses to Lenin* (London, 1963), pp 433-58.

<sup>15</sup> Lujo Brentano, 'On the History and development of guilds and the origins of trade unions', Joshua Toulmin Smith (ed.), *English guilds: the original ordinances of more than one hundred early English Guilds*, (London: Oxford University, 1870), p. clxv.

‘exclusively Protestant incorporation of working masters, which was abolished by statute in 1840.’<sup>16</sup> This was a general trend in their study and Chase commented that:

The Webbs were horrified by cheerfully uncritical antiquarians in the labour movement, notably the bricklayers’ leader and MP, George Howell, who evinced an almost romantic interest in supposed connections between guilds and trade unions.<sup>17</sup>

More recent attempts to tackle the question have been somewhat divided with D’Arcy (1971) agreeing with the Webbs that the ‘structural connection between guild and trade union in Dublin is a myth’, and Hogan and Murphy (2001) arguing that in the case of the Dublin Bricklayers’ Society, at least, the claims of continuous lineage were more than mere ‘appropriation of the past’ and that the combination – which preceded the union – was an ‘evolution from and not a revolution against, the guild.’<sup>18</sup> In particular, Hogan’s study of the Dublin Bricklayers’ Society illustrates the very prominent role that the Protestant guild master Benjamin Pemberton played in both the guild and the workman society representing that trade:

With members such as Pemberton moving between both societies, there was definite and strong crosspollination from the Guild of Saint Bartholomew to the bricklayers’ combination.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, Hogan’s description of how the Catholic John Byrne, the 1860s secretary to the society which represented working masons and bricklayers, actually served his apprenticeship to Pemberton, perfectly illustrates how the Webbs should not have so readily dismissed the link between the two traditions.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *History of Trade Unionism* (London, 1894), p. 719.

<sup>17</sup> Chase, *Early trade unionism*, p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> John Hogan & Gary Murphy, ‘From guild to union: the evolution of the Dublin Bricklayers’ Society, 1670-1888’, p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> Hogan, *From guild to union: The Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers’ Trade Union*, pp 24, 35-38, 41.

<sup>20</sup> Hogan, *From guild to union: The Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers’ Trade Union*, p. 44.

We should not try to overstate the continuity between guild and union, however, since there still remains a need to explain how Limerick artisans in 1850, for example, sharply contrasted with their predecessors of the same trade in 1750 in the manner in which they were collectively represented. The continual use of the guild terminology by the Limerick trades throughout the nineteenth century tends to add to the confusion and one should recognise the lack of accuracy in this language. The term ‘guild’ was used by a large number of nineteenth century bodies including the Abbey Fishermen and the Sandmen, and there was even a Guild of Labourers briefly mentioned in 1852.<sup>21</sup> One can easily discount the legitimacy of these three examples since these occupations were never formerly incorporated by charter, but many other societies – many with an apparently superior claim to guild heritage – also fail this test. One can decide how loosely to apply the term ‘guild’ but this thesis does not seek to solve this conundrum categorically in the context of nineteenth century Limerick. To summarise, the appearance of the word ‘guild’ in itself in the nineteenth century is not necessarily of great significance.

Writing on the subject of Limerick guilds, Robert Herbert confidently described the economic forces that killed the guild system in eighteenth century Limerick but found it difficult to explain the perseverance of these bodies into the nineteenth century. Whilst he noted the appearance of twenty-one ‘guilds’ appearing before the 1833 municipal corporation commissioners, he did not offer an explanation as to the nature or legitimacy of the nineteenth century bodies.<sup>22</sup> A cursory comparison with similar bodies in 1765, almost certainly chartered bodies with recognised municipal privileges, is necessary to ascertain who the nineteenth century bodies were. Firstly, it is important to note that the 1833 ‘guilds’ representing the sawyers, ropemakers, nailors, ship-wrights, millwrights, stonecutters and coachbuilders do not

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<sup>21</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 5 Dec 1843, 22 Nov 1844, 17 Aug 1852; *Freeman’s Journal*, 9 Oct 1840, 3 Jan 1848; *The Nation*, 1 April 1848; *Munster News*, 30 June 1886.

<sup>22</sup> Herbert, ‘The Trade Guilds of Limerick’, p. 122.

have any obvious antecedents amongst the 1765 bodies and, furthermore, there was no record of any 1833 bodies representing the brewers, butchers, surgeon barbers or tallow chandlers whereas these trades were all represented by incorporated guilds in 1765.<sup>23</sup> A total of seven trade bodies appear verbatim in name in 1765 and 1833 – bakers, carpenters, coopers, hatters, smiths, tailors, and tobacconists. A number of other 1833 guild bodies appeared to reflect trade specification, namely the weavers, represented in 1765 by the Guild of Weavers but listed as the Guild of *Linen* Weavers in 1833; the smiths were one body in 1765, whereas in 1833 there was both a Guild of Smiths *and* a Guild of Founders; the Shoemakers Guild of 1765 appears to have given rise to two 1833 bodies, the Cordwainers Guild and the Brogue-makers Guild; and the building trades, amalgamated into one body in 1765 (the ‘Guild of Masons, Bricklayers, Slaters, Plasterers, Painters, Pavours [sic], and Limeburners’) whilst the Guild of Masons, Guild of Slaters [sic] and Guild of Painters appeared to be independent of one another in 1833.<sup>24</sup> Given the apparent degree of continuity it is possible that the unions of the 1890s were, to some extent, the same bodies as the guilds of previous centuries and that it was only the world around them that had changed (see Chapter Three). There were distinct differences, however, that need to be addressed. The civic entitlements of the eighteenth-century guilds – exemptions from tolls, ability to legally expel non-members from the city and ability to attain municipal freedom through servitude – were not enjoyed by the nineteenth century bodies. This was clear as early as 1833 when the Municipal Commission revealed that the ‘guilds’ assembled before them were essentially friendly societies with a vague municipal

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<sup>23</sup> An argument could be made that the stonemasons descended from the Guild of Masons but all local nineteenth century sources suggest that the two trades were very distinct, *Limerick Evening Post*, 17 April, 5 May 1829; *Munster News*, 9 Oct 1880, 16 Dec 1885. The case of the butchers is most puzzling as this trade formed the core of the organised labour corpus in other urban centres, particularly Ennis, but are almost entirely removed from the organised labour community in nineteenth century Limerick, see Chapter Four.

<sup>24</sup> *First report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the municipal corporations in Ireland*, p. 542; Herbert, ‘The Trade Guilds of Limerick’, p. 128.

tradition, emphasising that ‘these bodies are not now, however, recognised as component parts of the corporation.’<sup>25</sup>

It is not enough, however, to point out that the privileges of the guilds were no longer legally recognised by the 1830s. Whether real or imagined, guild legacy was a crucial component of the organised labour bodies’ self-image from the 1820s until the end of the century. The paradox of organised labour in Limerick lies in the fact that the strength of evidence for the perseverance of guild tradition and culture in the nineteenth century contrasts so strikingly with the clear evidence that the guild system of the eighteenth century city died a certain death during the years of the city’s economic and physical expansion (from the dismantling of the walls in 1760 to end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815).<sup>26</sup> Significantly, there is no indication that the value system of organised labour in nineteenth century Limerick was the sole preserve of the journeyman or the wage earning artisan: some employers, undoubtedly exceptions to their class, retained ties with the trades and hinted at the existence of a community that was somewhat akin to the old guilds where fraternal links within an occupational group transcended class and status. When journeyman coachbuilders in 1860 attacked a small employer whose men were working outside the regular hours, a more established employer attempted to justify the rationale of the attack.<sup>27</sup> Even in Dublin, where the guild and journeyman societies were far more polarised, there were instances of masters seeking to ostracise non-apprenticed employers and, equally, a number of the Dublin witnesses representing the journeyman combinations, and speaking in their favour, before the 1824 parliamentary committees were themselves working employers.<sup>28</sup> There were many examples

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<sup>25</sup> *First report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the municipal corporations in Ireland*, p. 542.

<sup>26</sup> For a look at the physical expansion of the city see Judith Hill, *The Building of Limerick* (Cork, 1991), pp 90-141.

<sup>27</sup> *Munster News*, 18 Feb 1860.

<sup>28</sup> Acheson Moore, who was called as a witness before a parliamentary committee, described himself as a working employer (carpenter). *First report from Select Committee on Artizans and Machinery*, pp 444-445, 443, 450, 456-7, 483, 475, H.C. 1824 (51), v, 1.

in Limerick of employees who became employers and yet remained within the trade societies, giving further strength to these bodies' right to call themselves 'guilds': notable examples from the 1880s and 1890s include John Hayes, master baker and member of the Guild of Bakers, and Richard Gleeson, builder and member of the Ancient Guild of Carpenters.<sup>29</sup> The details of this situation are hazy, but it is clear that many of these employers played an important part in running the societies and were often foremost in upholding the values of the trade. The aforementioned John Hayes – acting as master of the Guild of Bakers in 1860 – led the assault on night work in the pages of the local *Munster News*, ten years later implacably stated that no bakers in Limerick would work on St. Stephen's Day, and is recorded as playing a key role in the initiation ceremony of apprentices in the 1880s.<sup>30</sup>

### Legislative watersheds? Combination laws examined

One approach favoured by labour historians is to link social change with changes in legislation and to use a legal framework as an overall foundation for their study. Such approaches invariably present the years 1824 and 1825 as a watershed when 'trade unionism' emerged. O'Connor's sub-chapter, 'Out of the shadows', starts with the statement that in response to the repeal of the Combination Laws the 'Waterford trade societies emerged into public prominence.'<sup>31</sup> Many British and Irish labour histories utilise such a framework which attributes great importance to the impact of legislation such as the Combination Laws – both their enactment between 1780 and 1803 and their repeal in 1824 – and acts relating to

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<sup>29</sup> Hayes's bakery appears in a number of trade directories from 1867 to 1884, see Limerick city trades register, 1769-1925 <http://www.limerickcity.ie/webapps/TradesReg/Search.aspx> accessed 9 June 2016; *Limerick Leader*, 13 Dec 1893. Richard Gleeson served an apprenticeship as a carpenter, joined the local society and remained a member despite becoming a building contractor in the 1890s. *Limerick Leader*, 13, 18 Dec 1893; *Munster News*, 13 Nov 1886; Census of Ireland Returns, 1901, Resident of House 13.1 in Punche's Row, Limerick No. 3 Urban District, Limerick, [http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Limerick/Limerick\\_No\\_3\\_Urban\\_District/Punche\\_s\\_Row/1499654/](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Limerick/Limerick_No_3_Urban_District/Punche_s_Row/1499654/) accessed 16 June 2014.

<sup>30</sup> *Munster News*, 21 Jan 1860, 17 Dec 1870; Mechanics' Institute, Ledger 20, Guild of Bakers Minute Book, 14 Oct 1865.

<sup>31</sup> O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford*, p.45.



apprenticeship and trade union membership in 1813 and 1871-5 respectively. Histories of early Irish trade unionism which use this legal framework tend to follow a certain sequence beginning with a tranquil period – where the guild system was strong and the artisans, consequently, lived in harmony with the law – followed by a period of uncertainty, when the decline of the guild system led to the isolation and radicalisation of the journeyman class and the enactment of the Combination Laws to neutralize the unhappy, and potentially Jacobin, operatives.<sup>32</sup> Labour histories adopting the aforementioned approach have suggested that this period, 1780-1824, gave rise to the ‘journeymen combination’ – a shadowy, primitive and rudderless amalgamation that only served as a precursor to the more fully formed trade unionism that emerged following the 1824 repeal of the Combination Laws.<sup>33</sup> Equally, Boyd inferred that British unions’ experience of the 1871-75 Trade Union Acts and the ‘repression’ that preceded them also applied in the case of the Irish unions: ‘before the Trade Union Act [1871] was passed the unions were scarcely lawful.’<sup>34</sup> There is some evidence that suggests that Limerick trade societies may have benefitted somewhat from the 1870s legislation and the 1875 Limerick building trades’ agreement (a seminal triumph for the Limerick artisan community – see Chapter Six) may have only been possible due to legislative change.<sup>35</sup> The artisans, however, did not acknowledge the benefits of the 1870s legislation during their trade negotiations nor was there any great involvement by Irish workmen in the campaign that preceded the legislation. Irish labour historians Cronin and O’Connor neglected, quite

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<sup>32</sup> Todd Webb, ‘Combination Laws and revolutionary trade unionism’, Immanuel Ness (ed.), *International encyclopedia of revolution and protest* (Columbia University, 2009), p. 819; Geoffrey Treasure (ed.), *Who’s who in British History: Beginnings to 1901* (London, 1998), p. 992.

<sup>33</sup> O’Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford*, pp 2-4, 15-17.

<sup>34</sup> Boyd, *The rise of the Irish trade unions* pp 62-65. The most important legislation passed during this period was the 1871 Trade Union Act (Ireland) and the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875. These acts made it easier to be a trade union member and largely decriminalized peaceful picketing. George O’Brien, *Labour organization* (London, 1921), p. 17; Thomas Murray, *Contesting economic and social rights in Ireland: constitution, state and* (Cambridge, 2016), pp 67, 231-2; J. H. Richardson, *An introduction to the study of industrial relations, volume 5* (London, 2003), pp 214-215; John McIlroy, *Trade unions in Britain today* (Manchester, 1995), pp 227-29.

<sup>35</sup> *Munster news*, 26, 30 June, 7, 10 July, 4 Aug, 4 Sept, 6, 10, 17 Nov 1875. The settlement ensured that artisans in the building trades had greater certainty of their working hours and rates of pay. See Chapter Six.

understandably, to mention the significance of the 1870s legislation and whilst Boyle does cover the issue he refers solely to the exertions of British campaigners such as Richard Applegarth, Frederick Harrison and Thomas Hughes.<sup>36</sup>

Problems with historical accounts of the Combination Laws mirror those of the penal laws, with both series of legislation portrayed as being more rigorously applied than was actually the case in practice. Both Musson in the 1970s and Chase in 2000 cautioned against overstating the influence of combination legislation, with Musson illustrating the extent to which common law or the Law of Master and Servant often presented a more implacable obstacle to artisan organisation.<sup>37</sup> As early as the 1930s the work of Dorothy George cast serious doubt on the impact of the 1799 and 1800 legislation (extended to Ireland in 1803) since it ‘introduced no new principle and created no new offence; compared with earlier Acts it was far from severe.’<sup>38</sup> Despite this, Boyd’s 1976 study concluded that after passing of the 1800 Combination Act (relating to Britain) and the 1803 Act (relating to Ireland) ‘the magistrates in all parts of Britain and Ireland did their utmost, with fines and floggings and imprisonments to wreck the unions’ and Prendergast’s 2003 account of early organised labour in Limerick similarly emphasises aggressive intolerance of combination and the practice of whipping those convicted of involvement.<sup>39</sup> Part of the problem of such interpretations relates to the sheer number of Combination Laws and many studies have been less than specific as to which laws relate to which eras, and whether a law were enacted by the Irish or British parliament, although Brian Henry’s thorough study of combination in late 1700s Dublin does

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<sup>36</sup> Applegarth was secretary of the artisan lobby group ‘the Conference of Amalgamated Trades’ and was also a leading member of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners. Harrison and Hughes were middle class supporters of the campaign. Boyle, *Irish labor movement in the nineteenth century*, pp 68-69, 225-26.

<sup>37</sup> A.E. Musson, *Trade union and social history*, pp 3-4, 9; Chase, *Early trade unionism*, pp 83-86.

<sup>38</sup> M. Dorothy George, ‘Revisions in Economic History: IV. The Combination Laws’, *The economic history review*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Apr., 1936), pp 172-178.

<sup>39</sup> Boyd, *The rise of the Irish trade unions* p. 29; Frank Prendergast, ‘Limerick Council of Trade Unions 1810-2003’, David Lee and Debbie Jacobs (eds) *Made in Limerick, Vol 1: history of industries, trade and commerce* (Limerick, 2003), p. 241.

detail extensively the number of laws and how they were applied in that period.<sup>40</sup> The last cases of whipping for the offence of workman combination in Limerick that this author could find were in 1800 and 1802 – prior to the 1803 legislation – when three carpenters and one cooper, respectively, were publicly flogged and it is significant that when a similar case came before a Dublin court in 1804 the new legislation appeared to make confinement more of an option than whipping.<sup>41</sup> By 1824 even spokesmen for journeyman societies acknowledged that whipping had become extremely rare and whilst there was some differences of opinion regarding the effectiveness and severity of the combination laws in Ireland, it appears that the primary impact of the laws was psychological in nature – a point which Chase contends also applies to Britain.<sup>42</sup>

It is nearly possible to omit the Combination Laws as a significant influence on the shaping of Irish trade unions, or at least to reduce their significance in the early nineteenth century context given that there were few instances whereby the legislation was used. The local magistrates tried the violent Limerick combiners in the 1819-21 period (see Chapter Two) under a number of different laws relating to riotous assembly, assault and oath-taking but not combination – and also due to the fact that the most extreme aspects of the legislation, which prevented more than two artisans of the same trade from meeting, were not regularly implemented.<sup>43</sup> The sheer number of eighteenth century laws that were passed was noted by Henry as evidence in itself of the difficulties the authorities had in dealing with the problem of

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<sup>40</sup> Laws relating to combination were passed by the Irish parliament in 1729, 1743, 1757, 1759, 1763, 1771-2, 1771-72, 1780. See Statutes (Ire), 3 George 11, c 14 (1729); Statutes (Ire), 17 George 11, c 8 (1743); 31 George 11, c 10 (1757); 33 George 11, c 5 (1759); 3 George III, c 17 (1763); 3 George III, c 34 (1763); 11 & 12 George III, c 18 (1771-2); 11 & 12 George III, c 33 (1771-72); Statutes (Ire), 19 & 20 George III, c 19 (1780) [general]; 19 & 20 George III, c 24 (1780) [silk industry]; 19 & 20 George III, c 36 (1780); Brian Henry, 'Industrial violence, combinations and the law in late eighteenth century Dublin', *Saothar*, Vol. 18, 1993, pp 19-34.

<sup>41</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 2 October 1800, 3 July 1804.

<sup>42</sup> *First report from Select Committee on Artizans and Machinery*, p. 301, 443, 450, 456-7, 483, 475; Chase, *Early trade unionism*, pp 84-85.

<sup>43</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 Mar 1821; George, 'Revisions in Economic History: IV. The Combination Laws', pp 176-178.

combination and an attempt to try a number of Limerick cabinet-makers in 1790 was abandoned when the jury failed to reach a verdict.<sup>44</sup> In 1791, Francis Arthur, merchant, put his trust in labour market forces rather than legal prescripts and appealed to masons from outside the city to take the place of Limerick men who were attempting to impede his building projects and ‘lay new laws.’<sup>45</sup> Two decades later, the response of the master coopers in 1812 to a strike by journeymen took the form of enticing coopers from outside the city to take the strikers’ place and there is no indication that the masters in question successfully prosecuted any of the journeymen despite calls from the local Chamber of Commerce to do so.<sup>46</sup> Such examples were indicative of the general trend evident in industrial disputes during the late eighteenth and entire nineteenth centuries: irrespective of legislative changes, the masters generally won when they could find skilled workers prepared to take the place of striking workers and the latter won when this proved impossible.

To better understand the situation of Limerick artisans in the early nineteenth century it is necessary to focus more on what was customary rather than what was legal. In this sense, the language and terminology of the trades strongly indicates continuity with, rather than departure from, the eighteenth century guild system, although problems with this approach will be explored later in the present study. We must, however, be careful when appraising the language of the trades during this period: their reluctance to cast off the nomenclature of the guild system was partly an attempt to retain legitimacy in the eyes of the public and the civic authorities. Indeed the manner in which the Limerick bakers still referred to their body as ‘the guild’, and their officers as ‘Masters’ and ‘Wardens’ as late as the mid-twentieth century was remarked upon by the early historian of the trade, John Swift.<sup>47</sup> Undoubtedly there was a degree

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<sup>44</sup> *Finn’s Journal*, 31 March 1790; Brian Henry, *Dublin hanged: crime, law enforcement and punishment in late eighteenth-century Dublin* (Dublin, 1994), pp 60-65.

<sup>45</sup> Jim Kemmy, ‘Arthur’s quay’, *Old Limerick Journal*, vol. 26, Winter 1989, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> *Limerick Gazette*, 29 Sept, 2, 13 Oct 1812.

<sup>47</sup> John Swift, ‘The bakers’ records’, *Saothar: Journal of the Irish Labour History Society*, vol. 3, 1976-77, p. 4.

of intentional subterfuge, but the pseudo-guilds of the nineteenth century were not as different as one might expect from the bodies they believed to be their progenitors. As Chase remarked, ‘a guild’s authority over its craft was seldom total’ and the Cork writer William Boles (writing in the 1730s and using the *nom de plume*, ‘Alexander the Coppersmith’) cast doubt on the legitimacy of the Cork guilds’ hegemony over the trade of the city, citing a number of instances where attempts by local artisan guilds to interfere with the employment of non-guildsmen were deemed to be in breach of existing legislation.<sup>48</sup> In Limerick, well over a century after the publication of Boles’ work, the number of small local employers/masters who remained affiliated to the city’s trade societies, as mentioned above, was significant.<sup>49</sup> In addition to the occasional presence of employers, the regulatory role of the eighteenth century guilds was retained by these later bodies – workmen responsible for shoddy work or who left employers without the required notice were fined and admonished by the trade societies – further suggesting continuity with, or at least emulation of, the original guilds.<sup>50</sup>

### **Eighteenth and nineteenth century labour forces compared**

To fully understand the situation in Limerick in relation to general trends it is necessary to look at the city’s labour force in the previous centuries in some detail as, although these years are beyond the direct focus of this study, the cultural legacy from this period profoundly impacted

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<sup>48</sup> Chase, *Early trade unionism*, p. 8; William Boles, *Remarks upon the religion, trade, government, police, customs, manners, and maladies, of the city of Corke. ... By ... Alexander the coppersmith. To ... a critical review of the whole* (Cork, 1737), pp 29-30. Boles claimed that ‘at the common law, none can be prohibited to exercise any trade altho[ugh] he never served his time to it.’

<sup>49</sup> It is often difficult to ascertain whether an artisan is an employer or an employee but we can be certain that Richard Gleeson served an apprenticeship as a carpenter, joined the local society and remained a member despite becoming a building contractor in the 1890s. *Limerick Leader*, 13, 18 Dec 1893; *Munster News*, 13 Nov 1886; Census of Ireland Returns, 1901, Resident of House 13.1 in Punche’s Row, Limerick No. 3 Urban District, Limerick, [http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Limerick/Limerick\\_No\\_3\\_Urban\\_District/Punche\\_s\\_Row/1499654/](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Limerick/Limerick_No_3_Urban_District/Punche_s_Row/1499654/) accessed 16 June 2014. Richard Raleigh, tobacconist, also appears to have been a member of the Guild of Tobacconists and an employer in the 1840s (see Chapter 2).

<sup>50</sup> The rules of the Guild of Housepainters are clearest about this: Rule Three emphasizes that an employee must do a ‘fair days work’ and Rule Five states that employers with a legitimate grievance shall be heard by the committee of the society who shall then deliberate accordingly. Mechanics’ Institute, Rule book of the Guild of Housepainters, Ledger 68 (the rules themselves are not dated but the rest of the ledger dates from the early 1860s).

upon the artisans of the nineteenth century. It should be noted, however, that the present work merely glances at this crucial period of the city's labour history and the transition between guild and combination in eighteenth century Limerick deserves a study in itself. Equally significant, though well outside the remit of this study, are the developments of the seventeenth century, when it seems that significant changes in the denominational and social composition of Limerick's skilled labour force occurred. The evidence that relates to the social profile of the eighteenth-century city suggests that from the perspective of the guilds and municipal authorities (though not necessarily the eyes of the law) the legitimate skilled workforce of Limerick city prior to the removal of the walled fortifications in 1760 was overwhelmingly Protestant.<sup>51</sup> To what extent the city's *actual* artisan population was exclusively Protestant is more difficult to discern. Sean Daly in his study of Cork Labour suggested that the guild system of this period disguises the fact that the Catholic artisans constituted the greater part of the urban skilled workforce in Munster and, in the case of mid-eighteenth-century Cork, he contended that Catholic artisans were 'unquestionably' in the majority, although he did not elaborate on this.<sup>52</sup> Other estimates, however, suggest that the Protestant share of the Cork population rose from nineteen to thirty-two percent between 1659 and 1732 and if we take into account any of the legal, political and social forces that operated during that period then it would be wise to assume that at least half of Cork's skilled workforce in the century before 1730 was Protestant.<sup>53</sup> Similarly in Limerick, Miller has detailed how Protestants comprised fifty-three percent of the population in 1659 and forty-three percent in 1732 and we can again

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<sup>51</sup> It was municipal bye-laws and pressure on the part of the City Corporations, rather than parliamentary legislation, which was the most crucial factor excluding Catholics and Quakers from freeman status and guild membership in Irish cities in the late 1600s and 1700s. See Brian Murphy, 'The Waterford Catholic Community in the Eighteenth Century', unpublished M.A. thesis, National University of Ireland, 1997, pp 6-15; Seamus Pender, Richard L. Greaves, *Dublin's Merchant-Quaker: Anthony Sharp and the Community of Friends, 1643-1707* (Stanford, 1998), pp 77-79; *Council book of the Corporation of Waterford, 1662-1700* (Waterford, 1964), pp 8-10; Matthew Potter, *The government and the people of Limerick* (Limerick, 2006), p. 187.

<sup>52</sup> Daly, *Cork: A City in crisis*, p. 258.

<sup>53</sup> Kerby Miller, Arnold Schrier, Bruce D. Boling, David N. Doyle, *Irish immigrants in the land of Canaan: Letters and memoirs from colonial and revolutionary America, 1675-1815* (Oxford, 2003), p. 676.

surmise that more than half of the skilled workforce in the city was Protestant during this period, with Catholics largely confined to the unskilled occupations.<sup>54</sup> The majority of this Protestant workforce in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is likely to have been descended from settlers, a large proportion of whom migrated in the Cromwellian or immediate post-Cromwellian period, although Ó hAnnracháin notes that as early as the 1640s the Protestant artisan population of Limerick city was of such economic importance that its members were permitted to hold religious service in a former Augustinian friary.<sup>55</sup> The measures taken against the Catholic artisan population under the ‘new laws’ of the Restoration were roughly continued after the Glorious Revolution: the legislation which limited Catholic apprenticeship undoubtedly had an impact and Lennon and Lenihan have even detailed instances where local Catholics – driven by social pressures or the lure of large apprenticeship fees – were taking Protestant apprentices in the 1700s.<sup>56</sup>

Eighteenth century demographic change radically transformed the skilled workforce of Limerick city, with the population increasing from 11, 000 in 1706 to 32,000 in 1776 and 48,000 in 1841 – largely due to high levels of immigration from the rural hinterland.<sup>57</sup> Whilst existing Limerick historiography has dealt mainly with the city’s physical expansion from the 1760s – after the city ceased to be a walled city – some personal correspondence of the Pery

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<sup>54</sup> Miller *et al.*, *Irish immigrants in the land of Canaan*, p. 675.

<sup>55</sup> Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, ‘In imitation of that holy patron of prelates the blessed St Charles’: Episcopal activity in Ireland and the formation of a confessional identity, 1618–53’, *The Origins of Sectarianism in Early Modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 90.

<sup>56</sup> The manner in which Catholic artisans were removed from cities and replaced with Protestants during the Restoration is detailed by Whelan, see Edward Whelan, *The Dublin patriciate and the reception of migrants in the seventeenth century: civic politics and newcomers*, unpublished PhD thesis, Maynooth, 2008, pp 132-142. See also, 7 Will III c.5 (1695): An Act for the better securing the government, by disarming papists; 7 Will III c.5 (1695): An Act for the better securing the government, by disarming papists; 8 Ann c.3 (1709): An Act for explaining ... an Act to Prevent the further Growth of Popery Sec. 37; Colm Lennon, *The urban patriciates of early modern Ireland: a case study of Limerick* (Maynooth, 1999), p. 19; Lenihan, *Limerick: Its history and antiquities*, p. 185.

<sup>57</sup> Calculating the population of Limerick City and the not the county of the city during this period is problematic as many figures are estimates. Hodkinson estimates that the 1659 population of Limerick city was approximately 2,500-3000. The county of the city rose from 11, 000 in 1706 to 32,000 in 1776 and 48,000 in 1841, see Hodkinson, ‘The medieval city of Limerick’, pp 30-31; Potter, *The government and the people of Limerick*, p. 251; Patrick O’Connor, *Exploring Limerick’s past* (Newcastle West, 1987), pp 49-50.

family suggests that the mass immigration of Catholics was something that was troubling the Protestant population as early as the 1730s.<sup>58</sup> The correspondence suggested that demographic pressures and unsanctioned building construction preceded the official expansion of the city in the 1760s, and focused particularly on the presence of Catholic artisans residing in the site of the abandoned St. Francis's Abbey:

[In] the said abbey and site thereof being or reputed to be in the county of Limerick, vast numbers of papists are settled, who exercise and follow the several trades followed in this city, and entertain none but popish journeymen and apprentices, and particularly there are in the said abbey and thereof, of the several branches of the clothing trades, upwards of 150 popish persons.<sup>59</sup>

Allowing for anti-Catholic paranoia – ubiquitous in 1730s Ireland – this correspondence illustrates the presence in Limerick city of a growing Catholic artisan population which was competing with the indigenous guildsmen. The fact that the St. Francis's Abbey area was the overwhelming choice of these Catholic immigrants was no co-incidence. The city boundaries extended roughly three miles beyond the walls although – as referred to in the above quotation – the site of St. Francis's Abbey area was the jurisdictional capital of Limerick County and

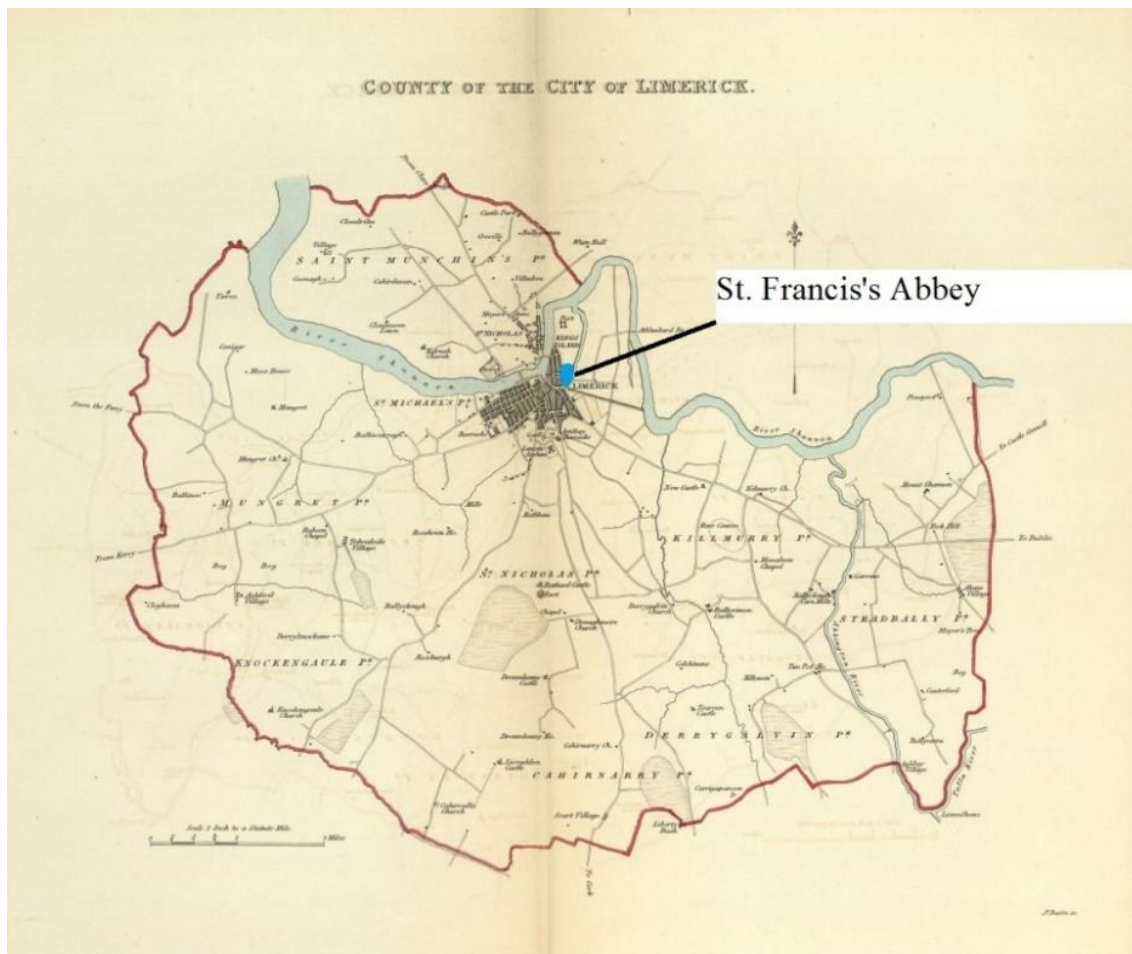
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<sup>58</sup> For a look at the physical expansion of the city see Judith Hill, *The Building of Limerick* (Cork, 1991), pp 90-141. The St. Francis Abbey area was a particular concern for the city's Protestant population, see Limerick Papers, Ms 41 678/2, NLI.

<sup>59</sup> Limerick Papers, Ms 41 678/2, NLI. These papers also contain some testimony alleging that the majority of the inhabitants of St. Francis's Abbey were, in fact, Protestant and that most of the artisans dwelling there were members of the guilds.



effectively formed a county enclave in the midst of Limerick city.<sup>60</sup>



**Figure 1. The County of the City of Limerick with the rough outline of the St. Francis's Abbey enclave marked in blue**

The St. Francis Abbey location was therefore well chosen: located outside the jurisdictional boundaries of the city but within the physical urban area meant exemption from anti-Catholic legislation, both municipal and national, but allowed for access to local trade. This enabled an avoidance of legislation prohibiting Catholics from settling in Limerick (a rarely administered law but one that was referenced in the Limerick Papers) as well as the municipal legislation restricting Catholics artisans to only quarter-brother membership of the city guilds (a practice

<sup>60</sup> Potter, *Government of the people of Limerick*, p. 187.

known as ‘quarterage’ which compelled Catholics and Dissenters to pay an extra fee for limited guild membership).<sup>61</sup>

The scenario of a Protestant guild system under siege from Catholic artisan interlopers was reflected in Lenihan’s mid-nineteenth century coverage of the eighteenth century city, in which he described the ‘Orange guilds’ opposing the Catholic artisans and merchants of St. Francis’s Abbey.<sup>62</sup> Further evidence of the denominational nature of the guild system comes from correspondence in 1741 between Edmund Sexton Pery and a number of guilds, marking Pery’s admission into the said guilds as an honorary freeman. The Carpenters’ and Joiners’ Guild, in particular, was clear as to its collective loyalties and declared its admiration for the Sexton family who ‘always acted in the Protestant Interest.’<sup>63</sup> Certainly it would seem that the guilds still actively opposed full inclusion of Catholics as late as the 1760s and the Masons’ Guild ledgers for this period suggest that any guildsman employing a ‘papist’ was disciplined.<sup>64</sup> Miller used the example of the Limerick Methodist cutler, Daniel Kent, to illustrate a broader trend affecting young Protestant artisans in the late eighteenth century:

Protestant craftsmen in ‘noisome’ or increasingly marginal trades, such as cutlery, were left behind economically and socially, in the narrow, congested streets of medieval Limerick’s Irish and English towns. By the 1780s these were squalid, impoverished neighbourhoods, where the Kents and other Irish Protestant artisans were increasingly outnumbered by Catholic migrants from the surrounding countryside.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Limerick Papers, Ms 41 678/2, NLI; 2 Ann c.6 (1703): An Act to prevent the further Growth of Popery, Sec. 23 and 28; Maureen MacGeehin, ‘The Catholics of the towns and the quarterage dispute in eighteenth-century Ireland’, *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 30 (Sep. 1, 1952), pp 91-114.

<sup>62</sup> Lenihan, *Limerick: Its history and antiquities*, p. 347. Lenihan’s anachronistic use of the word ‘Orange’ should be noted here.

<sup>63</sup> National Library of Ireland, Limerick Papers, Ms. 41678/4.

<sup>64</sup> Herbert, ‘The trade guilds of Limerick’, p. 128.

<sup>65</sup> Miller *et al.*, *Irish immigrants in the land of Canaan*, p. 185.

Certainly, there is other evidence that the old Protestant artisans from the medieval quarter of the city, in particular, were cast adrift in the economic revolution and spatial expansion of the late eighteenth century. This is exemplified by the Methodist saddler Mitchell Bennis (at one time recorded as Master of the Guild of Saddlers), whose continual investment in properties and businesses in the old town in the 1760s financially ruined the family and caused his American grandson to refer in 1868 to his, ‘grandfather making a bad speculation in buying some property.’<sup>66</sup> It is likely that Protestant artisans, the foundation of the guild system, ‘beleaguered as they were by economic distress and by the rise of Catholic competitors in trade and petty manufacturing’, were unable to avail of the new opportunities offered by the city’s new quarter of Newtown Pery and all that it represented.<sup>67</sup> Some eighteenth century sources suggest that Catholics squeezed out the urban Protestant population by being extremely exclusive in their trading patterns: the already quoted reference to Catholic Limerick clothiers who ‘entertain none but popish journeymen and apprentices’ is reinforced in the Cork context by William Boles’s contention that ‘they [Catholics] deal with and always employ one another. If a Papist at the Gallows wanted an ounce of hemp, he’d skip the Protestant shops and run to Mallow-lane to buy it.’<sup>68</sup> In short, Protestant artisans were bound by tradition to declining manufacturing trades whereas recently arrived Catholics were ready to adapt to whatever trade was booming. It is significant that Protestant voices from the coopering trade and building trades, both of which exploded in membership due to the 1770-1815 boom in provisioning and construction, were conspicuously silent in the nineteenth century, and the 1901 census shows

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<sup>66</sup> Bennis invested in a business in the English town and a number of tenemented houses in the Irish town in the 1760s. He sold the latter off at a loss in the late 1780s and died shortly afterwards leaving the remaining family close to poverty, see Rosemary Raughter, *The journal of Elizabeth Bennis* (Dublin, 2007), pp 9-26, 49-51.

<sup>67</sup> Miller also implied that some of the city’s Protestants were uncomfortable with the social environment and vices of an increasingly Catholic city and for moral and spiritual reasons sought a new ‘sober virtuous way of living in America’, see Miller *et al.*, *Irish immigrants in the land of Canaan*, p. 185; Kerby Miller, *Ireland and Irish America* (Dublin, 2008), p.33.

<sup>68</sup> Boles, *Remarks upon the religion, trade, government, police, customs, manners, and maladies, of the city of Corke*. p. 99.

these trades, in particular, as having few if any Protestants within their ranks.<sup>69</sup> In addition, ‘pull’ factors accelerated the emigration of Protestant artisans: Campbell has presented some evidence suggesting that Irish Protestant artisans were particularly sought after by American employers in the 1820s, and this corresponds with the widely held view in pre-famine Ireland that this class was overly prone to emigrate.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, Mac Suibhne uses the work of 1810s social commentator, John Gamble, to postulate that the high rate of emigration from Presbyterian Ulster was a result of high expectations from life and a refusal to accept the post-1815 drop in living standards. Mindful of the cultural determinism evident in Gamble’s work, Mac Suibhne nevertheless agrees that Catholics, in contrast to Protestants, accepted lower living standards.<sup>71</sup> Of course, entirely different forces, namely social and economic promotion, could also have hastened the demise of the Protestant artisan population and the example of the Barrington family – part of the eighteenth century Protestant artisan community of the old town before prosperity elevated them out of this class – is worth noting.<sup>72</sup>

### Why the guilds disappeared

The spatial and demographic expansion of Limerick city during the thirty years after 1760 is probably the main reason for the decline of the local guild system. The guilds most likely

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<sup>69</sup> Hill contends that Protestant artisans were overly represented in the manufacturing trades and consequently more likely to be driven to emigrate, see Hill, ‘Artisans, Sectarianism and politics in Dublin’, p. 16. The weakness of manufacturing in Limerick was most pronounced in 1799-1801 and 1810, see Roger Wells, ‘The Irish famine of 1799-1801: Market culture, moral economies and social protest’, Adrian Randall, Andrew Charlesworth (eds), *Markets, Market Culture and Popular Protest in Eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland* (Liverpool, 1998), p. 168; Miller et al., *Irish immigrants in the land of Canaan*, p. 195; Freeman’s Journal, 11 July 1810. The health of the provision trade can be gauged from the huge increase in exports from the Port of Limerick and customs receipts increased from £16,000 in 1751 to £32,000 in 1764 and £70,000 in 1821, see Potter, *The government of the people of Limerick*, p. 251.

<sup>70</sup> Malcolm Campbell, *Ireland's New Worlds: Immigrants, Politics, and Society in the United States and Australia, 1815–1922* (Madison, 2008), pp 14-15; *Report from the Select Committee on the state of Ireland: 1825*, p. 453.

<sup>71</sup> John Gamble, *Society and Manners in Early Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, Brendan Mac Suibhne (ed.), (Dublin, 2011), pp lviii, lxi.

<sup>72</sup> The Barringtons operated as pewter smiths in the 1790s in the Charlotte Quay area, by the 1830s the family had acquired land, a title and had built their own quay on the northern side of the Shannon. Dom Hubert Janssens de Varebeke, ‘The Barrington's of Limerick’, *Old Limerick Journal*, No. 24, Winter, 1988, pp 5-10; *Limerick Star*, 1 Nov 1836; Lenihan, *Limerick: Its history and antiquities*, p. 444.

buckled because they were a hindrance to many, both rich and poor, who profited from this expansion. Without bending or ignoring all their own rules, the local guilds were incapable of supplying the labour required to complete the construction work involved in the building of New Town Pery and the expansion of the service and manufacturing sectors which accompanied it. Employment was regularly advertised during this period, and on many occasions both journeymen and apprentices were sought after as shown in this 1789 advert:

Journeymen Cabinet-Makers wanted:

The cabinet makers of the city of Limerick, desirous to encourage good workmen from the different parts of the Kingdom, will hold out every advantage to them, as they wish to have their work in general finished in the best manner.

N.B. Diligent young men from the country or elsewhere will have the best opportunity of improvement and will be constantly employed.

Apprentices wanted by the different employers.<sup>73</sup>

Other similar notices in 1789 included a clockmaker and saddler looking for apprentices, along with an employer seeking a foreman carpenter and ‘six or seven’ journeymen for ‘constant employment.’<sup>74</sup> The language in all of these advertisements suggested a completely unrestrained labour market, indeed one of the notices was signed by Thomas Bennis – saddler and son of a previous Master of the Guild of Saddlers – who now sought to avail of the free labour market of the post-guild era. Catholic artisans were uninhibited by quarterage at this point – this troublesome municipal legislation had been overturned in the 1770s – and were entirely free to exercise their trade, unimpeded by any guild body.<sup>75</sup> The prevailing *entrepreneurial drive* which came to define the city was diametrically opposed to the outlook of the city corporation and the social clique associated with it. Hannan’s depiction of the old

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<sup>73</sup> The employer did not leave his name and applicants had to presumably correspond with the editor. *Limerick Chronicle*, 23 April 1789.

<sup>74</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 18, 21 May, 20 July 1789.

<sup>75</sup> MacGeehin, ‘The Catholics of the towns’, pp 91-114.

corporation is somewhat partisan, but there was some merit in his summation of the spirit of the early New Town Pery residents:

The exodus came about mainly through a desire on the part of the merchant and professional classes to put themselves outside the jurisdiction of the corrupt Corporation, and otherwise to get away from the cooped-up and uncongenial confines of the old city.<sup>76</sup>

Newtown Pery, the suburb that quickly became the new centre of the city, was home to people who represented a new dawn and wanted freedom from the many cartels – including the guilds – associated with the unrepresentative corporation: consequently many of the new business class had less respect for the guild system.<sup>77</sup> This new business model was not confined to Limerick – in Dublin the old municipal system was increasingly viewed as anachronistic and one commentator in 1788 described the guilds and certain municipal authorities in Ireland as a firm obstacle to a freer society:

Formerly in this metropolis [Dublin] an imposition was raised on the people, and was attempted to be continued under the name of *quarterage*, but happily was defeated. There were certain streets in this great city, where it was pretended only freemen alone could exercise handicraft trades; but in like manner, from the exertions of a few spirited individuals, it was shown to be equally inconsistent with the laws. The Corporation of Limerick, some years ago, were attempting hardships upon the industrious inhabitants, but which they were obliged to relinquish. The manufactures of our country should have no restraints.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Kevin Hannan, 'St. Michael's', *Old Limerick Journal*, vol. 9, winter, 1981, p. 19.

<sup>77</sup> Potter, *The government and the people of Limerick*, pp 268-9.

<sup>78</sup> *Freemans Journal*, 4 Dec 1788.

We can surmise that the spirit of *laissez faire* was the friend of the Catholic artisan in Limerick, especially the rural immigrant, during the initial years of urban expansion in the 1760s and 1770s. One Dublin Quaker merchant in 1780 characterised the penal laws and labour market regulation as related legislative evils and called for employers to be allowed to hire

as many apprentices male or female as he may think fit in any trade within this kingdom, whether such master or apprentice be protestant or papist, any statute, usage, custom, charter, bye law, order, or regulation to the contrary notwithstanding.<sup>79</sup>

It is difficult to ascertain what organised labour system existed in the city in the last two decades of the eighteenth century or how effective or authoritative this system was. Studies of Cork and Dublin have concluded that the guild system either disappeared entirely or else became almost completely divorced from the operative artisans, but there is some evidence that the guild system progressed in some form in Limerick and was gradually infiltrated by Catholic operatives.<sup>80</sup> In Cork and Dublin the journeyman combinations were said to be the principal organisations seeking to regulate the labour market in the late 1700s but there are only limited references from this period to organised societies of this type in Limerick. Certainly, there is evidence of sporadic combination: in 1791, for example, when masons working for Francis Arthur struck for higher wages, Arthur's assurance to outside masons seeking to replace his recalcitrant workers that 'country masons will meet every protection and encouragement' does imply that some indigenous body may have existed and inspired such fear.<sup>81</sup> Henry's thorough study of such combinations in Dublin shows that in 1780 employers there obtained the help of masters in Cork, Belfast, Waterford, Derry, Newry, New Ross and Dundalk to back their

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<sup>79</sup> Henry, 'Industrial violence, combinations and the law in late eighteenth century Dublin', p. 20.

<sup>80</sup> Daly maintains that the Guild system in Cork was dead as early as 1750 and characterises attempts to revive the guilds in 1780s as nothing more than the pretensions of Protestant triumphalism. In Dublin the guilds continued as the playthings of political candidates and had only a tenuous link with the trades they represented. Daly, *Cork a city in crisis*, pp 253-281; *Minutes of evidence taken before Select Committee on combination laws, particularly as to act 5 Geo. IV c. 95*, p. 16, 1825 (417).

<sup>81</sup> Kemmy, 'Arthur's quay', p. 6.

desperate attempts to stamp out combination, and the absence of Limerick masters from this list (the city was third largest in the country at the time) certainly suggests that they were not overly concerned with combination.<sup>82</sup> Herbert offers some evidence that Catholics in Limerick were already gaining admission to the guilds in the late 1760s, noting that the bulk of the Shoemakers' Guild appeared Protestant but that by 1769 newer members had what looked like Catholic surnames. This evidence suggests that the Catholic artisans chose the guild system as a way of organising and representing themselves, irrespective of how increasingly impotent these guild bodies were becoming.<sup>83</sup> It should be noted here that whilst Catholics were not allowed full freedom of the guilds prior to the 1760s they were afforded limited membership as quarter-brothers and the minute book of the Company of Masons, Bricklayers, Slaters, Plasterers, Painters, Paviours, and Limeburners of the City of Limerick recorded in 1754 that John Cronin and Timothy Ryan were each made 'a free quarter brother of the guild.'<sup>84</sup> Whilst we cannot be certain, there is much to suggest that quarter-brothers such as Cronin and Ryan – presumably Catholics given their names and status – were very much impressed by the culture, values and customs of the guilds. Indeed, it is likely that many Catholic artisans were extremely desirous of full guild membership and rather than inspire them to devise an alternative system of labour organisation, their status as quarter-brothers made them covet what they were denied. The testimony of many Limerick guild representatives in 1833 reflected this devotion to a defunct system. The brogue-makers, in particular, were most compelling in the evidence they gave, not only producing the original guild charter of 1672, under which they insisted they continued to act, but also detailing how their society was organised according to a guild structure: holding quarterly meetings, appointing masters and wardens, and, most interestingly

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<sup>82</sup> Henry, 'Industrial violence, combinations and the law in late eighteenth century Dublin', p. 22.

<sup>83</sup> Herbert, 'The trade guilds of Limerick', p. 127.

<sup>84</sup> Jim Kemmy Municipal Museum, Minute Book of the Company of Masons, Bricklayers, Slaters, Plasterers, Painters, Paviours, and Limeburners, 1754. Whilst the quarterage laws prevailed Catholics and dissenters could only be admitted to guilds as quarter-brothers for which they paid a levy and enjoyed fewer privileges, MacGeehin, 'The Catholics of the towns', pp 91-114.



of all, even regulating the price of brogues. All this, of course, was mere customary practice at this point and the guild master, Standish Bourke, admitted as much, stating that whilst their guild attempted to regulate the price of brogues, ‘that law [presumably a bye-law related to guild trading privileges] was not now in force, any man can sell at what price he can get.’ Furthermore, whilst they demanded that ‘strangers’ should not practice their trade in the city without joining their guild (for a fee of two guineas), Bourke acknowledged that many plying his trade in the city were not ‘free of the guild’ and whilst ‘there are many in the guild against it [the toleration of strangers in the city]’ it was clear that ‘they cannot enforce it by legal means.’<sup>85</sup> In all, Bourke’s testimony suggested an organised labour system which had remained the same whilst the surrounding world had changed. But there are, of course, some unresolved issues regarding the society at that point. In particular, Bourke strongly implied that the guild at this point was overwhelmingly Catholic:

[He] never heard of any of the guild sitting in the council, but at the time Mr. Tuthill set up as candidate [in the 1817 parliamentary election], he said he was anxious to be elected their master as he could claim a right to sit in the council [presumably the Common Council] in right of that office, *he being a Protestant* [my italics].<sup>86</sup>

Understandably, this poses questions as to how the guild came to be so Catholic in membership, having undoubtedly been exclusively Protestant in the mid-eighteenth century and given that ‘strangers’ were seldom admitted. The prevailing confused understanding of guild privileges – Tuthill could not have been admitted to the common council even if he had become the guild master – is also evident here. Bourke also implied that some of his guild’s customary practices were falling into abeyance and referred to a council of twelve elders having previously existed

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<sup>85</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 11 Oct 1833.

<sup>86</sup> The implication here, of course, being that John Tuthill was a Protestant and the guildsmen were not. *Limerick Evening Post*, 11 Oct 1833.

within the guild – Herbert has shown how this type of structure prevailed amongst the mid-eighteenth century guilds – was but was unclear as to why this practice stopped.<sup>87</sup> To support his contention that his society was indeed a guild, Bourke outlined how it was composed of twelve masters and twenty-four journeymen – he did admit that at times the journeymen had formed their own separate body in the past – and that the journeymen could, and did, graduate to master status in time.<sup>88</sup>

It is important at this point to differentiate the manner in which the municipal government of Limerick operated as opposed to that in other Irish cities. Discussions of the situation in Dublin or Britain are only of relevance when describing the general context. Each urban centre should be approached with an open mind by labour historians. General histories of the labour movement are undoubtedly vital to anyone seeking a starting point for the movement in a particular area but these can often offer misleading templates. Irish labour history, in particular, has tended to use Dublin as an example to explain the model of urban labour in Ireland as a whole and thus Boyd's *Rise of the Irish trade union: 1729-1970* and Ryan's *Irish Labour Movement* make extensive use of the parliamentary committees investigating the trade societies of Dublin in the mid-1820s but wrongly imply that what can be inferred from this evidence, regarding the origins of labour movements, applies to all of Ireland.<sup>89</sup> Additionally the two aforementioned studies, along with Boyle's *Irish labor movement in the nineteenth century*, also incorporate Belfast in their discussion, but the reality is that both cities were vitally different from other urban centres in terms of their scale, social profile and municipal legislation.<sup>90</sup> The Dublin situation was more complicated than the

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<sup>87</sup> Herbert, 'The trade guilds of Limerick', p. 125; *Limerick Evening Post*, 11 Oct 1833.

<sup>88</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 11 Oct 1833. Black, quoting Leeson, refers to many instances of master guilds and journeyman guilds in England but there is less evidence of that in Ireland, Black, *Guild and State*, p 174-75.

<sup>89</sup> W. P. Ryan, *The Irish Labour Movement* (Dublin, 1919), pp 46-69; Boyd, *The rise of the Irish trade unions*, pp 15-41.

<sup>90</sup> Boyle, *The Irish labor movement in the nineteenth century*, pp 7-25.

Limerick one as the guilds there were incorporated into the civic framework of the city to a much greater degree than was the case in Limerick. Crucially, membership of the Dublin guilds was often a legal prerequisite for many candidates seeking municipal office in the city (as stipulated in various articles of legislation, particularly 33d Geo. 2) and this remained the case as late as 1826 when a number of non-guild members were refused entry to municipal office on attempting to stand in the guild interest.<sup>91</sup> The fact that the Dublin guild system retained this vestige of legal legitimacy until 1840 meant that a dichotomous organised labour environment developed there in which operative bodies and master guilds existed side by side, and generally independent of one another.<sup>92</sup> The resulting situation caused one commentator in 1824 to state that

the combinations are now powerful. The guilds have ceased to be powerful; they have degenerated into guilds for eating and drinking, and for political purposes, and they do not make laws to regulate trade.<sup>93</sup>

In Limerick, the situation was complicated in a different way: since the guilds were not incorporated into the municipal framework of the city to the extent that those of Dublin were, guild membership was never a requirement for entry to the corporation and hence the guilds never became the playthings of the political ambitions.<sup>94</sup> Lenihan, a partisan observer, noted vaguely that the ‘fifteen Corporations’ (ie. the fifteen incorporated trade guilds) still existed around 1800 and that the names of those in charge of such organisations ‘contrasted with the

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<sup>91</sup> Lenihan refers once to the fact that ‘it was the specific duty on the part of the [political] candidate that he should enroll himself in the guilds of trade’ but all other evidence suggests that this was purely customary, Lenihan, *Limerick: Its history and antiquities*, p. 328. John J. Webb, *Guilds of Dublin* (Dublin, 1929), p. 242; Hogan, ‘From guild to union’, pp 22-24. The relevant part of this act states that ‘no election should be considered valid, unless the party, at the time of the election, follow the trade of the guild.’ *Freeman’s Journal*, 1 April 1826.

<sup>92</sup> Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*, pp 719-20; Fergus D’Arcy, ‘The trade unions of Dublin and the attempted revival of the guilds’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, Vol. 101, 2, 1971, pp 113-127.

<sup>93</sup> *Minutes of evidence taken before Select Committee on combination laws*, p. 16.

<sup>94</sup> Kieran Hoare, ‘Guilds in Irish towns, 1450-1534’, *History Studies: University of Limerick History Society Journal*, vol. 7, 2006, p. 64; D’Arcy, ‘The trade unions of Dublin and the attempted revival of the guilds’, pp 113-127; *The Nation*, 17 July 1886.

Cromwellian and Williamite names' that had previously existed. But elsewhere he emphasised that the Corporation had

dissolve[d] their connection with it [the guild system] simply because those guilds had ceased to be composed of Orangemen and could no more control the votes of Tory partizans in favour of a political candidate.<sup>95</sup>

Specifically, Lenihan was referring to the ability to obtain freedom of the city by servitude; one of the last municipal privileges that the Limerick guilds retained, which was rendered redundant by the late 1790s, if not earlier, when the Corporation began illegally altering the manner in which an individual gained the freedom of the city.<sup>96</sup> Additionally, and perhaps crucially, the fact that efforts to uphold quarterage legislation were defeated in the 1760s meant that the guilds had lost a source of income and as a result the guilds, now composed of Catholics, were politically and financially useless to the elites of the city.<sup>97</sup> As the local labour force was stripped of political privileges, Limerick city also became, by the early nineteenth century, the most deregulated of all southern Irish cities and whilst limited wage and labour regulation still existed in Dublin, Waterford and Cork, nothing of the sort existed in Limerick although different Mayors often intervened in the labour market in an *ad hoc* manner by way of courtesy to the trade societies in the 1820s (see Chapters Two and Three).<sup>98</sup> Prior to 1815, relative economic prosperity may have eased concerns about the extent of this deregulation but

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<sup>95</sup> Lenihan, *Limerick: Its history and antiquities*, pp 421, 462. It should be noted that as a historian Lenihan's language was actually more accurate than many of his successors in some contexts but in terms of politics and religion his use of the words 'Tory' and 'Orange' are often extremely anachronistic.

<sup>96</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the Limerick election*, pp 4, 43, 62, 70. Specifically, anyone who served an apprenticeship to a freeman was made a freeman himself.

<sup>97</sup> Daly suggests that one of the last remaining functions of the guilds in Cork was to collect tax, Sean Daly, *Cork: A City in crisis* (Cork, 1978), p. 257.

<sup>98</sup> Magistrates had a role in setting the wages in Cork, Waterford and Dublin in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, pp 34-36; O'Connor, *A labour history of Waterford*, p. 16; *First report from Select Committee on Artizans and Machinery*, pp 470, 481-82. In Limerick, there appeared to be no legal device allowing a magistrate to regulate wages in any way but they did intervene in an unofficial manner. *Limerick Chronicle*, 25 Mar, 14 Oct 1820, *Limerick Evening Post*, 11, 15 Oct 1833.

this situation changed after 1816 when the local artisans rejected *laissez-faire* attitudes and sought to organise themselves and protect their trade and living standards.

By the second decade of the nineteenth century it had become clear that the political and commercial elites had lost all respect for the fundamentals of the guild system in Britain and Ireland and MacRaild and Martin characterise much of the remaining regulatory legislation as a ‘dead letter.’<sup>99</sup> This change was not always accepted meekly by artisans: in Glasgow, bakers were able to prevent non-guildsmen from working in their trade as late as 1803, and between 1812 and 1814 there was a massive petition campaign launched in Britain – mainly England and southern Scotland – calling upon parliament to enforce apprenticeship laws and discourage unqualified masters.<sup>100</sup> The inquiry discovered what was already apparent, i.e. that a large number of business owners in various English cities titling themselves as ‘masters’ of respective trades did not, according to the laws of the original guild system, have anywhere near the required experience in the trade to deserve such a title. Many cases cited ‘master coach-makers’ who had previously been coachmen, tailors or shoemakers by trade.<sup>101</sup> Other cases cited apprentice coopers who were being taken from their masters by competing employers before completing their seven years apprenticeship and then put to work in cooperages, therefore both depriving the original master of a workman he had invested time in and systemically corrupting the labour market by flooding it with half-trained coopers.<sup>102</sup> The response of parliament, however, was not what the lobbyists envisaged, with the 1814 Apprenticeship Act categorically ratifying the behaviour of such masters who had deviated from the guild system, and abolishing the requirement for employers to hire workers who had

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<sup>99</sup> Donald MacRaild and David E. Martin, *Labour in British society*. (London, 2000), p. 41.

<sup>100</sup> Over 300,000 British workmen signed the petition with Lancashire cotton spinners featuring most prominently. Chase, *Early trade unionism*, pp 19, 99-101; William Cunningham, *The growth of English industry and commerce, volume 2* (London, 1968), pp 659-60.

<sup>101</sup> (*Apprentice laws, act 5 Eliz.*) *Report from committee on the several petitions, presented to this House, respecting the apprentice laws of this kingdom*, pp 7-9, H.C. 1812-13 (243), iv, 941.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, pp 29-33.

served a full apprenticeship.<sup>103</sup> A similar triumph of capitalism over tradition was blatantly evident in Limerick and in 1813, George Hunt, a local chandler, showed no apparent qualms in describing himself as a ‘master tailor’ when he advertised his new tailoring business, alerting the public to the fact that he had ‘declined chandling’ and ‘intends to devote all his attention to the tailoring business and to engage a number of the best workmen.’<sup>104</sup> As it was highly unlikely that such a man had served a full apprenticeship in both chandling and tailoring, he was most probably a venture capitalist who had simply bypassed the traditional entry route for at least one, and possibly both, of the trades. None of this should really come as a surprise: indeed, similar developments were noted in Cork by Murphy, as the decline in the guild system had started in the late eighteenth century and, in truth, the further back one investigates the less clear it is whether the guild system was ever fully adhered to in Limerick.<sup>105</sup> There is no doubt, however, that it was stronger – as Herbert has demonstrated – as one approaches the mid-eighteenth century and in 1748 it was deemed necessary to seek the approval of the Guild of Masons as to the structural integrity of the King John’s Castle barracks.<sup>106</sup> The guildsmen who gave evidence to the 1833 Municipal Commissioners gave every impression that they expected this world to continue in existence but the commissioners bluntly described how the guild system was now viewed as unfit for purpose:

The creation of a class exclusively privileged, from its connection (by servitude, birth or marriage) with the members of the Corporation, whether divided into guilds, or not comprising such establishments, may have been a scheme of local polity

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<sup>103</sup> Chase, *Early trade unionism*, pp 19, 99-101.

<sup>104</sup> *Limerick Gazette*, 19 Mar 1813, the Master Tailor in question was George Hunt. The 1788 *Lucas Trades Directory* refers to one George Hunt – Tailor and Habit Maker while the 1809 *Holden Trades Directory* refers to one George Hunt – Chandler and Soap Maker.

<sup>105</sup> Maura Murphy, ‘The economic and social structure of nineteenth century Cork’, David Harkness and Mary O’Dowd (eds), *The town in Ireland* (Belfast, 1981), p. 134.

<sup>106</sup> Herbert, ‘Trades Guilds of Limerick’, p. 126. In the instance of the King John’s Castle soldier barracks being constructed in 1748 the approval of the Guild of Masons as to the structural integrity of the barracks appears to have been deemed necessary.

accommodated to the constitution of things which existed at the origin of these institutions. But the changes which society has since undergone, the diffusion of wealth, and the security of its enjoyment among persons engaged in traffic, who have not served any apprenticeships to particular trades, demonstrate that the structure of these Corporations was planned for purposes which, in the altered condition of society, are not suited to the wants or accordant with the circumstances of existing communities.<sup>107</sup>

### Where to begin? Labour histories versus an academic approach

Perhaps the most curious thing is not the fact that the guild system in Limerick city declined over time but rather that neither local government nor the local judiciary were prepared to deliver the death blow. Most language used by local authorities lent credence to the continued existence of the guild system and the trade societies retained a quasi-legitimate position in the civic, economic and social fabric of the city throughout the nineteenth century, although hardly anyone stated exactly what their role was. Court cases involving artisans were often abandoned by the presiding law officers and matters passed over to ‘umpires’ or authority figures within the trade itself and by the 1890s the city corporation agreed to ‘fair wage’ policies whereby they would employ only indigenous, unionised workers working for recognised wage levels on any local projects in which they were involved.<sup>108</sup> This tacit recognition of the latter day guilds crumbled when combination was involved, however, and when a number of tailors involved in combination in 1838 introduced themselves to the court as the ‘Chamberlain’, ‘Clerk’ and ‘Freemen’ of the ‘Corporation of Tailors’, the entire court room erupted in laughter.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, in 1860 and 1896 attempts by coach-makers and bakers, respectively, to introduce

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<sup>107</sup> *Limerick Star*, 23 June 1835.

<sup>108</sup> In 1834 an ‘umpire’ from within the butchery trade was asked by the petty sessions court to oversee a dispute between two members of the trade and in 1835 and in 1835 and 1860 Master Shoemakers were similarly asked to oversee disputes involving masters and employees within the trade and in 1880 the Stonecutters and masons were told by one presiding law officer, Councillor Counihan, to resolve any differences they had outside of court, see *Limerick Chronicle*, 20 Feb 1834; *Limerick Star*, 8 Dec 1835; *Munster News*, 21 Jan 1860, 9 Oct 1880; *Freeman’s Journal*, 12 Jan 1894. See Chapter Four for more information on ‘Fair Wages’ policies.

<sup>109</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 12 Dec 1838.

the society rule books as evidence in cases involving masters working irregular hours and workmen crossing the picket line, were met with derision and incredulity.<sup>110</sup>

When exploring the reasons why the language and spirit of the guilds was retained in the Limerick context through much of the nineteenth century, an examination of developments in the first three decades of the century is crucial as it appears that there were two forces at work here. The ‘masters’ – whether they were new and self-proclaimed like George Hunt in 1813 (see above) or, as with the leaders of Guild of Coopers, purportedly genuine heirs to an old tradition – sought legal recognition of the guild system and were particularly active in seeking to recover ‘rights withheld from them’ (a cause also common to British artisans), namely the right to freeman status on completion of an apprenticeship.<sup>111</sup> The masters’ campaign appears to have been sparked by the agitation of the political grouping known in Limerick as the ‘Independents’ and their interest in attaining freeman status was likely to have been linked with their pursuit of voting rights, in both the local and parliamentary context. These ‘Independents’ were a group of local reformers pitted against the ‘old corruption’ of the Limerick Corporation.<sup>112</sup> Despite their mutual antipathy, both the ‘Independents’ and the corporation shared attitudes that presented implacable obstacles to the trades. With the corporation, the trades were dealing with an old enemy, and yet the paternalistic spirit of such bodies was something which many artisans in Britain and Ireland could relate to.<sup>113</sup> In Britain,

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<sup>110</sup> *Munster News*, 18 Feb 1860; *Limerick Leader*, 15 April 1896.

<sup>111</sup> *Limerick Gazette*, 10 October 1820; Black, *Guild and State*, p. 175.

<sup>112</sup> The term ‘Independent’ was applied to/adopted by many urban groups in the early nineteenth century Irish Whig tradition and, to an extent, referred to those whose landed wealth ensured that they were independently minded, see Elizabeth Hegg, ‘The nature and development of liberal Protestantism in Waterford, 1800-42’, unpublished Ph.d thesis, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2008, p. 27. For a detailed account of the vested interests of both the Independents and the Limerick Corporation see William Mulligan, ‘The enemy within; the enemy without: How the wealthier class manipulated local government in nineteenth century Limerick’, unpublished M.A. thesis, Mary Immaculate College, 2005.

<sup>113</sup> Alliances between artisans and Tory politicians are explored by Maguire and Foster, see Martin Maguire ‘The organisation and activism of Dublin's Protestant working class, 1883-1935’, *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 29, No. 113, May, 1994, p. 70; John Foster, *Class struggle and the Industrial Revolution: early industrial capitalism in three English towns* (London, 1974), pp 203-4. In Limerick, the pre-reform Corporation occasionally accommodated the wishes of the local artisan bodies by temporarily halting the importation of



for example, George Rose – a Tory MP and old fashioned protectionist – found favour with politicised artisans in the 1810s whereas the radical reformer Alexander Galloway, architect of the repeal of the Apprenticeship Laws in 1814, was a hated figure amongst the artisan community.<sup>114</sup> Notwithstanding this, in the Limerick context the sectarian and unrepresentative nature of the corporation meant that the artisans of the city, whether protestant or catholic, were unlikely to persuade this body to share power and grant the craft guilds the ‘rights’ withheld from them since the 1790s.<sup>115</sup> Regarding the Limerick Independents, the logical conclusion of general reformist ideology during this period (as expressed by the Municipal Commissioners, see above) left little room for guilds to exist at all, and whilst there were many within the Limerick Independent movement – particularly John Boyse and John Tuthill – who were favourably predisposed towards the notion of guild restoration, the rhetoric used by more prominent reformist leaders such as Thomas Spring Rice, Limerick city MP (1820-32) and later Chancellor of the Exchequer, and General Richard Bourke, later Governor of New South Wales, hinted at a forbidding ‘brave new world’ where uninhibited market forces dictated.<sup>116</sup>

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clothing ware in 1820 and by advising employers to discharge non-society workmen in the mid-1820s. *Limerick Chronicle*, 25 Mar, 14 Oct 1820, *Limerick Evening Post*, 11, 15 Oct 1833.

<sup>114</sup> Chase, *Early trade unionism*, pp 99-101.

<sup>115</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the Limerick election*, pp 60-62. The members of the Guild of Coopers were particularly confident of their guild status and this was reflected by their petitioning of the Limerick Corporation in 1820 for the return of ‘rights withheld from them’ and their request that the mayor should swear in their newly elected masters and wardens on the first Monday after the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel according to ‘ancient’ custom. *Limerick Gazette*, 10 Oct 1820; *Limerick Chronicle*, 27 Sept 1820.

<sup>116</sup> Boyse was a lawyer who worked with, and was possibly employed by, the Guild of Coopers in 1820 as they sought recognition from the corporation and Tuthill was a parliamentary election candidate in 1817. Both were involved in the Limerick independent movement from 1812 onwards, see *Limerick Gazette*, 20 Oct 1812, 13 Nov 1816, 3 Jan 1817; *Limerick Evening Post*, 10 Oct 1820. Chase elaborated on the phenomenon of the Tory artisan in Britain and the instances where Tory parliamentarians espousing protectionism and old paternalism were more favoured by early Trade Unions than Radicals and Reformers who, like Spring Rice, sought to dismantle all trade and labour regulation, see Chase, *Early trade unionism*, p. 98; Foster, *Class struggle and the Industrial Revolution*, pp 203-4. Ridden description of Bourke’s world view encapsulates the point made in the main text: ‘Economic theory was a means to an end for Bourke. His ideal was a positive programme of government activity that would promote the operation of market forces.’ Ridden, *Making good citizens*, p. 132.

## Traditional histories assessed

Whilst this study has so far dealt with the events in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to establish as satisfactorily as possible a point of origin for Limerick's nineteenth century labour bodies, it is also important to recognise the local labour histories, and particularly the points of origin, as presented by the trade unions themselves in later years. The date 1810 is the most popular point of origin offered in such histories and is said to mark the foundation of the Limerick Trades Council, and this date is incorporated into the coat of arms of the twenty-first century Limerick Mechanics' Institute.<sup>117</sup> There is, however, no clear evidence at all that the workers of the city embarked upon a 'new beginning' of any sort in 1810. The Mechanics' Institute was founded in 1825 with the oldest Mechanics' Institute in Britain and Ireland, that of Edinburgh, preceding it by only four years at most.<sup>118</sup> The Congregated Trades, which may be described as a trades council of sorts, was founded in 1824; and the first body in Limerick to be referred to specifically as the 'Limerick Trades Council' was founded in 1893. The only Limerick body resembling a trades council which may have existed in 1810 was the United Trades and while this body was extremely active during the years 1819-1821, prior to this there is no evidence of its existence (see Chapter Two). There is an outside possibility that 1810 may be the date that marked the year that journeymen in the city decided to bond together in one form or another, their decision possibly remaining undetected until 1819, and that the significance of this date was preserved only within local artisan culture and passed on orally through the generations.

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<sup>117</sup> Frank Prendergast, 'Limerick Council of Trade Unions 1810-2003', p. 240.

<sup>118</sup> Kieran Byrne, 'Mechanics' Institutes in Ireland, 1825-1850', *Proceedings of the Educational Studies Association of Ireland Conference* (Dublin, 1979), pp 32-47; Kieran Byrne, *Mechanics' Institutes in Ireland before 1855*, unpublished MA Thesis, University of Cork, 1976, *passim*.



**Figure 2. The crest of the modern Mechanic's Institute showing the 1810 foundation date.**



**Figure 3. Additional crest of the modern Mechanics' Institute along with foundation date.**

However, whilst the date is in the middle of the transitional period that followed the guild era, there is little reason to believe that the nineteenth century artisans of the city paid any heed to their history beyond that which they could remember themselves, and there were some highly erroneous points of origin offered at times, including one by Congregated Trades Secretary, Charles Carrick, in 1861, which stated that the Mechanics' Institute (founded in 1825) was 'two thirds' of a century old.<sup>119</sup> At the end of the century, attempts by *Limerick Leader*

<sup>119</sup> *Munster News*, 4 Dec 1861

journalists to trace the history of the local labour bodies led them to James Kett T.C., cooper and former Secretary to the Congregated Trades, who was recommended to them as an authority. Kett, however, was not able to elaborate greatly on any period prior to his own lifetime – he was sixty years old according to the 1901 census – leaving the *Leader* reporter somewhat frustrated in his efforts to cover ‘The History of the Mechanics’ Institute and the evolution of the old system of Guilds into the present-day Trade Unionism.’<sup>120</sup>

This attempt at labour history writing on the part of the *Limerick Leader* in the late 1890s, however, marked the first clear effort to illuminate the shadowy period between guild and union in response to a growing local interest in Limerick labour history. A series of historical pieces appeared in the newspaper in 1897, penned by James Forrest, City High Constable, whose father, Benjamin, previously held a number of offices in the Congregated Trades.<sup>121</sup> One piece in this series centred on the Mechanics’ Institute and Congregated Trades, which at this stage appear to have been regarded as one and the same body. Forrest not only confidently, but erroneously, stated that the Mechanics’ Institute was founded in 1810 but also bolstered this factoid with the assertion that it had been founded by the acclaimed philanthropist, Lord Brougham.<sup>122</sup> His description of the building closely resembles that in Lenihan’s *Limerick: Its history and antiquities*, which Forrest undoubtedly used as a source, although one then has to question why he ignored the fact that Lenihan also, correctly, gave the founding date of the Mechanics’ Institute as 1825.<sup>123</sup> This appears to be the first occasion in which 1810 was used as to mark the beginning of modern organised labour in Limerick and it is likely that repeated reference of this date can be traced back to this point.

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<sup>120</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 22 Mar 1899

<sup>121</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 13 Jan 1872.

<sup>122</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 30 Aug 1897.

<sup>123</sup> Lenihan, *Limerick: Its history and antiquities*, p. 359. The information detailing the history of the building and the original date of the Mechanics’ Institute is all contained on the same page making Forrest’s inaccuracy all the more glaring.

Forrest's account of Limerick labour history can be placed alongside similar myth-making that accompanied the political and social movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The opening years of the twentieth century, when the city experienced an upsurge in cultural nationalism and local leaders built upon the foundations laid nationally by Douglas Hyde, Michael Cusack and D.P. Moran, were marked by a concerted rejection of O'Connellite history which used Grattan as a starting point.<sup>124</sup> Key local developments which formed the background to this re-imagining of the past in Limerick, reflecting broader developments, included the 1798 centenary commemorations; the political ascent of the local advanced nationalist, John Daly; and the 1899 Municipal election campaign.<sup>125</sup> By this time key members of the trades were inextricably linked with the Gaelic and nationalist revival which saw many cultural practices questioned and attacked, including popular music and sport.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, socio-economic change within the ranks of organised labour had an influence: the artisans of Limerick were represented – since 1893 – by the Limerick Trades

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<sup>124</sup> John Daly, Fenian and convict, was exceptionally popular with the trades in the 1896-1899 period. The similarities between his rhetoric and that of D.P. Moran has been noted by Collins, see Collins, *Labour, church and nationalism in Limerick*, p. 169. Members of the Limerick Trades Council initiated and led the campaign to change the names of certain city streets identifying in particular Collooney Street (named after a battle which the Limerick militia fought with a French/United Irishman army in Sligo), Cornwallis Street (named after Charles Cornwallis, Lord Lieutenant in 1798), George Street (named after George III); *Limerick Leader*, 11 June 1897, 1 April 1898. A speech given by James Kett, cooper and prominent member of the Congregated Trades, during the 1897 Manchester Martyrs ceremony is particularly illuminating, 'Referring to what some might call the Irish Parliament, the speaker said he would not term it so because it was amalgamated with the English Parliament which it assisted in the endeavor to drive out any spark of Nationality that remained in the Irish race.' *Limerick Leader*, 29 Nov 1897.

<sup>125</sup> Trade unionists played a crucial role in the 1798 centenary commemorations with William Whelan, Trades Council President, particularly prominent. In turn, the trade unionists who were prominent in the 1798 commemoration committee were elected as town councilors in 1899. *Limerick Leader*, 11, 28 June, 22, 30 July, 4, 6, 16, 20, 27 Aug, 17, 24 Sept, 1, 8, 11, 27 Oct, 15, 19 Nov, 24, 31 Dec 1897; Enda McKay, 'Limerick Municipal Elections, January 1899', *Old Limerick Journal*, vol. 36, Winter 1999, pp 3-10.

<sup>126</sup> James Kett, cooper and prominent member of the Congregated Trades, appears to have been involved in the Gaelic League and the local trade unionists were all fully supportive of Daly's opposition to the use of military bands as oppose to civilian bands at political functions. A 1901 letter from a local printer named John Reidy shows how the post-1898 affection for all things Gaelic had gripped some of the local artisans, '[Gaelic] games which had come down to us through the bloody centuries, over the graves of our kindred dead, over age, over the Druidic cromlech and time seared pillars, and past Carnaha of the Fiana [sic] of old, over the accursed dust of the mongrel Sassanach and Vikings, must be preserved.' *Limerick Leader*, 18 June 1898, 25 Jan 1901; McGrath, *Sociability and socio-economic conditions in St. Mary's parish*, pp 47-52, 98; John McGrath, 'Music and politics: Marching bands in late nineteenth-century Limerick', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, no. 46, 2006, pp.97-106.

Council, which included labour groups outside the skilled artisan class.<sup>127</sup> When this background is taken into account it is not surprising that the link with the old ‘Orange’ guilds – as Lenihan had described them in 1865 – was rejected and instead the Catholic journeyman combinations that opposed the guilds were increasingly presented as the roots of organised labour. Specifically the year 1899 – marked by the triumph of the Labour candidates in the municipal elections in Limerick – appears to have been the year in which the housepainters of the city decided that their body had been founded in 1821.<sup>128</sup> This was the information they gave to the Chief Labour Correspondent of the Board of Trade, whereas in 1898 they had left a blank return when asked for their the foundation date, while a year previously in 1897 they had indicated that 1782 was the year in which they originated.<sup>129</sup> Similarly the masons of the city in 1898 and 1899 also indicated to the Board of Trade that their body originated in 1810.<sup>130</sup> The old guild legacy was not completely rejected in the late 1890s, however, and the Ancient Society of Limerick Carpenters, armed with the ‘fact’ that their body dated from 1710, was able to win the favour of the City Council and hold off the encroachments of the British based Amalgamated Society of Carpenters in 1899.<sup>131</sup> The twentieth century saw the various skilled unions alternatively accept and reject their guild heritage and, interestingly, one of the modern banners used by the local Limerick branch of the Building and Allied Trade Union in the early twenty-first century pushes the union’s origins back to the period of the early guilds, giving

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<sup>127</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 26 June, 3, 12, 21 July 1893.

<sup>128</sup> *Trade Unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on Trade Unions in 1898 with comparative statistics for 1892-1897*, p. 80, H.C. 1899 [C.9443], xcii, 493.

<sup>129</sup> *Trade unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on trade unions in 1897 with comparative statistics for 1892-1896*, p. 80, 1898 [C.9013], ciii, 127; *Statistics of Trade Unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Ninth report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on Trade Unions 1896 with statistical tables*, p. 68, H.C. 1897 [C.8644], xcix, 275.

<sup>130</sup> *Trade Unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department), 1899*, p. 76; *Trade unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department), 1898*, p. 76.

<sup>131</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 10 June 1898.

1677 as the foundation date of the Incorporated Brick and Stone Layers of Limerick (see Fig. 4 below).



**Figure 4. Source: Mechanics' Institute of Limerick.**

### Summary

In a similar vein to O'Connor (cited at the beginning of this chapter), Antony Black argued that a 'labour consciousness' could arise spontaneously in different places in response to adverse conditions and concluded 'it is a question of how much – particularly with regard to the forms of organisation adopted – one ascribes to human instinct and how much to cultural tradition.'<sup>132</sup>

In the Limerick context, we can surmise that there was undoubtedly a point of origin in the early nineteenth century in response to economic conditions, an initial and brief moment of millenarianism (see Chapter 2), after which the exclusively Protestant traditions of the eighteenth century were culturally appropriated and a guise of respectability was forevermore maintained. This was a seminal development that characterised nineteenth and twentieth century labour bodies. A 1982 report on labour relations in Limerick city remarked upon the

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<sup>132</sup> Black, *Guild and State*, pp 174, 62.

organisational format and prevailing ideology of the dock labourers, noting many features that were reminiscent of the early guild system.<sup>133</sup> Whilst it is beyond doubt that no guild ever represented the dock labourers of Limerick, traditional values such as the ‘closed shop’ were indicative of a mind-set that harkened back to a medieval period when Limerick was to all effects (if not formally) a self-governing city-state. For much of the twentieth century skilled labour unions, particularly the carpenters, proudly announced their independence from wider amalgamations, purposely identified themselves as guilds and applied old ideas to twentieth century predicaments.<sup>134</sup> To determine the origin of this labour movement one needs to abandon any ideas that the first two decades of the twentieth century offer anything relevant and the much touted ‘new unionism’ of the 1888-1890 period was little more than a catalyst for expansion (see Chapter Seven). The true beginnings of this movement can be found in the early nineteenth century when a largely Catholic body of skilled workers decided that their best course of action was to try to reclaim the guilds that their fathers and grandfathers had struggled with and gained limited admission to. They bore the guild regalia as proudly as the largely Catholic councillors of the reformed post 1841 City Council wore the robes of the old, and infamous, Limerick Corporation. This transition cannot be described as a revolution in any terms, however, and Daly’s description of the situation in Cork also applies to Limerick, namely that ‘their [the trade societies’] objectives were conservative because the old order was familiar; it was what they understood best, and within its framework they knew where they stood.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Joseph Wallace, *Employment research programme – final report – industrial relations in Limerick city and county* (Limerick, 1982), pp 9, 23.

<sup>134</sup> *The Kerryman*, 5 Jan 1935; *Irish Press*, 14 Sept 1940; *Evening Herald*, 15 Oct 1940; *Irish Examiner*, 12 Dec 1940; *Limerick Leader*, 26 Nov 1941, 9 Mar, 5 Oct 1942.

<sup>135</sup> Daly, *Cork, a city in crisis*, p. 255.



**Chapter Two:**

**Origins – the social  
and political context**

## Beginnings: social and economic conditions

Given the evidence available, we can surmise that modern organised labour in Limerick began in the 1819-24 period when the local working artisans came to recognise themselves as a class and made the decision to band together under a pan-trade umbrella council, first as the illegal United Trades of Limerick followed by the more law-abiding and publicly tolerated Congregated Trades of Limerick. The social background to this period is crucial when examining the beginnings of the modern organised labour movement in Limerick. As detailed later in Chapters Six and Seven, the local artisan class had no great regard for constitutional politics *per se* – regarding it as a means to an end – or for any enduring relationship with local politicians prior to 1820. The role of the Catholic clergy was relatively minor relative to that of the clergy of the post-famine period or even the 1830s: Bishop Touhy claimed in 1820 that the religious orders were in serious decline in the city, and in the surrounding hinterland, from which the city received the bulk of its migrants, the priest to parishioner ratio was exceptionally high.<sup>1</sup> Many Catholics in the city and, more particularly, the county were often extremely ignorant of Catholic doctrine and the bulk of the mid-west population could be best described as Catholics in a cultural rather than a confessional sense.<sup>2</sup> In the city, sacrilegious theft of church property (metal from the roof of churches or even sacred items) became particularly

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<sup>1</sup> Bishop Tuohy stated that there were ten Poor Clare sisters, three Austinian Friars, four Franciscans, four Dominicans, four Christain Brothers in the city in 1820. *Minutes of evidence taken before the Select Committee of the House of Lords, appointed to inquire into the state of Ireland, more particularly with reference to the circumstances which may have led to disturbances in that part of the United Kingdom, 24 March--22 June, 1825*, p. 352, H.C. 1825 (521), ix, 249. Curtin states that the ratio of priests to Catholic parishioners in Limerick diocese was one to 2,539. The number of priests in the diocese increased from fifty-two in 1800 to ninety-seven in 1835. Gerard Curtin, 'Religion and social conflict during the Protestant crusade in West Limerick, 1822-49', *Old Limerick Journal*, Winter edition, 2003, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> One teenage witness in a Rockite trial in 1821 admitted that he had no contact with Catholic clergy or with formal education and showed only very basic knowledge of Catholic doctrine. Curtin contended that awareness of Catholic doctrine gradually increased in this respect in pre-famine County Limerick and he referenced an 1831 trial in which a teenage girl displayed a slightly fuller knowledge of core Catholic teachings than the 1821 Rockite witness. *Limerick Chronicle*, 22 Sept 1821, Gerard Curtin, *West Limerick: crime, popular protest and society* (Limerick, 2008), pp 206-07.

common in the late 1810s and early 1820s and in the surrounding counties many priests were in fear of agrarian marauders, the murder of Fr. Mulqueen in Bulgaden, Co. Limerick in 1819 being a case in point.<sup>3</sup> Localism and an accompanying suspicion of outsiders was particularly strong in the Limerick area, partly as a response to the typhoid epidemic of 1817-19 which left an indelible psychological mark on the local population and which also, in part, prompted the millenarianism that was to follow.<sup>4</sup> However, whilst the outlook of the wider working class and rural poor might have appeared somewhat inward looking they proved to be remarkably susceptible to the momentum created by social disturbances in Ireland and afar.

Before exploring the impact of broad political movements and social doctrines, purely economic factors must also be considered as a root cause for the emergence of the modern tradition of organised labour in Limerick. Lenihan describes the Limerick guilds as being dominated by Catholics by the 1810s but it was clear that they had inherited a broken, toothless system.<sup>5</sup> The protective legislation which the guild system had traditionally offered within the labour market was almost entirely absent from the cities of 1810s Ireland, retained only in piecemeal fashion by the various municipal authorities.<sup>6</sup> The beginnings of the post-Union

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<sup>3</sup> Donnelly, *Captain Rock*, p. 61, 96; Curtin, 'Religion and social conflict during the Protestant crusade in West Limerick', p. 43. Priests were not even safe in their churches and a number of Rockites blatantly recovered some arms from a church in Kanturk whilst the priest was saying mass and on another occasion 'Jeneral [sic] Rock' warned a priest that he'd suffer the same fate as Mulqueen if he didn't stop annoying them', see *Limerick Chronicle*, 13 April, 15 June 1822; *Finn's Journal*, 15 Dec 1821; *Freeman's Journal*, 25 Dec 1821. The pillage of church property in the city ranged from rooftop lead to sacred items, see National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary's Office, Received Papers, State of the Country [hereafter NAI/CSO/RP/SC], 1821, 902 7 Nov 1821 and NAI/CSO/RP/SC/1821/902 13 Nov 1821. Robbery of a similar sacrilegious nature was common throughout the country at this time, see *Freeman's Journal*, 1 July 1816, 15 Aug 1820; *Belfast Newsletter*, 14 Dec 1821; *Limerick Chronicle*, 19 Feb 1820.

<sup>4</sup> Vivien Hick, 'The Palatine Settlement in Ireland: The Early Years', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, Vol. 126 (1996), pp 11-12; Hugh Fenning, 'Typhus Epidemic in Ireland, 1817-1819: Priests, Ministers, Doctors', *Collectanea Hibernica*, No. 41, 1999, pp. 117-152; Susan Connolly, 'Health services in Limerick in the early nineteenth century', *Old Limerick Journal*, vol. 28, winter 1988, pp 19-20. Geary mentions how the 1817 Typhoid outbreak caused a general fear of the migrant worker throughout the country, see Laurence Geary, *Medicine and charity in Ireland, 1718-1851* (Dublin, 2004), p. 83.

<sup>5</sup> Lenihan, *Limerick: Its history and antiquities*, pp 421, 462.

<sup>6</sup> Magistrates had a role in setting the wages in Cork, Waterford and Dublin in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, pp 34-36; O'Connor, *A labour history of Waterford*, p. 16; *First report from Select Committee on Artizans and Machinery*, pp 470, 481-82. In Limerick there appeared to be no legal device allowing a magistrate to regulate wages in any way but they did intervene in an unofficial manner. *Limerick Chronicle*, 25 Mar, 14 Oct 1820, *Limerick Evening Post*, 11, 15 Oct 1833.

manufacturing collapse were apparent as early as 1810, a year which witnessed a series of protests from Irish urban artisans in the face of rapidly withering manufacturing strength. In the context of the general post-Napoleonic Irish economic collapse, the north Munster region appears to have been relatively healthy in the 1819-20 period, although there is no consensus regarding the relationship between the local economy and the social disturbances that followed. Certainly the typhus epidemic had subsided at this point and Broeker has outlined how the 1819 harvest had been very good and yet there was a marked increase in illegal activity in the mid-west region. Alternatively, Chase and Donnelly chose to add one crucial caveat when considering the apparent economic prosperity, outlining how the bountiful harvest glutted the market and compounded the problems caused by the post-Napoleonic collapse in the agricultural market, causing the price of agricultural produce to plummet further.<sup>7</sup> This particular set of economic circumstances affected the wage-earning class most of all. By way of contrast, small rural landholders – a class that was relatively detached from the cash economy and who often paid their rent in kind – benefitted by the amount of produce from their small plot of land. Wage earning artisans in Limerick, a city that was extremely reliant on agricultural exports, were inevitably hit by the cascade of events prompted by economic circumstances and their problems were exacerbated by the banking collapse of June 1820 in Limerick city, which temporarily impeded many employers from paying wages to the city’s artisans.<sup>8</sup> A number of commentators commented specifically upon the acute distress amongst the artisans of Limerick city, particularly John Norris Russell, president of the Limerick

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<sup>7</sup> Galen Broeker, *Rural disorder and police reform* (Dublin, 2004), p. 110; Donnelly, *Captain Rock*, pp. 52-56; Malcolm Chase, *1820: Disorder and stability in the United Kingdom* (Manchester, 2013), pp. 56-58.

<sup>8</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 29 May 1920. The records of the Chamber of Commerce reflect the extent to which the local economy relied on the agricultural export market and the consequent effect upon the artisan population was profound. Lard, tallow, butter and salted meat formed a large part of the export trades. The total amount of butter alone tripled between 1717 and 1827 from twenty-six to eighty thousand firkins annually. Limerick Chamber of Commerce, minute book one, June 15 1815- April 1820, *passim*; Matthew Potter and Sharon Slater, *Limerick’s merchants, traders and shakers: celebrating two centuries of enterprise* (Limerick, 2015), p. 55.

Chamber of Commerce, who remarked in June 1820 that 'the Trades people of this City are in great distress for want of Employment' and urged extension of relief.<sup>9</sup>

### **General approach: how to define lower order social groups**

Whilst the social and economic factors described above certainly offer enough to suggest that with the emergence of the first pan-trade labour council, the 1819 United Trades, organised labour in Limerick was simply responding to a variety of local economic pressures exerted upon it, there is additional evidence emphasising the extent to which external events influenced the trades of urban Limerick. Before we attempt to explain the relevant social patterns that formed the background of the United Trades we must be mindful of the manner in which these patterns were perceived by commentators, both contemporaneous and otherwise, as previous explanations for related social developments have tended to be shaped by specific historiographical trends. In this sense, many commentators seek to differentiate clearly between social disturbances caused by local economic distress and those that reflected a diffusion of ideas and social doctrines. This historical method dominates all discussion relating to social disorder in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries where the objectives of the various agitators are emphasised and the actions are made to fit a pattern.<sup>10</sup> In truth, this modern historiographical dilemma treads a familiar path worn by Marxist and Hegelian dialectics but special consideration must be given to the Irish situation. The 'protest group' was the most favoured description in the Irish sense and this term was used to roughly describe a group whose objectives were local in dimension and not politically dangerous. This approach

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<sup>9</sup> The banking crisis of 1820 was part of a general one that affected the whole of Ireland. By the end of 1820 there were half as many banks as there had been in 1804, S. J. Connolly, *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* (Oxford, 1998), p. 36; National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary's Office, Received Papers [hereafter NAI/CSO/RP], 1820/816 21 June 1820. The local dimension of the 1820 banking crisis in Limerick is discussed fully in Michael Patrick Deegan, *Limerick merchants: a social and economic study of the mercantile and maritime trade in Limerick, c. 1800-1835*, unpublished MA Thesis, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, 2008, pp 32-38.

<sup>10</sup> Erikson describes a similar problem concerning the attempts to differentiate between faction fighters and agrarian secret societies, see Eriksson, 'Crime and popular protest in County Clare', p. 31.

reflected both the mind-set of the authority figures in early nineteenth century Ireland, with one eye on the revolutionary 1790s, and the tendency of modern commentators to turn history from below into a way of locating the origins of their own class-consciousness. As well as historical accounts, contemporaneous commentators were also obsessed with the need to differentiate between economic conditions and dangerous political doctrines as a source of social disorder.<sup>11</sup> Were their actions politically motivated? Was the social disorder part of some wider conspiracy? Whilst it is important to address such questions it is equally important to avoid the binary argument therein and to recognise the various complexities involved. The nature of the source is vital when addressing these issues, there were a host of commentators willing to explain the nature of illegal combinations, both urban and rural, in pre-famine Ireland. In the urban context it was customary to suggest that a great ‘Union of Trades extends throughout Ireland’, a contention that dovetailed neatly with the notion that an alternative, underground legislative system of sorts, generally described as the Ribbon system, reigned in every corner of the country.<sup>12</sup> Equally there were others who pointed to unemployment, poverty or the unwarranted cruelty of landlords and/or employers.<sup>13</sup> Studies of the period are inhibited by the many tall tales of vast conspiracies, produced by informants who were ever mindful that the greater the threat the longer they would be employed.<sup>14</sup> Two of the most important commentators relevant to this study were Major George Warburton and Major Richard

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<sup>11</sup> Hoppen, *Governing Hibernia*, p. 48.

<sup>12</sup> Kyle Hughes and Donald MacRaild, ‘Irish politics and labour: Transnational and comparative perspectives, 1798-1914’, Niall Whelehan (ed.), *Transnational perspectives on modern Irish history* (London, 2015), pp 52-53; *Minutes of evidence taken before Select Committee on combination laws, particularly as to act 5, Geo. IV, c. 95*, p. 27, H.C., 1825 (417), iv, 565; Trinity College Dublin Archives, Sirr Papers, 869/1, f 181-3, Sept 1820; 869/1, f 187, 21 Oct 1820; 869/1F 218, 20 April 1822.

<sup>13</sup> Donnelly, *Captain Rock*, pp. 52-57; *Report from the Select Committee on Outrages (Ireland); together with the proceedings of the committee, minutes of evidence, appendix and index*, pp. 523-525, H.C. 1852 (438), xiv, 1; *Minutes of evidence taken before the Select Committee of the House of Lords, appointed to examine into the nature and extent of the disturbances which have prevailed in those districts of Ireland which are now subject to the provisions of the Insurrection Act, and to report to the House, 18 May--23 June, 1824*, pp. 172-183, H.C. 1825 (181), ix, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Trinity College Dublin Archives, Sirr Papers, 869/1, f 181-3, Sept 1820; 869/1, f 187, 21 Oct 1820; 869/1F 218, 20 April 1822.

Wilcocks who were the principal, and most capable, agents for official law and order in the mid-west area during this period.<sup>15</sup> Crucially they were both relatively objective individuals, both critical of the part that party politics had played in blunting the power of the authorities in Limerick city and county and aware of the distinctions between illegal groups that were simply protesting against economic conditions and those which were implicated in broader and more dangerous political movements.<sup>16</sup>

There were undoubtedly significant differences between the actions of the United Trades – the progenitor of all subsequent labour bodies in Limerick – and those of the food rioter; specifically the activities of the body go beyond that of the ephemeral food riot alliance.<sup>17</sup> In addition, many of the violent episodes of the United Trades involved a series of attacks on several specific properties and people in rapid succession on the same day, suggesting a level of planning and a coherent selection of targets that was not characteristic of food rioters.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, when reviewing the pattern of illegality in the city area, it appears that the United Trades first became active in 1819 – which would relegate the 1820 banking crisis from being a primary cause to merely an accelerator for the emergence of post-guild organised labour in Limerick city.<sup>19</sup> In any case, the level of organisation demonstrated by the United Trades and the scope of their demands suggest a degree of ambition beyond that of a distressed and destitute community responding to a single event or set of circumstances. Several aspects of the United Trades phenomenon imply analogies with other outbreaks of

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<sup>15</sup> Patrick Long, 'Sir Richard Willcocks', *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, [www.dib.cambridge.org](http://www.dib.cambridge.org) accessed 27 Feb 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid; Michael MacMahon, 'George Warburton: County Clare's first professional policeman', *Irish Police History*, <http://www.policehistory.com/warburton.htm> accessed 10 Dec 2016.

<sup>17</sup> For a general discussion of the many forms of riotous crowds in Limerick city during this period see, John McGrath, 'Riots in Limerick city, 1820-1900', Maura Cronin and William Sheehan (eds), *Riotous Assemblies: rebels, riots and revolts in Ireland* (Cork, 2011), pp 153-174.

<sup>18</sup> Irish food rioters of the day were also capable of being selective when looting but a degree of chaos typically accompanied a food riot, see McGrath, 'Riots in Limerick, 1820-1900', pp 153-174; Cunningham, 'Three urban crowds', pp 128-151.

<sup>19</sup> One employer mentioned that his first encounter with the United Trades was during the mayoral reign of Joseph Gabbett (Mayor 1818-19). See Benjamin Russell, NAI/CSO/RP/1820/1097 2 Dec 1820.

violence amongst the underclass in Britain and Ireland. Significantly, there was a complete absence of women (so active in food rioting) from any of the activities associated with the United Trades. This does not rule out the possibility that the United Trades were a protest group; the Luddites, the followers of Captain Swing and the Whiteboys were all overwhelmingly male in composition and have tentatively been classed as ‘protest groups.’<sup>20</sup> The absence of women, however, does rule out most of the analogies with the food riot alliance.

### Events in detail

Finding a starting point for a pattern of social disturbance is always problematic and there was no prolonged period of perfect tranquillity to separate one period of violence from another. There were serious, if short-lived, outbreaks of insurgency in County Limerick – notably in 1815 – and the only major example of artisan combination in Limerick city during the 1810s was a relatively peaceful attempt of the coopers in 1812 to combine and improve their wages.<sup>21</sup> What was different about the developments in Limerick city in 1819 was the administration of oaths and the violence directed against specific employers and fellow workers who were considered by this artisan group to be rogue elements.<sup>22</sup> This eruption of violence was mirrored by somewhat similar developments in the mid-west region in general and Eriksson’s detailed account of secret society groups in the mid-west area cites Warburton’s report of the introduction of a new oath-bound secret society group in late 1819, the rise of the United Trades coinciding exactly with this.<sup>23</sup> A series of arms raids accompanied much of the violence in the rural hinterlands (the areas most affected were within fifteen kilometres of the city). Typically, these nightly raids began in the city with groups on horseback leaving under cover of darkness

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<sup>20</sup> Oberschall’s thorough analysis of ‘Protest groups’ includes Luddites and other such groups. Anthony Oberschall, *Social movements: ideologies, interests and identities* (London, 1997), pp 163-167.

<sup>21</sup> *Reports, also, Accounts and Papers, Relating to Ireland*, Session 1 Feb – 2 July 1816, Vol. IX, p. 10, *Limerick Gazette*, 29 Sept, 2, 13 Oct 1812.

<sup>22</sup> The fact that an oath was being used as a means of cementing the bonds of illegal combinations in Limerick city was clear as early as November 1819, see *Limerick Chronicle*, 6 Nov 1819.

<sup>23</sup> Eriksson, *Crime and popular protest in County Clare*, p. 64.



and hitting at least two houses in the outlying regions before returning to the city before daybreak.<sup>24</sup> Whilst most of these arms raids were small scale they displayed signs of being orchestrated and one particular raid in 1821 featured a large number of individuals who attempted to disarm a corps of yeomanry in Sixmilebridge (fifteen kilometres north-west of the city). This particular attack was described as being carried out by a well-drilled group who used a system of scouts to evade an ambush which the authorities had in place for them.<sup>25</sup> Whilst arms raids were the principal illegal activity reported in the local journals at this time, there were also many apparently related incidents that were firmly in the Whiteboy tradition – land was ‘turned up’, livestock maimed and ‘strangers’ attacked and threatened.<sup>26</sup> As expected, threatening notices and letters featured alongside many of these incidents with the monikers ‘Captain Bone-all’, ‘Captain Stepwright’ and ‘Captain Ribbinman’ [sic] predominating.<sup>27</sup>

In the city the first indications of violence that can be linked to this particular series occurred in October 1819 with a number of attacks – typically carried out by three or so individuals – on lone soldiers who were each struck on the head with a cudgel and then had a facial knife wound inflicted, which caused the *Limerick Chronicle* to comment that they indicated, ‘something more than the usual hostility to soldiers by these nocturnal ruffians and assassins.’<sup>28</sup> By November an identical group paid a visit to the home of a master tailor, again knocking him senseless and attempting to inflict a facial knife wound. On this occasion, the three attackers were accompanied by a large mob of artisans who attacked the rear of the house, causing extensive damage to the property. The local press appeared to be aware of a reason for this attack, citing the fact that the victim had annoyed many local operative tailors by

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<sup>24</sup> This study has found evidence for at least eighteen reports of arms raids within fifteen kilometres of the city. See Appendix 5.

<sup>25</sup> George Cornwall Lewis, *On Local Disturbances in Ireland* (London, 1836), pp 267-68.

<sup>26</sup> See Appendix 5.

<sup>27</sup> See Appendix 5.

<sup>28</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 29 Sept, 2 & 16 Oct 1819.

employing ‘strangers.’<sup>29</sup> This type of attack, involving large numbers of artisans attacking people and property, was the prototype for a long spate of violence (first repeated in February and March 1820) whereby a number of rapid attacks were carried on in short bursts – typically four or five properties or individuals were attacked in an hour or two. Skilled workers who were identified as ‘colts’ or ‘strangers’, the masters who employed them, or properties belonging to either party were all targets of this oath-bound group identified as ‘the United Trades of Limerick.’<sup>30</sup> The victims and the perpetrators alike came from a broad spectrum of trades, and the attacks, now clearly economically motivated, maintained the focused pattern first seen in September 1819 when isolated soldiers were targeted. Whilst the very earliest attacks generally involved low numbers – typically three individuals – this quickly escalated and in January 1820 a group of fifty took part in an attack on a business involving the destruction of ‘foreign’ apparel manufactured in Cork and Bandon.<sup>31</sup> An attack on a number of properties and individuals in February appears to have involved a larger number and following the banking collapses of May and June 1820, attacks on employers, properties and non-society workmen involved between two and four hundred individuals.<sup>32</sup> The banking collapse itself marked the largest assemblage of all although the crowd gathered resembled a ‘food riot’ style protest group although a number of employers in the city – particularly those accused of employing ‘strangers’ or ‘colts’ – were threatened by members of the large mob.<sup>33</sup> Little more than a month after the banking collapse the pattern of coordinated violence began again with attacks on property and persons carried out by marauding groups said to number between two

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<sup>29</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 6 Nov 1819.

<sup>30</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 16 Feb 1820; *Limerick Chronicle*, 22 Jan, 12 Feb, 11 Mar 1820; Boyle, *The Irish labor movement in the nineteenth century*, pp 11-15.

<sup>31</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 22 Jan 1820.

<sup>32</sup> See Appendix 5.

<sup>33</sup> The banking crisis of 1820 was part of a general one that affected the whole of Ireland. By the end of 1820 there were half as many banks as there had been in 1804, S. J. Connolly, *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* (Oxford, 1998), p. 36; NAI/CSO/RP/1820/816 21 June 1820. The local dimension of the 1820 banking crisis in Limerick is discussed fully in Deegan, *Limerick merchants: a social and economic study of the mercantile and maritime trade in Limerick*, pp 32-38; *Limerick Chronicle*, 31 May, 1 July 1820.

and four hundred. The attacks were, again, carried out swiftly and with co-ordination but there was an added degree of brazenness now. Many employers were offering armed resistance but this only proved partially successful as the attackers were often content to fire a barrage of missiles (stones, rocks etc.) from behind cover.<sup>34</sup> Their most outrageous attack occurred in mid-October and involved a blitzkrieg style attack that traversed the city, targeting two master chandlers, an iron manufacturer, a master nailor and three operative smiths.<sup>35</sup> A number of troops did eventually appear on the scene on this occasion but they were not as effective as one would expect – given that it was a military versus civilian-mob situation – and only a small handful of the United Trades was actually apprehended whereas a number of troops were injured.<sup>36</sup> One eye witness account reaching the office of the Chief Secretary of Ireland told of a massive mob of artisans which demolished the house of the on-looking master baker, Benjamin Russell, in November.<sup>37</sup> What most incensed Russell was the fact that a troop of horse did appear but took no part in stopping the marauders – apparently due to the fact that no City Magistrate or High Constable was present – and the United Trades calmly proceeded to systematically demolish the house under the watchful eyes of the troops.<sup>38</sup> Along with the attacks on individuals and personal property there were also occasional large assemblages of artisans (up to four hundred in number) bent on destroying ‘foreign’ retail goods (it should be noted that some of these ‘foreign’ goods – corduroys, gingham and muslins – were far from exotic, coming from locations such as Bandon, Co. Cork).<sup>39</sup>

The belated response from the authorities appeared late in 1820 when city magistrate Andrew Watson led a raid on the headquarters of the United Trades in a public house (the Four

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<sup>34</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 12, 16 Aug 1820; *Limerick Gazette*, 11, 18 Aug 1820.

<sup>35</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 21 Oct 1820; *Limerick Gazette*, 20, 24 Oct 1820.

<sup>36</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 21 Oct 1820; *Limerick Gazette*, 20, 24 Oct 1820.

<sup>37</sup> NAI/CSO/RP/1820/1097 2 Dec 1820.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* Military troops were indeed prevented from acting without a magistrate present but Russell appeared to imply that he expected more from them.

<sup>39</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 22 Jan, 16, 21 Aug 1820; *Limerick Gazette*, 15 Aug 1820.

Alls [sic] Tavern) in Mungret Street where he seized a chest containing ‘rules and regulations.’<sup>40</sup> After this point marauding groups tended to be smaller in number but no less deadly, and there were two fatalities resulting from attacks in January 1821 when the wife of Benjamin Russell, master baker, suffered a heart attack as yet another attack was made on the Russell townhouse and, in another incident, a non-union tailor named John Roughan was killed after having his head split by an axe-wielding member of the United Trades.<sup>41</sup> The response to these two fatalities was much sharper and a number of United Trades members were brought to trial, including Mick ‘Bust-the-guts’ McNamara, the murderer of the tailor Roughan, who was found guilty and transported.<sup>42</sup>

The manner in which law and order was enforced in the city evolved rapidly during this period and by the end of 1821 a more professional system of policing was in place.<sup>43</sup> The United Trades were largely a peripheral body by the summer of 1821, although they continued to be referred to as active in 1822 by a number of sources.<sup>44</sup> The Roughan murder trial prompted the United Trades to distance themselves from the attacks and a number of trades publicly disassociated themselves from the umbrella group. By 1822, despite reports of limited activity, the strength of the United Trades broke.<sup>45</sup> By 1824 the trades of the city had reorganised themselves as the O’Connellite ‘Congregated Trades of Limerick’ and with the name change came an almost complete abandonment of the militancy that had so marked the years 1819-21.

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<sup>40</sup> *Limerick Gazette*, 24 Oct 1820.

<sup>41</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 13, 17 & 24 Jan 1821.

<sup>42</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 Feb, 7, 10, 17 & 24 Mar 1821, 5 & 16 May; Christopher O’Mahony & Valerie Thompson *Poverty to promise: the Monteagle emigrants 1838-58* (Darlinghurst, 2010), pp 91-94. O’Mahony and Thompson draw upon an earlier account of McNamara’s crime, which in turn relied upon McNamara’s own haphazard recollection of the deed, and his subsequent transportation to Australia, see Edmund Finn, *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne*, (Melbourne: Heritage Publications, 1888), pp 941-42.

<sup>43</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 27 Nov 1821.

<sup>44</sup> NAI/CSO/RP/1822/2606 4 Nov 1822; *Limerick News*, 23 & 30 May 1822.

<sup>45</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 17, 24, 27, 31 Jan, 3 Feb, 7, 10, 24 Mar, 16 May 1821.

## Events in context

Explaining the broader context to the United Trades and their short reign of terror, which marks the birth pangs of modern organised labour in Limerick, requires appreciation of many different strands of political and social phenomena. Firstly, it is important to recognise what one might call the *long year of 1820* as one of the four short epochs – along with 1847-48, 1867-72 and 1890-94 – where the trades responded to and were significantly influenced by broader events and overarching social movements. Using the work of Malcolm Chase, in particular, one can define this *long year* as beginning with the Peterloo Massacre in August and ending in July 1821 when the Queen's death put paid to 'Caroline fever' and all related social unrest and insurrectionary plots in Britain.<sup>46</sup>

The United Trades were just one of the many groups throughout Britain and Ireland that challenged the state and local representatives of law during this tumultuous period. Many of these disturbers of the peace can be tentatively described as insurrectionary; the majority of them strongly influenced by millenarianism or prophecies grounded in the pre-industrial folk tradition.<sup>47</sup> A large proportion of them straddled the historiographical divide between economic reactionaries and politically motivated revolutionaries borrowing from either tradition.<sup>48</sup> Radical doctrines in the tradition of Paine, Spence or Hunt loomed large in British radical circles and the stated objectives of the more conspicuous British groups, such as the 1820 Cato

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<sup>46</sup> Malcolm Chase, 'Caroline fever, Robert Chaloner and the North Riding Whigs', *Northern History*, vol. 52, issue 1, pp 85-100.

<sup>47</sup> Both Irish and English groups were extremely influenced by prophesy and millenarianism began with the appearance of a comet in July 1819 and developed to include Queen Caroline and the planned visit of King George IV to Ireland. The significance of the comet is difficult to ascertain but Frank Peel commented that a similar appearance of a comet in 1811 heralded the Luddite disturbances, see Frank Peel, *The Rising of the Luddites* (Heckmondwike, 1888), p. 9; *Belfast Newsletter*, 6 July 1819;

<sup>48</sup> The significance of the comet is difficult to ascertain but Frank Peel commented that a similar appearance of a comet in 1811 heralded the Luddite disturbances, see Peel, *The Rising of the Luddites*, p. 9; *Belfast Newsletter*, 6 July 1819. Sirr reported that the Dublin Ribbonmen (circa 1820) were principally concerned with a prophecy which stated that the King would come to Ireland but would not return and this would trigger a mass revolt, see Trinity College Dublin Archive, Trinity College Dublin Archives, Sirr Papers, 869/1, f 181-3, Sept 1820; 869/1, f 187, 21 Oct 1820; 869/1F 218, 20 April 1822.

Street conspirators and the participants of the 1820 Scottish Radical War, emphasised democratic and/or social reform and could be broadly described as republican. When comparing contemporaneous Irish groups the contrasts are perhaps more obvious than the similarities: undoubtedly Irish groups invariably looked back to the past when deciding upon their goals rather than embrace any doctrine that promised a new dawn, urban artisans and rural tenants alike both bemoaning the intrusion of the state and aggressive capitalism at the expense of customary rights and protective legislation.<sup>49</sup> We cannot suggest too great a divergence, however, and the work of Michael Huggins, amongst others, has sparked a more nuanced appreciation of pre-famine Ireland whilst Malcolm Chase and Matthew Roberts have highlighted the schism between radical leaders and grassroots activists in the Luddite heartland of the industrial north, which retained the distinction of being the most socially disturbed region of Britain in 1820.<sup>50</sup> In particular, Chase has contrasted the anti-trade unionism of many leading democratic reformers and rightly highlighted the predominance of conservative values among Britain artisans as evidenced by the major campaign to oppose the 1814 Apprenticeship Act.<sup>51</sup> In short, the main difference between British and Irish social disaffection was the relative absence in Ireland of a literate, reformist middle-class leadership who were prepared to engage with disaffected groups and simultaneously pursue radical reform.<sup>52</sup> The legacy of the 1790s, in terms of political and social objectives, was largely absent in Ireland with Cronin concluding that by 1820 the wider appreciation of the United Irishmen, in the Munster region in particular,

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<sup>49</sup> The core tenets of 18<sup>th</sup> century Whiteboyism, which were based upon the belief that the general standard of living in the bygone past had been superior to that of their own time, still held true for most nineteenth century groups who yearned for a 'fair rent' and even a 'fair tithe.' See Donnelly, *Captain Rock*, pp 5-7.

<sup>50</sup> Matthew Roberts, 'Rethinking Luddism in Nottinghamshire', talk delivered 22 Sept 2012 [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLIW2nAJqs1CGfOhQfZwS7x5d4E\\_V7Anr9](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLIW2nAJqs1CGfOhQfZwS7x5d4E_V7Anr9) accessed 14 June 2016; Huggins, 'Captain Swing, Captain Rock', pp 63-80.

<sup>51</sup> Iain McCalman, 'Ultra-Radicalism and Convivial Debating-Clubs in London, 1795-1838', *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 102, No. 403 (Apr., 1987), p. 319.

<sup>52</sup> Daniel O'Connell would appear to be an exception here but whilst he met with disaffected groups he was never sincere in his dealings with them and although his support for Emancipation and Repeal could be deemed as radical agendas he cannot be truly classed as a radical. Michael Beames, 'The Ribbon societies: lower-class nationalism in pre-famine Ireland', Charles .H.E. Philpin (ed.), *Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland* (Cambridge, 1987), pp 257-58.

amounted to little more than ‘radical catch-phrases imported from *Paddy’s Resource*.’<sup>53</sup> British radical tradition, in fact, proved to be the greatest beneficiary of the 1790s United Irishmen tradition with individuals such as William McCabe actively participating with and influencing English radicals, particularly in the London region, right through until the 1820s.<sup>54</sup> Smith’s 1955 article ‘Irish rebels and English radicals’ went further than other commentators did in this regard in claiming that ‘that founding meeting of [the United Irishmen in] 1791 ought to be regarded as a date significant in English as well as in purely Irish history, for its ultimate effects were to inaugurate the physical force school of English radicalism’ and the work of E. P. Thompson also elaborated on the strong influence of the Irish on militant British radicals.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, as MacRaild has shown, there was a reciprocal awareness of Irish issues shown by radicals such as Cobbett and Hunt during this period.<sup>56</sup> Whereas British groups sought to gain inclusion or even establish ownership of the political system and to challenge the state religion, Irish subaltern groups were content to ignore or defy both entities, with little evidence – prior to the establishment of the Catholic Association in 1823 – that they sought reform either by legitimate means.

Whilst it is beyond question that the brief, but seminal, episode of artisan militancy that gave birth to the modern organised labour movement in Limerick occurred during a time of heightened social upheaval across Britain and Ireland, the evidence linking the local events to

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<sup>53</sup> Maura Cronin, ‘Broadside literature and popular opinion in Munster, 1800-1820’, John Kirk, Michael Brown and Andrew Noble (eds.), *Cultures of radicalism in Britain and Ireland* (London, 2013), pp 145-158. Michael Huggins described the phenomenon as ‘grafting Paineite and half-digested French principles onto a customary consciousness.’ Huggins, ‘Captain Swing, Captain Rock’, p. 72. There were a number of occasions when the language of ’98 was utilised in the midwest region in the disturbed 1819-24 period but there was scant evidence that the core message was embraced and developed, see Donnelly, *Captain Rock*, pp 22-24. The best example of this idle repetition of ’98 rhetoric was when a threatening notice posted to a chapel door in Adare in 1822 citing English tyranny and the establishment of an ‘Irish Republick [sic]’ but this notice was soon after shown to be an almost exact replica of an 1798 decree issue by General Hubert with the title ‘General Rock’ substituted in place of the French commander’s, see *Limerick Chronicle*, 13 Feb 1822.

<sup>54</sup> McCalman, ‘Ultra-Radicalism and Convivial Debating-Clubs in London, 1795-1838’, p. 319.

<sup>55</sup> A. W. Smith, ‘Irish rebels and English radicals, 1798-1820’, *Past and Present*, No. 7 (April, 1955), p. 78; E.P. Thompson, *The making of the English working-class* (New York, 1963), pp 482-83, 596-97.

<sup>56</sup> Donald MacRaild, *The Irish diaspora in Britain, 1750-1939* (Basingstoke, 2011), pp 116-117.

larger movements or events is more circumstantial but, nevertheless, impossible to dismiss. Ireland, in general, played an active role in the plans of insurrectionary groups in Britain and as the politically fuelled agitation – sparked by the notorious Peterloo Massacre in August 1819 – spread in a wave of mass disorder and conspiratorial gatherings throughout parts of England and Scotland, Catholic Ireland came to be regarded by British radicals as a potential military ally.<sup>57</sup> These cross-channel plans to create synchronised disorder in the short term, and to establish a new political order in the long term, were carried out in Ireland by Dublin-based Ribbonism – a movement which dramatically expanded westward from its Leinster and South Ulster base in 1819.<sup>58</sup> From a historiographical perspective, problems relating to nomenclature and the difficulty involved in defining the objectives and geographic distribution of Ribbonism make it necessary to specifically outline who the Ribbonmen were at this point.<sup>59</sup> Testimony from the most reliable contemporaneous sources suggest that the Ribbonmen established themselves in Limerick city late in 1819 using the canal system as a means of liaising with the Dublin based command structure.<sup>60</sup> Major Richard Wilcocks elaborated on this detail by

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<sup>57</sup> Chase, *1820: Disorder and stability*, pp. 51-55. MacRaild describes Henry ‘Orator’ Hunt’s efforts to propagate radical ideas in Ireland as the most successful, MacRaild, *The Irish diaspora in Britain*, pp 116-117.

<sup>58</sup> The insurrection in Connaught in late 1819-1820 is the most obvious example of this, see David Ryan, ‘Ribbonism and Agrarian Violence in County Galway, 1819-1820’, *Journal of the Galway Archeological and Historical Society*, Vol. 52, (2000), pp 120-134.

<sup>59</sup> A M Sullivan’s admittance of confusion in 1877 expressed some of the most accurate observations on the subject, ‘there is to this hour the widest conflict of assertion and conclusion as to what exactly were its real aims, its origin, structure, character, and purpose..... The Ribbonism of one period was not the Ribbonism of another’, see A. M. Sullivan, *New Ireland* (London, 1877), pp 70-71. See also, Donal McCartney, *The Dawning of Democracy: Ireland 1800-1870* (Dublin, 1987), pp. 82-103; Tom Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics* (Dublin, 1981), pp. 34-52.

<sup>60</sup> The Ribbon system has been defined in a number of ways from the time of its emergence in the 1810s right down to the present day. Whilst the movement split into a northern and southern faction by the 1830s the system appears to have been relatively united in 1819 under a Dublin based leadership. The system appears to have been urban based, albeit with a remit for rural activities. It should be noted that this description differs in a number of ways from Joseph Lee’s use of the term ‘Ribbonism’ to mean a ubiquitous lower class, rural system of agrarian redress. Major Sirr, Major Warburton and Major Wilcocks all attest to the presence of Ribbonism, defined as a movement seeking to overthrow British rule in Ireland, in Limerick city in 1819-1820 with Warburton and Wilcocks adding that the lodge in question orchestrated illegal activities in the East Limerick and East Clare region. *Minutes of evidence taken before the Select Committee of the House of Lords, appointed to examine into the nature and extent of the disturbances which have prevailed in those districts of Ireland which are now subject to the provisions of the Insurrection Act, and to report to the House, 18 May--23 June, 1824*, p. 81, H.C. 1825 (200), vii, 501; Trinity College Dublin Archives, Diary of Major Sirr, 869/3, 12 Feb, 17 Mar, 30 Apr, 13 May; George Cornewell Lewis, *On Local Disturbances in Ireland* (London, 1836), pp. 267-68; NAI/CSO/RP/SC/1821/1609/17 27 Oct 1821.



specifying that the introduction of Ribbonism into Limerick city was largely a result of the financial patronage of British radical groups who crucially provided enough funding to employ a core group of individuals who were to provide the leadership for this lodge. Wilcocks and Warburton also directly mentioned the actual presence of British radical ‘emissaries’ in the Limerick area whose mission appeared to include the co-ordination of cross-channel social upheaval and, in a more limited sense, the spread of radical doctrine.<sup>61</sup>

The role in which Ribbonism and British radicalism played in the development of Limerick labour at this point may well be described as incidental; specifically, the militancy and combined unity of the United Trades of Limerick was certainly evidence that the Limerick artisans were part of a wider pattern of social change, but we must be clear that the objectives of the Limerick artisans were not directed by outsiders but rather these outsiders provided a social network linking them to the disaffected working class groups in Dublin and Cork and, indirectly, to the Ribbon movement and radical Britain. Crucially there is little to suggest that the Ribbon doctrine ostensibly contained anything that promoted organised mass violence in any sense.<sup>62</sup> Belchem’s work emphasises that the establishment of fraternal links was a crucial trait and, whilst his work centres on the Irish emigrant experience in Liverpool, there is much to suggest that this objective was predominant in all the different strands of Ribbonism.<sup>63</sup> The aspect of Ribbonism most relevant to the study of the period of militant organised labour in

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<sup>61</sup> The account of Wilcocks suggests the presence of British Radicals in Limerick city (c. 1819-21) whereas Warburton places radical emissaries in the ten miles outside the city in Sixmilebridge (c.1820) where they were distributing medals displaying the ‘Tree of Liberty.’ Additional evidence includes testimony of Major Going, of the Limerick Peace Preservation Force, who states that emissaries were present in Newcastlewest in 1821 and other accounts state that British radicals were meeting with renowned mid-west faction fighters, the Three Year Olds during the same era. See NAI/CSO/RP/1821/738 11 Jan 1821 and NAI/CSO/RP/1821/754 13 Jan 1821; *State of Ireland. Minutes of evidence taken before the select committee appointed to inquire into disturbances in Ireland, in the last session of parliament; 13 May-18 June, 1824*, p. 139, H.C. 1825 (20), vii, 1; *Select Committee of the House of Lords, 18 May--23 June, 1824*, p. 59.

<sup>62</sup> Under-secretary Thomas Drummond commented in 1835 that the most common Ribbon oath that he was familiar with was ‘unexceptional in terms’, see John F. McLennan, *Memoir of Thomas Drummond* (Edinburgh, 1867), pp 259-265.

<sup>63</sup> John Belchem, “‘Freedom and Friendship to Ireland’: Ribbonism in Early Nineteenth-Century Liverpool”, *International Review of Social History*, Volume 39, Issue 01, April 1994, pp 33-34.

Limerick is suggested by a line from a copy of a Ribbon oath from the mid-west area in 1823 which strongly emphasises ‘brotherly’ bonds and contained the line: ‘In town or country that I will give the preference to dealing to any one attached to our material interest according as circumstances afford me.’<sup>64</sup>

Warburton made it clear that the format of the Ribbon lodge in Limerick was in line with the rest of the country whereby no more than ‘six-and-thirty men’ were to be ‘sworn by any one individual’ and these ‘six-and-thirty were to be considered a body completely within themselves’ and this body was to contain a ‘committee man, a treasurer and a secretary.’<sup>65</sup> Crucially, only committee men were to communicate with other bodies of Ribbonmen and in practice this brief incursion of Ribbonism into the Munster area resulted in a very fragmented, isolated and independent system with, at best, only tenuous links to the Dublin central committee. Speaking in 1825, Warburton and Wilcocks were adamant that most co-ordinated violence of the previous five years in the north Munster area (including the Rockite insurrection) had been due to the influx of Ribbonism in 1819-20, but both Wilcocks and Sirr emphasised that the link with Dublin had broken down by late 1821 when the flow of money from the British radicals ceased and differences arose. Whilst describing a series of interviews that he had held with recalcitrant Rockites in 1824, Wilcocks commented that all of them remembered swearing that they would take part in a general ‘rising’ if called upon but none of them had any thorough appreciation of this oath-bound directive.<sup>66</sup> By way of contrast, Sirr’s

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<sup>64</sup> The society in question referred to itself as the ‘society, dedicated to St. Patrick the Holy Patron of Ireland.’ *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 April 1823. The Oath was almost identical to one used as evidence during the trial of Dublin Ribbon leader Michael Keenan, the notable difference being the fact that the Dublin oath began with a pledge to the Monarch. Although worded differently, it contained all the same points as an 1848 Ribbon/Molly Maguire oath found in Donegal. *Report of the trial of Michael Keenan for administering an unlawful oath*, p. 48; Brendan Mac Suibhne, “‘Bastard Ribbonism’: The Molly Maguires, the uneven failure of entitlement and the politics of post-Famine adjustment,” Enda Delaney and Brendan Mac Suibhne (eds), *Ireland’s Great Famine and popular politic* (Abingdon, 2015), p. 197.

<sup>65</sup> Select Committee of the House of Lords, 18 May--23 June, 1824, p. 81.

<sup>66</sup> NAI/CSO/RP/SC, 1821, 2296, 50, Oct-Nov 1821; *Select Committee of the House of Lords, 18 May--23 June, 1824*, p. 58.

description of the Dublin Ribbon lodges in the 1819-21 period depicts a movement that was primarily focused upon achieving some unspecified form of national independence and a reshaping of Irish society – all of which was to be achieved by open rebellion.<sup>67</sup>

Where exactly the United Trades of Limerick stood in the general context is open to question. They arose immediately after the introduction of Ribbonism into Limerick and from their inception were described as an oath-bound society. Similarly their power collapsed by late 1821 which is precisely the time when Wilcocks and Sirr stated that Ribbonism lost contact with Limerick leaving behind a bastardised off-shoot which quickly became known as the Rockite movement that built upon the network that Ribbonism had developed.<sup>68</sup> The Rockite movement was weak in the city but strong in the county (a fact which directly contrasted with the initial Ribbon system) – a pattern which was in no way inevitable, and Donnelly has described how the Union of Trades of Kilkenny city blended seamlessly with the Rockite movement of the rural hinterlands in 1822-24 period.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, there is some evidence that the United Trades of Limerick were, in the 1819-21 period, undoubtedly allied to the rural based groups in the hinterlands who were most clearly identified as Ribbonmen by Warburton. One employer, James Quinlan, explicitly linked the United Trades with the group that were rampaging in the liberties and stated that he had been warned that his ‘assassination’ would take place in the ‘fields of the suburbs’ by allies of the United Trades if they themselves did not get him in the city.<sup>70</sup> In a number of cases city men and city artisans were apprehended carrying out raids in the hinterlands and a core group of United Trades agitators, led by the

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<sup>67</sup> Major Sirr’s informants did allude to a general mingling of English agents and the disaffected of Ireland and stated that the latter were keenly aware of events in Scotland and England at this point and the general mood was characterised by the words ‘the day is at hand.’ Trinity College Dublin Archive, Major Sirr Papers, 869/1, f 181-3, Sept 1820.

<sup>68</sup> Katsuta commented that, ‘It seems possible that the Rockites, having borrowed from Ribbonmen their organisational structures (and possibly mentality), began to develop their own movement independently in Munster.’ Shunsuke Katsuta, ‘The Rockite Movement in Cork in the early 1820s’, *Irish Historical Studies*, 33, no. 131 (May 2003), p. 295.

<sup>69</sup> Donnelly, *Captain Rock*, p. 174.

<sup>70</sup> *Limerick Gazette*, 18 Aug 1820.

recidivist cordwainer Thomas Purcell (Purtill), were implicated as being part of both urban workmen combinations and rural banditry.<sup>71</sup>

Whilst the actions of the United Trades certainly suggest that they were focused upon economic issues and responding to harsh employers, the same body of artisans largely refrained from violence in other times of economic distress in the face of similar grievances. The master baker, Benjamin Russell, made it clear that he had been operating his business for a number of years in Limerick and yet he was never once molested until 1820 when the United Trades approached him demanding that he release the ‘colts’ in his pay and take on their men.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, speaking in 1853 one senior builder commented that Limerick unions were not overly troublesome but recalled how a body he termed ‘the Union’ had terrorised employers of every trade in 1820.<sup>73</sup> Clearly the United Trades represented an unusually violent level of artisan combination by the standards set in Limerick city and the presence of the Ribbon Lodge in the city during this period was hardly coincidental. There certainly is a degree of evidence to show that the artisan violence spread, in tandem with Ribbonism, like a contagion from Dublin to Limerick by 1819 and then to Cork by December 1820, where the authorities there immediately concluded, rightly or wrongly, that the appearance of the Cork ‘Union of Trades’ was a social phenomenon introduced from Limerick.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, Beames quoted one intriguing

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<sup>71</sup> On another occasion a group who attacked premises in Clarina (approximately eleven kilometres from Limerick city) were apprehended near the Artillery Barracks just outside the city, see *Limerick Chronicle*, 1 April 1820, Thomas Purcell (sometimes spelt Purtell) was apprehended a number of times and implicated in a number of conspiracies relating to rural and urban affairs but was released after swearing a solemn oath to have no more dealings with the United Trades or any other conspiratorial group, see *Limerick Chronicle*, 28 June 1820, 7, 14 April 1821.

<sup>72</sup> NAI/CSO/RP/1097 2 Dec 1820.

<sup>73</sup> Cliffe Leslie, ‘trades’ unions and combinations in 1853’, a paper read before the Dublin Statistical Society, on Monday, May 16th, 1853.

<sup>74</sup> Hughes and MacRaid have detailed how primitive trade unionism was often tinged with Ribbonism and MacRaid has shown how Ribbonism could ‘supplement’ trade unionism. Kyle Hughes and Donald M. MacRaid, ‘Anti-Catholicism and Orange Loyalism in Nineteenth-Century Britain’, Allan Blackstock and Frank O’Gorman (eds), *Loyalism and the formation of the British world, 1775-1914* (Woodbridge, 2014), p. 68; Donald M. MacRaid, *Faith, Fraternity and Fighting: The Orange Order and Irish Migrants* (Liverpool, 2005), pp 182-183; *First report from Select Committee on Artizans and Machinery*, pp 438-439; Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, p. 219; *Limerick Chronicle*, 20, 23 Dec 1820, 17 Jan 1821. The concept of riots spreading like a contagion is discussed by Williams and Bohstedt who use late eighteenth and early nineteenth century

1833 Meath source which described one branch of Ribbonism in the county as being ‘from a religious party in the north of Ireland’ and a competing system which was introduced in 1821 ‘from Dublin, which partakes more of the nature of the combination of trades.’<sup>75</sup> In Dublin, unlike Limerick, the tradition of violent or even extremely violent artisan combination had existed since the 1780s and this culture represented a social template which Limerick and Cork appear to have drawn from occasionally.<sup>76</sup> Even the related Limerick attacks upon the military, which marked the beginning of the series of violence, mirrored a phenomenon of ‘houghing’ of soldiers, which had existed in Dublin since the late eighteenth century.<sup>77</sup>

### Explaining where the United Trades fitted with overall events

The contention that the United Trades were part of a wider pattern of social unrest must be measured against the greater part of the evidence which suggests that their objectives were not directed by any outside agency. Similarly, whilst their campaign suggests some sort of vague alliance with a wide spectrum of anti-establishment groups throughout Britain and Ireland, the most we can conclude is that they were availing of a social network that ranged far and wide. They were opportunists responding to a general mood that spoke of revolution and social change. They undoubtedly felt that they were part of something much bigger than themselves but at all times they retained their own world view and values. The marauders of the suburbs who harassed itinerant workers, raided for arms and plotted a general ‘rising’ undoubtedly fitted the profile of Ribbonism and were certainly allied to the United Trades but profound

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Devonshire as a case study, see John Bohstedt and Dale E. Williams, ‘The diffusion of riots: The patterns of 1766, 1795 and 1801 in Devonshire’, *Journal of interdisciplinary history*, xix:1, (Summer 1988), pp 1-24.

<sup>75</sup> Beames, ‘The Ribbon societies: lower-class nationalism in pre-famine Ireland’, p. 260.

<sup>76</sup> Henry, ‘Industrial violence, combinations and the law in late eighteenth century Dublin’, pp 19-34; Henry, *Dublin hanged*, pp 60-77.

<sup>77</sup> Martyn J Powell, ‘Ireland’s Urban Houghers: Moral Economy and Popular Protest in the late Eighteenth Century’, Michael Brown, Seán Patrick Donlan (eds), *The Laws and Other Legalities of Ireland, 1689-1850* (Ashgate, 2011), p. 246; Vincent Morley, *Irish Opinion and the American Revolution, 1760-1783* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 92-95. There was an attack on an isolated soldier in Dublin in 1820 which resembled the attacks in Limerick in 1819 with the difference being that the hamstring rather than the face was targeted with a knife, *Freeman’s Journal*, 15 April 1820.

differences existed alongside similarities. Stark differences were evident in the language used by urban and rural groups. Outside of the urban centre of Limerick, in many cases less than a mile from the edge of the city proper, threatening letters were littered with bombast and invariably signed by the aforementioned Captain Moonlight, Captain Bone-all and Captain Stepwright.<sup>78</sup> The United Trades, however, never entirely abandoned the possibility that legal means could be used to resolve their problems. Whilst the United Trades waged their campaign other artisans in the city were seeking to invoke the guild system and eighteenth century protectionism with varying levels of success.<sup>79</sup> The United Trades certainly appear to have differed in their approach from this latter group and even attacked one master cooper – an alleged employer of ‘colts’ – who was leading a campaign to restore the rights of the Guild of Coopers.<sup>80</sup> However, they were not content to shun entirely the state and all associated laws, customs and notions of respectability. Their use of local newspapers to address concerns they had over employer practices was a stark contrast with rural groups who were content to remain in the hidden Ireland of clandestine popular action without a care for any written word that was not nailed to a tree or gate. The manner in which they interfaced with respectable society was indicative of a group that still had one foot in the shadows; their denials of illegality in the pages of the *Limerick Chronicle* were half-hearted – claims that none of their men had been amongst the gangs of three or four hundred involved in various attacks on employers were obviously disingenuous.<sup>81</sup> Spurious attempts to deny wrongdoing were always accompanied with long, detailed explanations as to why certain employers were in the wrong (and by implication why the attacks upon them were warranted).<sup>82</sup> Whilst this tendency to step

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<sup>78</sup> See Appendix 5.

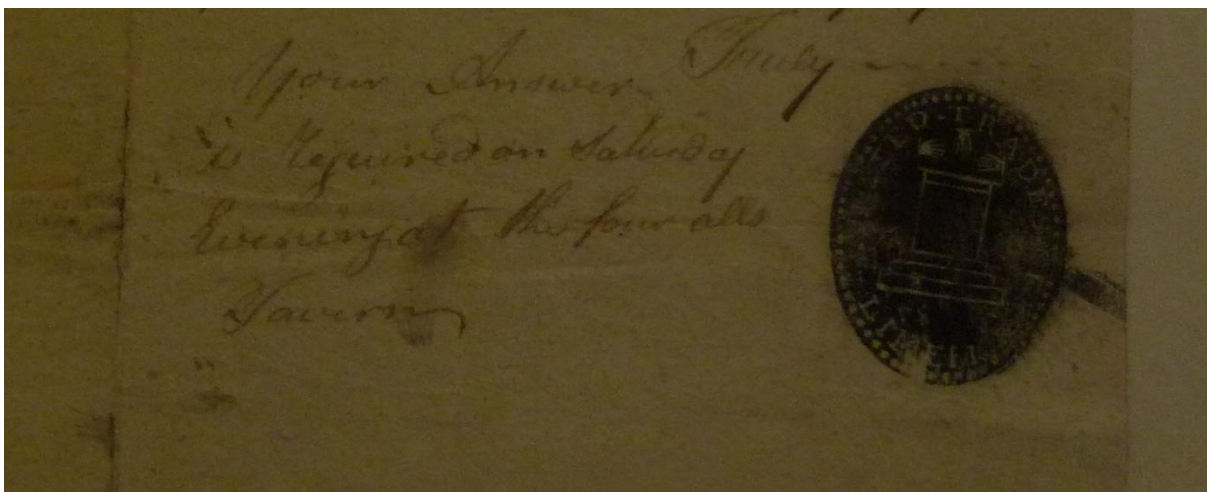
<sup>79</sup> Weavers, Coopers and even labourers sought to advocate in a legitimate manner. NAI/CSO/RP/1820/827; *Limerick Chronicle*, 25 Mar, 27 Sept, 14 Oct 1820; *Limerick Gazette*, 10 Oct 1820.

<sup>80</sup> The master cooper in question was Patrick Sarsfield who was attacked in February 1820 and was a signatory of a petition to restore ‘rights withheld’ from the Guild of Coopers, of which he was named as a warden, in October. *Freeman’s Journal*, 16 Feb 1820; *Limerick Gazette*, 10 Oct 1820.

<sup>81</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 Aug 1820.

<sup>82</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 Aug 1820.

temporarily out of the shadows differed from the practice of rural protest groups it was very similar to the methods of certain Dublin artisan groups who similarly often dismissed violent members as an unrepresentative minority, in contrast to rural groups who often boasted of such actions.<sup>83</sup> Close inspection of the one surviving threatening letter from Limerick's United Trades reveals details that further compound the difficulty of locating the group amid the plethora of illegal bodies and subaltern traditions at the time, with the official seal adorning the letter certainly the one of the most curious aspects of the whole affair:



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<sup>83</sup> The case of the 1829 Dublin murder of the non-union sawyer, Thomas Hanlon, epitomised the dichotomies of an urban labour tradition that would brutally deal with dissenters but still strive to present a somewhat legitimate front. The testimonies of a number of Dublin artisans to a Select Committee in 1824 were similarly meek and reasoned at a time when labour related violence was endemic in the city. The manner in which the Rockites gleefully used the death of Richard Going, a prominent law officer, to threaten opponents best reflected the rural tradition. *First report from Select Committee on Artizans and Machinery*, pp 444-475; Fergus D'arcy, 'The murder of Thomas Hanlon: a nineteenth century Dublin labour conspiracy', *Dublin Historical Record*, vol. xxiv, no. 4, 1971, pp. 89-100; *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 Aug 1820; Donnelly, *Captain Rock*, pp 95, 219.



**Figure 5 Official Seal of the United Trades of Limerick.**

Preceding the seal was a simple message to the master baker in question, Benjamin Russell:

The body of Journeymen Bakers solicit your aid in respect of their men that wants [sic] employment[.] [Y]our compliance with the above shall be gratefully [sic] acknowledged by yours Truly, The United Trades of Limerick.'

The finishing note to the letter contained the barest hint of a threat: 'Your answer is required on Saturday evening at the four alls [sic] tavern.'<sup>84</sup>

The fact that this group was later responsible for a number attacks on the home of Russell, including one in which his wife died due to heart failure, the softly spoken message

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<sup>84</sup> NAI/CSO/RP/1820/1097 2 Dec 1820.



should be viewed in the general context of the group's general tendency to be both a part of and removed from the state and official law at the same time.<sup>85</sup> There are a number of ways in which the seal itself could be interpreted. Firstly, the fact that they used a seal, as well as the moderate language, distinguishes them from other clandestine groups. Nearly all such groups incorporated language – often wielded with comical bombast – which aped officialdom and was a manifestation of their wider attempts to impose an alternative, shadow system of justice in place of the official law and order and the use of a seal could be interpreted as a more professional example of this practice.<sup>86</sup> Semiotic interpretation of the seal is difficult but it is likely that the altar or plinth which features is derived from masonic iconography and the three hands, a motif used by Ribbonmen, suspended over it represents fraternal links.<sup>87</sup> At the very least, the seal further distinguishes the United Trades from many other groups by the fact that it appears to suggest a depth to the complexity of their identity and the level of their internal debate. Furthermore, it suggests that the artisans of the city viewed their short-lived pan-trade council as something more permanent than it eventually transpired to be.

### **Legacy: the United Trades as a template for violent trade unionism?**

The United Trades were rendered ineffective by late 1821 and were never mentioned again by name after the year 1822. In 1824 a new body representing all the city's artisans, the Congregated Trades of Limerick, came into existence. Whilst the judicial, political and religious authorities were initially disjointed and ineffective in their opposition to the United

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Donnelly, *Captain Rock*, pp 93-97, 219.

<sup>87</sup> The open palm hand appears on a 'Master Ribbonman's Scarf' and the general outline of the United Trades image roughly resembles some local Masonic iconography. See Donnelly, *Captain Rock*, p. 101; William Stuart Trench, *Realities of Irish life* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1868), p. 47; see also the 1831 masonic image marked 'Royal Arch Warrant No 13', North Munster District Grand Chapter Website [http://www.irishfreemasonry.com/index.php?p=1\\_36\\_North-Munster-District-Grand-Chapter](http://www.irishfreemasonry.com/index.php?p=1_36_North-Munster-District-Grand-Chapter) accessed 20 Aug 2016. I am indebted to Liam Chambers of the Mary Immaculate College History Department for drawing my attention to the latter source.

Trades, by 1822 a better-organised police force and a more vocal Catholic hierarchy presented a united front against the spectre of artisan combination. Whilst the Limerick clergy were inexplicably silent when United Trades violence was at its peak – in stark contrast to the immediate and forceful opposition of the Cork clergy to the Union of Trades – the Catholic Bishop of Limerick, Charles Touhy, did eventually and categorically condemn them in 1822, specifying that the oath-taking and inter-trade dimension to the combination were the most deplorable aspect of the phenomenon: ‘Nothing but the suggestion of Satan could invent such wicked and diabolical oaths; for what has the tailor to do with the mason, or the broguemaker with the carpenter?’<sup>88</sup> With this in mind it is significant that a new pan-trade council of artisans was not only allowed to form in 1824 but was eventually tolerated by, and even approved by, the Catholic clergy and large sections of the political class in the city. Sworn to remain peaceful, whereas the United Trades were distinguished by their violence, the Congregated Trades appeared to be completely different to their predecessors. On closer inspection, however, the differences between the two are subtle but undoubtedly significant.

The United Trades had only ever represented one branch – undoubtedly composed of the majority of the artisans – of an artisan population that was struggling to establish an identity in the early nineteenth century. Whilst they appear to have represented the apolitical branch who followed an alternative legal code, there was another branch that posed as guilds as they sought to regain the legal status previously afforded to such bodies, and attended a local ceremony to celebrate the coronation of George IV.<sup>89</sup> Whilst much of this type of ceremonial activity appears to have been carried out by a minority group there were signs that the wider

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<sup>88</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 1 June 1822. The Cork clergy confronted the combination problem immediately upon its arrival in Cork in December 1820 and Catholic clergy in Britain regarded opposition to secret societies as one of their principal responsibilities, *Limerick Chronicle*, 23 Dec 1820; Donald M. MacRaild, “‘Abandon Hibernicisation’: priests, Ribbonmen and an Irish street fight in the north-east of England in 1858”, *Historical Research*, vol. 76, issue 194, November 2003, pp 557-573.

<sup>89</sup> The Guild of Coopers twice appealed to the Mayor and the Limerick Corporation in general to recognize their body and even for the mayor to swear in their Master and Warden according to a custom marked out in a 1685 Charter. *Limerick Chronicle*, 5, 9 Feb, 27 Sept 1820; *Limerick Gazette*, 10 Oct 1820.

artisan community was not averse to using legitimate means to address their concerns as well as involving themselves in constitutional politics.<sup>90</sup> Significantly, there was widespread support for the popular local reform politician, Thomas Spring Rice, and one publican described to the Chief Secretary how his business failed in 1820 because the trades organised a boycott when he publically sided with Rice's political enemies.<sup>91</sup> Interestingly, Rice's 1820 parliamentary election victory was marked by a massive parade which featured a number of trades, described as 'fifteen Guilds of United Tradesmen attended by their Masters and Wardens.'<sup>92</sup> Whilst this description was ambiguous and could refer to either the United Trades or to some sort of alliance with the legitimate wing of the trades, it nevertheless indicated that large numbers of local artisans were willing to support constitutional politics – as can be seen in the rich pageantry of trade banners displayed in William de Lund's depiction of the victory parade (see Fig. 6 below).<sup>93</sup>



**Figure 6 The Chairing of Spring Rice by William Turner de Lund**

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<sup>90</sup> Prior to launching an attack on the master coachbuilder Quinlan, the United Trades had sought the judgement of the resident magistrates regarding employment of men who were not 'bred to the trade' only for the magistrates to rule in Quinlan's favour. The weavers also sought the judgement of the magistrates over a similar matter with the magistrates agreeing to act in their favour by way of courtesy. *Limerick Gazette*, 18 Aug 1820; *Limerick Chronicle*, 25 Mar, 14 Oct 1820.

<sup>91</sup> NAI/CSO/RP/1820/1362 15 Aug 1820.

<sup>92</sup> Herbert, 'Chairing of Thomas Spring Rice', p. 134.

<sup>93</sup> The date of the painting is unclear. It currently is on display in the Limerick Chamber of Commerce.

The United Trades and the guilds shared one crucial objective which remained the principal *raison d'être* of organised labour in Limerick, namely the control of entry to the skilled labour market.<sup>94</sup> The two bodies – the guilds and the United Trades – used very different approaches to achieve a common end: the guilds sought legitimacy and – in pursuit of this – interfaced with the constitutional political system, whereas the United Trades was a product of the confluence of militant urban Ribbonism and the ubiquitous localism of north Munster in the post-Napoleonic era.<sup>95</sup> Whilst the United Trades were undoubtedly strongly influenced by urban guild tradition, there appears to be almost as much evidence to group the United Trades alongside rural protest groups as both were manifestations of a wider customary consciousness shaped by resistance to the rate of economic change and the legislative enforcement of such economic change that brought with it enclosures and labour rationalisation. In fact, although the United Trades apparently sought to uphold the tenets of the guild system, there is every reason to believe that they were simply an urban version of the rural agitators of north Munster, who placed particular importance on the employment of locals rather than ‘foreigners.’<sup>96</sup> The fact that none of the artisan bodies aligned to the United Trades referred to themselves as guilds (e.g. the carpenters were simply the Working Carpenters of the City of Limerick) or explicitly invoked the guild system to justify their actions, suggests that it may well have been a simple coincidence that their core principles and objectives resembled those of the old guilds.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> The objectives of the United Trades are outlined directly in a letter to the *Limerick Chronicle* and indirectly in a letter to the Chief Secretary of Ireland from one of their victims. *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 Aug 1820; NAI/CSO/RP/1820/1097 2 Dec 1820.

<sup>95</sup> The prevalence of localism in North Munster was commented upon by contemporary witness and has been noted by modern scholars. The *Limerick Chronicle*, in 1819, noted that ‘Foreign’ labourers’ were attacked in Clonmel for working below price and added ‘it is remarkable that a similar attack was made upon the same description of persons in this city on Sunday last.’ *Limerick Chronicle*, 9 Oct, 4 Dec 1819; Hick, ‘The Palatines: 1798 and its aftermath’, pp. 5-36; James Donnelly, *Captain Rock: The Agrarian Rebellion of 1821-24* (Cork: Collins Press, 2009), pp 88-91.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*; *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 Aug 1820; NAI/CSO/RP/1820/1097 2 Dec 1820.

<sup>97</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 10, 31 Jan 1821.

Nevertheless, a tradition was established and furthermore the artisans of the city continued with the precepts of the United Trades but invoked guild heritage as they did so.

The emergence of the United Trades in the early 1820s may be explained by the economic downturn caused by end of the Napoleonic Wars. There had been less need for a body such as the United Trades during the years of economic expansion between 1760 and 1815 as the increased demand for labour kept wages generally high and workers generally satisfied. The bulk of the artisan class introduced to Limerick city during this period appear to have been Catholic and it appears to be the Catholic artisans, profiting from the *laissez faire* of the late eighteenth century, who sought to reintroduce labour market regulation in the 1820s. The flood of blackleg workers into the city in the eighteenth century gave rise to the journeyman combinations in the early nineteenth seeking to close the door on such unaffiliated workers as the local labour market became more congested and economic expansion ground gradually to a halt during the post-1815 slump.

Whilst the evidence strongly suggests a rupture in continuity in the 1819-21 period, the ascension of the Congregated Trades of Limerick in 1824 was accompanied by myth-making efforts to suggest a seamless continuation of the guild tradition. Like the Guild of Coopers in 1820, the Congregated Trades went to great lengths to appear as legitimate, incorporated bodies and the elaborate ceremony it performed whilst bestowing freedom of all the guilds upon Tom Steele in 1828 suggested that it was – or was believed to be – truly the heir to the guild tradition of the eighteenth century.<sup>98</sup> This logic also suggests that the master guilds had completely absorbed the rebellious journeymen who were formerly represented by the United Trades. This is suggested by both the composition and the behaviour of the artisan societies in the late 1820s. A list of the Guild of Coopers in 1829 included both employees and employers and, similarly,

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<sup>98</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 24 Oct 1828.

the Guild of Broguemakers in 1833 clearly described how their body was composed of ‘about twenty-four journeymen... and about twelve employers.’<sup>99</sup> More significantly, the general abstention from violent combination – only infrequently broken by small scale disturbances – suggests that the Congregated Trades was a composite body guided by the spirit of the master-controlled guilds with a journeyman combination underbelly that occasionally surfaced in times of economic distress. The role of Daniel O’Connell and Tom Steele was also significant and the artisans of Limerick were one of the many groups throughout Ireland who abandoned illegality to follow the Liberator and his Head Pacificator (Steele’s pseudo-title) for the good of their country and their creed.<sup>100</sup> Whatever the reality, with the developments in the early 1820s we can confidently state that we have a starting point for the modern form of organised labour in Limerick, one that was to define skilled and unskilled labour groups in the city well into the twentieth century.

## Summary

This chapter has suggested that organised labour emerged in Limerick in response to economic stimuli but also, undeniably, in response to the revolutionary schemes of two subaltern traditions in Britain and Ireland. This, however, is not to suggest that any revolutionary spirit guided the designs of this urban combination. The most obvious effect of the connection was a desire to meet economic challenges aggressively and violently, but even here the connection is problematic for how did an association with a supposedly revolutionary Dublin-based secret society cause the artisans of Limerick to unite and attempt to brutally control the labour

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<sup>99</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 15 Dec 1829, 11 Oct 1833.

<sup>100</sup> Tom Steele’s role as Head Pacificator is particularly significant in relation to the Limerick trades. The manner in which Steele and O’Connell tamed many of the agrarian agitators of the Munster area has been well documented. Bernard Burke, *The rise of great families, other essays, and stories* (London, 1873), pp. 285-6; George Cornewell Lewis, *On Local Disturbances in Ireland* (London, 1836), p. 175. There is a good description of nightly meetings between O’Connell and Steele and agrarian groups in Clare in *The Tablet*, 12 Aug 1843. For a comprehensive account of how the O’Connellite campaign pacified agrarian groups see Gary Owens, ‘A moral insurrection’: faction fighters, public demonstrations and the O’Connellite campaign, 1828’ *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 120 (Nov., 1997), pp. 513-541.

market?<sup>101</sup> Mac Suibhne's theory of 'bastard' Ribbonism and 'true' Ribbonism bears some consideration here. 'Bastard' Ribbonism – which Mac Suibhne ascribes to the Donegal and American branches of the Molly Maguires but which can also be applied to the Limerick Rockites and, most probably, to the Dublin Billy Welters – describes the phenomenon whereby secret society groups with a purely local dimension and economic agenda appear to have been spawned by but, in many cases, disowned by or divorced from Ribbonism.<sup>102</sup> Under-Secretary Thomas Drummond's 1839 dismissal of Ribbonism as a publicans' money racket was a welcome counter to the hyperbolic accounts of a ubiquitous revolutionary movement but it probably goes too far.<sup>103</sup> In particular, his allegations that Ribbon lodges were responsible for no outrages – he claimed that such activities were planned outside of the lodge environment – and that in all such outrages were planned and carried out by locals, therefore disproving any

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<sup>101</sup> The Dublin Ribbonmen certainly appear to have had revolutionary intentions in the 1819-21 period. The evidence to support the theory that the Ribbonmen were revolutionary diminishes after this point and by the 1830s Thomas Drummond, Under Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant, was of the opinion that Ribbonism's revolutionary dimension was fictional and the entire movement was run for the benefit of publicans. McLennan, *Memoir of Thomas Drummond*, pp 259-265.

<sup>102</sup> Mac Suibhne's excellent micro-study of the birth of the Molly Maguires in 1840s Donegal and subsequent exportation to America, where they became the most acclaimed example of 'Bastard' Ribbonism, is an important work in this regard and Donnelly and Katsuta's work, when read in tandem, describes the instance of 'Bastard' Ribbonism in Limerick that became known as the Rockite movement. These two cases describe what occurs when Ribbonism was introduced into virgin territory, became detached from the progenitor body and underwent a name change, Holohan's account of the Billy Welters and of the generally confused relationship between, artisan combination, unskilled combination, factionalism, Ribbonism and mainstream politics in Dublin best describes the notion of urban 'bastard' Ribbonism. 'True' Ribbonism is somewhat harder to define but is best described as the secret society tradition that existed continuously in areas of where the Orange met the Green, in areas where migrant Irish formed communal and occupational bonds and in the mainly Dublin based lodges where impotent revolutionary aspirations were occasionally expressed. Beames, 'The Ribbon societies: lower-class nationalism in pre-famine Ireland', pp 255-257, 259, 263; Donnelly, *Captain Rock*, pp. 20-21, 100-103; Katsuta, 'The Rockite Movement in Cork', pp 278-96. Mac Suibhne, "'Bastard Ribbonism'", pp 186-232; Patrick Holohan, 'Daniel O'Connell and the Dublin Trades: A Collision, 1837/8', *Saothar: Journal of the Irish Labour History Society*, Vol. 1, No. 1, May 1975, p. 1.

<sup>103</sup> McLennan, *Memoir of Thomas Drummond*, pp 259-265. Drummond's contention that Ribbonism was non-political was rejected somewhat by succeeding administrations who insisted that a 'general confederacy' was 'ultimately directed to political objects, and especially to the ascendancy of the Roman Catholic Religion and its professors.' Brian Jenkins, *Irish Nationalism and the British State: from Repeal to Revolutionary Nationalism* (London, 2006), pp 138-140. Jennifer Kelly, however, contends that whilst Ribbonism was still deemed to be political in the early 1840s, the Dublin Castle administration were downplaying the seriousness of the Ribbon threat, dismissing the ability of the Ribbonmen to 'hold communication with any foreign power' and asserted that 'its main evil lay not in its potential to subjugate the established political power in Ireland, but rather in its ability to impede the progress of trade and agriculture and interfere with the administration of justice.' Jennifer Kelly, *An outward looking community?: Ribbonism and popular mobilisation in Co. Leitrim*, unpublished PhD thesis, Mary Immaculate College, 2005, p. 117.

theories of a geographically broad social network that could summon allies from afar, stands in stark contrast to Warburton's consistent testimony that much of the crime he witnessed in south-east Clare was orchestrated by a Limerick city-based council and often carried out by individuals from the city.<sup>104</sup> In addition, the evidence presented in this chapter suggests that an oath bound society was introduced to the Limerick area in the late autumn of 1819; a series of violence, urban combinations and rural arms raids, soon followed; the urban combination was in communication with, and expected assistance from, the raiders in the city suburbs; and not all the outrages in the mid-west area were carried out by people from the immediate area. There is every reason to consider Drummond's contention that outrages were not planned in Ribbon Lodges – Major Sirr's informers amongst the early 1820s Dublin lodges reported an emphasis on maintaining a strong network and preventing dissension – but we cannot ignore the fact that, in the Limerick city area, orchestrated violence waxed and waned in tandem with the ephemeral presence of Ribbonism.<sup>105</sup> Undoubtedly, there were economic factors which caused the city artisans to act as they did but materialist rationale does not explain why the same body of artisans decided to hold a peaceful, if somewhat menacing, protest march in 1842 when similar economic conditions prevailed.<sup>106</sup> The clear difference in this regard was the prevailing political culture: the 1842 Congregated Trades artisans were amongst the keenest disciples of

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<sup>104</sup> Warburton was adamant that a culture of disorder was spread from district to a neighboring one and that Limerick city, during a certain period, operated as a base of operations. At one point, he identified a Limerick publican named Ward as an individual who was administering oaths in South Clare but other times he was vaguer. On another occasion, Warburton resorted to patrolling the Shannon on a boat so as to prevent the movement of Limerick agents across the river. Furthermore, an attack on the 'strangers' at Roxborough, approximately one kilometre from the city, in February, 1820, was carried out, somewhat ironically, by 'strangers' from Croom, twenty-one kilometres south of the city, and exhibited a stratagem and a level of co-ordination that was common amongst secret society groups. McLennan, *Memoir of Thomas Drummond*, pp 259-265; *State of Ireland. Minutes of evidence taken before the select committee. .... 13 May-18 June, 1824*, p. 139; *Papers relating to the state of Ireland: viz. extracts of dispatches from His Excellency the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, enclosing communications from magistrates and commanding officers in different counties, May 1822*, p. 6, H.C. 1822 (423), xiv, 757; *Select Committee of the House of Lords, 18 May--23 June, 1824*, p. 89; NAI/CSO/RP/SC/1821/501 28 Nov 1821, NAI/CSO/RP/SC/1821/1609 27 Oct 1821, NAI/CSO/RP/SC/1821/1611 29 Oct 1821 and NAI/CSO/RP/SC/1821/1617 3 Nov 1821; *Limerick Chronicle*, 26 Feb 1820; Donnelly, *Captain Rock*, p. 107, 173.

<sup>105</sup> Trinity College Dublin Archive, Major Sirr Papers, 869/3 22 Jan, 19 Feb, 14 March 1821.

<sup>106</sup> The 1842 era was marked by high unemployment and a subsistence crisis. *Limerick Reporter*, 22 April, 17, 20 May, 3 June, 22 & 29 July 1842; Cunningham, 'Three Irish Urban Crowds', pp. 128-151.



the O'Connellite programme of peaceful political advocacy and this body was a clear response to O'Connell's Catholic Association and his dictate that 'whoever commits crime gives strength to the enemy.'<sup>107</sup> The precise relationship between the United Trades, the Dublin Ribbonmen and the British Radicals (the financial sponsors of a core group of Limerick activists) need not have been close or axiomatic to support a general theory of interdependency, and the actions of the United Trades may well have been in line with the general designs of the two aforementioned groups rather than being the actions of a wayward group of economic redressers. Whilst the accepted course of action for British radicals included large public gatherings accompanied by democratic demands, they appear to have expected far less cerebral input but far more brute action from their Irish colleagues whom they expected would murder and maim to such a degree that the might of the state would be primarily focused on the sister kingdom.<sup>108</sup> In this sense the United Trades, and all 'primitive' rebels in the west of Ireland were a fulfilment of British radical ambitions.

The United Trades arose during a period when the city artisans sensed that groups near and far were acting similarly and would lend assistance, when millenarian prophecies promised a new order, when the local magistracy was unable to confront them efficiently and when the

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<sup>107</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 13 Oct 1840; Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: war, peace and beyond*, pp 30-32; Laurence J. McCaffrey, *Daniel O'Connell and the Repeal year* (Kentucky, 1966), p. 202.

<sup>108</sup> There were a few indications that British Radicals hoped to disseminate their ideology in the sister kingdom but expectations of such acculturation were low and Richard Carlile's comment that 'Ireland appears to possess a spirit without the understanding the right point to apply it' reflected a common belief amongst English Radicals that Irish rebels had crude, unenlightened objectives but were nevertheless prone to insurrection. MacRaid, *Labour in British society*, p. 16; *The Republican*, 17 March, 21 April, 1820, 27 Sept 1822; Henry Hunt, *To the radical reformers, male and female, or England, Ireland and Scotland* (London: W. Molineux, 1820), pp 89, 339, MacRaid, *The Irish diaspora in Britain, 1750-1939* (Basingstoke, 2011), pp 116-117. It is important to note that the English radicals, or even English based Irish radicals, generally felt that money was required when one intended to foment disturbances in Ireland. Wilcocks claimed that Ribbonism in Limerick was maintained thanks to English money and ceased operating when the money stopped coming. *Select Committee of the House of Lords, 18 May--23 June, 1824*, p. 59. A. W. Smith detailed many instances in the 1800-1820 period when radical agents from Britain were sent to Ireland with up to four hundred pounds in bank notes to keep 'up a communication between the disaffected in London and this country' used large amounts of cash to entice rebellious Irishmen to lend assistance to their cause. Smith, 'Irish rebels and English radicals, 1798-1820', p. 84.

ability of the local artisans to provide for their families was hampered.<sup>109</sup> They were evidence of a phenomenon was illustrative of how marginalised young men were, as Jennifer Kelly asserted, bolstered by Ribbonism and became aggressive economic regulators.<sup>110</sup> Ribbonism was largely absent from the city area from 1822 onwards and the phenomenon of the United Trades remains as an indicator of an alternative type of organised labour to the peaceful and respectable Congregated Trades which followed.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Millenarian prophecies associated with mid-west Ribbonism during this period include those related to George IV and his estranged wife, Caroline, and those related to Pastorini. Many feel that 'Caroline fever' never reached Ireland but Willcock's most valued Limerick informant assured him that only for the death of the Queen in mid-1821 'he [Willcocks] would not be sitting on the chair he was sitting on.' *Select Committee of the House of Lords, 18 May--23 June, 1824*, p. 59; NAI/CSO/RP/SC/1821/1546 30 June 1821 and NAI/CSO/RP/SC/1821/1609 27 Oct 1821.

<sup>110</sup> Beames, 'The Ribbon societies: lower-class nationalism in pre-famine Ireland', pp 255-257, 259, 263; Kelly, 'Ribbonism and popular mobilisation in Co. Leitrim,' pp 209-214.

<sup>111</sup> There is some evidence that secret society networks maintained a link with the Limerick trades that was manifest during parliamentary election campaigns. There is a low incidence of illegal oath swearing in Limerick city and county in the 1830s but the frequency tended to spike during an election year, for example there were no prosecutions for the administration of illegal oaths in 1831 in Limerick city and county but there were six in 1832, five of which occurred in December when the general election of that year took place. No other county in the country exhibited such a correlation between the election month and the number of illegal oaths administered, in fact the number of illegal oaths administered in Limerick in December 1832 was higher than any other county. The trades acted as street muscle during the fractious 1837 election and were alleged to have assaulting a number of Conservative voters after telling them that their names were on 'a black list' which was in the hands of 'our brokers in the Country' who will 'murder every person whose name is in it – a man named Four-bones is on the watch for you.' *Limerick Standard*, 15 Aug 1837; *Limerick Star and Evening Post*, 1 Aug 1837; *A return of the number of offences against the law, which have been committed in Ireland during the years 1831 and 1832 so far as returns of such offences have been made to the Irish Government; specifying the general nature of the offenses and the counties or places in which they have occurred*, pp 10-12, H.C. 1833 (80), xxix, 411.

# **Chapter Three:**

## **In defence of the**

### **trade**

Local Limerick newspapers (by far the most abundant source of material for this study) as well as the personal correspondence of politicians, all give the impression of an organised labour community pre-occupied with politics.<sup>1</sup> By way of contrast, the surviving ledgers of the individual trade societies give only rare and oblique references to political matters. This chapter focuses on the non-political matters that truly did pre-occupy the bulk of the organised workers of Limerick city: maintaining control of the number of apprentices, the training of apprentices and the movement of workers in and out of the city.

### The ‘closed shop’ system

The term ‘closed shop’ gained widespread use in twentieth century U.S.A. where it referred to a business environment where the unionised workforce sought to refuse entry to all newcomers who would not join their union. Similarly in Britain MacRaild and Martin defined the term ‘closed shop’ to mean ‘that all those employed were trade union members.’<sup>2</sup> In twentieth century Ireland the term had additional connotations, implying that entry to a skilled trade was confined to sons of workers in that trade.<sup>3</sup> The ‘father to son’ model of craft knowledge transmission was something which appeared in many cultures over time and, equally, was eroded at different periods when economic growth demanded a more open labour market. In this way, the hegemony of artisan dynasties over their respective trades broke down completely in Renaissance Florence, and in industrial England.<sup>4</sup> Economic growth rather than economic theory was the common factor in these cases. Daniels’s depiction of eighteenth century Maryland highlighted start-up capital and the cost of tools as principal factors determining

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<sup>1</sup> Instances of such personal correspondence would include those of Daniel O’Connell and William Smith O’Brien. See Chapters Four and Five.

<sup>2</sup> MacRaild and Martin, *Labour in British society*, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> General histories of Ireland or Irish industry often touch upon the closed shop system in twentieth century Ireland. It was remarked upon as a background fact, generally without much explanation. Tony Corcoran, *The goodness of Guinness: a loving history of the brewery, its people and the city of Dublin* (New York, 2009), p. 35; Richard Killeen, *Concise history of modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2006), p. 173. Long has detailed the core values of craft knowledge progression in different cultures and at different times, see Pamela O. Long, *Openness, secrecy, authorship: technical arts and the culture of knowledge* (London, 2001), pp 72-101.

<sup>4</sup> Richard A. Goldthwaite, *The economy of Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore, 2009), p. 230.

whether a son would follow his father's trade or not, with no mention of any rules or regulations set by any trade body.<sup>5</sup> Equally, Burton's examination of the craft dynasty phenomenon in England locates it in the classic guild period of 1600-1750 when 'despite the dangers, every artisan wanted to be his own master' and, more to the point, most artisans had some realistic chance of achieving this goal and then raising their sons in the same tradition.<sup>6</sup> In reference to the tradition of apprenticeship in early modern Britain, Humphries looked at factors such as 'family wealth and connections' and noted that the sons of skilled workers were more likely to be apprenticed themselves. But she mentioned no inter-trade barrier such as that which developed in Limerick (i.e., the son of a British mason appeared to be free to be apprenticed as a bookbinder once the family had the right money and connections).<sup>7</sup> In all, Humphries concluded:

The surprisingly low frequency with which boys were apprenticed to their own fathers and the apparent interest on obtaining a placement that enabled boys to learn the latest techniques and be able to produce new products testifies to English apprenticeship's resilience to entropy. It was an outward-looking institution within which boys were placed to advance themselves and not just fill their fathers' boots.<sup>8</sup>

In short, apprenticeship in eighteenth and early nineteenth century England generally meant the acquisition of a new skill. This often involved a teenage boy leaving his family and moving in with a master, to whom he might have to pay an extortionate fee, who might live many miles away.<sup>9</sup> In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Waterford context, Bill Irish simply

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<sup>5</sup> Christine Daniels, 'From father to son: economic root of craft dynasties in eighteenth century Maryland', Howard B. Rock, Paul A. Gilje, Robert Ahser (eds), *American artisans: crafting social identity, 1750-1850* (Baltimore, 1995), pp 3-16.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Duane Burton, *The world of English artisans and traders: 1600—1750*, unpublished Phd dissertation, Purdue University 2007, pp 131-140.

<sup>7</sup> Jane Humphries, 'Rent seeking or skill creating? Apprenticeship in early industrial Britain', Perry Gauci (ed), *Regulating the British Economy, 1660-1850* (Ashgate, 2011), pp 248-249.

<sup>8</sup> Humphries, 'Rent seeking or skill creating?', p. 251.

<sup>9</sup> Joan Lane, *Apprenticeship in England, 1600-1914* (Warwick, 1996), pp 161-165; Humphries, 'Rent seeking or skill creating? Apprenticeship in early industrial Britain', pp 253-255.

states that the 'closed shop' custom was common, stops short of saying it was total, but contends that by the late nineteenth century the dynastical system of succession was entirely dominant in the shipbuilding trades.<sup>10</sup> In nineteenth century Limerick, apprenticeship meant that the son of a local craftsman would learn the trade of his father, probably live in the home of his father and, upon qualification, hope to gain employment in the city where his ancestors lived and died. Within the main trades, the whole process was dominated by wage-earners who decided who was to enter the trade and then oversaw the training as well. Outside of the main organised trades in the city, there were closer comparisons with the English model: for example, a number of turner apprentices (not a numerous profession, occasionally represented by the Smith's Guild/Society but not on this occasion) who came before a petty session court in 1835 appear to have been placed with the master and removed from their families.<sup>11</sup> In this particular case the principal parties involved appear to have been Protestant (the boys attended the St. George's Day School and the surnames of the two apprentices, Blackwell and Stafford, along with the surname of the master, Switzer, suggest a non-Catholic background) and almost certainly were independent of any organised labour group.<sup>12</sup> Significantly, the eighteenth century Bennis family (Methodist saddlers, although the father, who was Master of the Guild, was originally Church of Ireland) operated in a similar fashion with the son sent away to serve an apprenticeship with an employer, suggesting that the nineteenth century Protestant artisans who were outside of the organised labour community showed greater continuity with the eighteenth century guilds upon which the nineteenth century bodies were supposedly modelled.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Bill Irish, *Shipbuilding in Waterford, 1820-1882* (Bray, 2001), pp 94, 217.

<sup>11</sup> *Limerick Star*, 10 April 1835; Local Studies Collection, Granary Library Limerick, Rules and Regulations of the United Smiths & Co, 1861.

<sup>12</sup> *Limerick Star*, 10 April 1835.

<sup>13</sup> The perspective of the apprentice's mother, who hoped he would be a scholar, was an interesting contrast to the Congregated Trades' 1842 statement that acquiring a skilled trade was 'hereditary property which it was his mother's fondest hopes to see realized.' Raughter, *Journal of Elizabeth Bennis*, p. 15; *Limerick Reporter*, 12 Aug 1842.

Studies of the Limerick labour force in the mid-twentieth century referred to the father-to-son 'Closed Shop' model as a formidable social institution that was not only retained by the traditional skilled labour groups but had also been adopted by the two largest non-craft worker groups and a 1982 labour relations report aptly described the situation in the 1960s:

Butchers in the Limerick plant were represented by the Pork Butchers' Society which was founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was in some respects similar to the Dock Labourers' Society. It operated a closed shop with entry strictly along family lines.<sup>14</sup>

Whilst the artisan dynasty phenomenon was presented in Limerick as being part of the guild heritage, it is clear that along with the Pork Butchers' Society and Dock Labourers' Society – which did not descend from guilds – the tradition was largely a nineteenth century invention amongst the traditional groups as well, or at the very least was a guild tradition that underwent profound evolutionary change in response to particular economic circumstances.

This most crucial issue binding all the trades of the city together in the nineteenth century was first expressed in 1820 when the United Trades stressed that the employment of men not 'regularly bred to trades' was their principal grievance with certain employers.<sup>15</sup> This was expounded upon in the broader Irish context by Boyle who differentiated between the 'colt' (who had not served a full apprenticeship) and the 'stranger' (the non-local worker), emphasising that the former was unlikely to escape his pariah status whereas the latter might gain admittance to some societies for a fee.<sup>16</sup> By the 1840s the antipathy towards non-society men had peaked amongst the trades and a sombre letter from the Congregated Trades to the citizens of Limerick at large in 1842 (just as a particularly turbulent period in labour relations

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<sup>14</sup> Joseph Wallace, *Employment research programme – final report – industrial relations in Limerick city and county* (Limerick, 1982), pp 9, 23.

<sup>15</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 Aug 1820.

<sup>16</sup> Boyle, *The Irish Labor Movement in the Nineteenth Century*, pp 11-15.

was concluding) lamented the perceived disruption of the closed shop system and the favouring of ‘strangers’, commenting: ‘If you support the stranger you make us paupers’ and detailing the critical areas of concern:

Is the capitalist justifiable in making a number of prentice hands, who knows nothing of the art in which they are to be instructed, and which alone was always the privilege, right and custom of the regularly bred mechanic to do.

Whilst the author claimed that, ‘every guild is open and free of access to the apprenticed mechanic and fair applicant’, the letter also qualified the assertion that all prospective guildsmen were ‘free’ to join by stressing the hereditary nature of guild membership:

Does not the capitalist...deprive the legitimate son of the mechanic of that hereditary property which it was his mother’s fondest hopes to see realised by his attainment of it?...Where is this property that by the law of nature he [the artisan’s son] should inherit? Oh, it is plundered – the capitalist takes it away and bestows it on others.<sup>17</sup>

In this respect, it would appear the phrases ‘bred to the trade’ and ‘regularly bred’ implied that a worker not only had to be fully qualified but to be the son of a similarly qualified worker. There was also a general expectation that skilled workers should be ‘local’ but the precise meaning here is unclear. In Cork, Cronin states that ‘strangers’ were totally excluded on certain occasions in the pre-famine era whereas Boyle states that absolute opposition did not exist and that, in times of high unemployment, entry fees were simply raised.<sup>18</sup> There are relatively few references to Limerick societies charging specific fees to non-locals; the United Trades assaulted a number of smiths in 1820 for non-payment of 18s 9d but it is unclear whether this

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<sup>17</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 12 Aug 1842.

<sup>18</sup> Boyle, *The Irish Labor Movement in the Nineteenth Century*, pp 11-15, 27; Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, p. 60. Both Boyle and Cronin cite certain occasions where steep entry fees of up to five pounds were imposed by local societies.



was an entrance fee or a fine and the housepainters appear in 1857 to have expected one prospective member, who seems to have been an outsider rather than a recently qualified local, to pay £1 2s 9d (10s up front and the rest in instalments of a half-crown a week).<sup>19</sup> There were some implausible allegations, made by local employers, that local masons were setting their entrance fee as high as nine pounds.<sup>20</sup> Whilst this extortionate figure appears unlikely there is more definite proof that masters were charging prospective apprentices fees of up to ten pounds to begin training.<sup>21</sup> For much of the century it appears that a properly qualified artisan who joined and contributed to the local society ceased to be a stranger and this is best exemplified by John Lucas, an English Protestant who became vice-President of the Congregated Trades in the 1840s, and Thomas Hogan, the 1870 Secretary of the same body, who was born and apprenticed in Charleville and subsequently travelled far and wide plying his trade in many places before settling in Limerick in 1855 at the age of forty-nine.<sup>22</sup>

The manner in which this core principle was interpreted became more rigid towards the end of the century, suggesting that the ‘closed shop’ system in Limerick was not an archaic social custom that was gradually disintegrating under the strain of modernisation, but rather that it was dynamic and actually growing in strength as the nineteenth century progressed. In the early period it appears to have been part of a mind-set that was ubiquitous in the north Munster area, with every district and labour division united in opposition to labour migration (see Chapters One and Two). On a broader scale, the whole province of Munster – if not Ireland as a whole – appeared to be embracing the values of eighteenth century English patrician society as a response to the post-Napoleonic slump.<sup>23</sup> In this regard, accepting Bartlett’s

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<sup>19</sup> *Limerick Gazette*, 24 Oct 1820; Mechanics’ Institute, Ledger 97, Minute book of the Guild of Housepainters, 20 May 1857.

<sup>20</sup> T.E. Cliffe Leslie, ‘Trades’ unions and combinations in 1853’, *Dublin: Dublin Statistical Society*, No. 74, 1853, pp 11.

<sup>21</sup> *Munster News*, 9 May 1863.

<sup>22</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 18 Sept, 9, 30 Oct 1840; *Munster News*, 17 Dec 1870, 21 Dec 1892.

<sup>23</sup> Bartlett maintains that Thompson’s ‘moral economy’ and food riots in general were relatively absent from eighteenth century Ireland while Cunningham finds in the best examples of the ‘moral economy’ in Limerick,

contention that food riots in eighteenth century Ireland were a relatively rare phenomenon, it would appear that 'primitive' methods of social recourse in nineteenth century Ireland (including Ireland's 'primitive' workman trade bodies) do not fit a unilineal, evolutionary model but rather represent artisans' novel reactions to broad socio-economic stimuli and demographic pressures. In the context of aggressive localism, the pre-famine city artisans blended seamlessly with their rural counterparts – a scenario reinforced by the fact that the city in 1819-21 was home to a Ribbon lodge and acted as the locus for orchestrating agrarian disturbances.<sup>24</sup> The localism frequently referred to in the twentieth century undoubtedly had roots in the nineteenth century experience and was likely to be, in part, a response to the acute levels of poverty and economic stagnation. In such an environment, the need for a strong communal network was paramount and many of the pre-famine food riots displayed a coordinated and collective response that was evidence of exceptionally strong communal networks.<sup>25</sup>

Demographic forces accounted for an attitudinal shift on the part of the artisans over the course of the century: whereas the urban population expansion of 1760-1815 led to a close communal bond between the urban artisans and their rural counterparts, demographically static Limerick city developed a siege mentality between 1830 and 1900. The 1841 census showed a city with relatively static population and eighty-eight percent of this population was Limerick born (the census data does not, however, distinguish between the city and county of Limerick in this regard). By 1851 the population had increased by over five thousand (over ten percent) and the proportion of the city that was Limerick born was now 75.5 percent (the comparative

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Clare and Galway during the 1817-1840 period, see Cunningham, 'Three urban crowds', pp. 128-151; Thomas Bartlett, 'An End to Moral Economy: The Irish Militia Disturbances of 1793', *Past & Present*, vol. 99, 1983, pp 41-64.

<sup>24</sup> Donnelly's sub-chapter 'The ethics of localism' is an excellent appraisal of localism in rural north Munster in the 1820s, see Donnelly, *Captain Rock*, pp 88-91; Hick, 'The Palatines: 1798 and its aftermath', p. 23.

<sup>25</sup> The comparison with Thompson's eighteenth century moral crowd here can be made and Cunningham has illustrated how Thompson's theory relates to nineteenth century Limerick, see Cunningham, 'Three Irish Urban Crowds, 1817-45', pp. 128-151; McGrath, 'Riots in Limerick, 1820-1900', pp 153-170.

figure for Dublin city in 1851 was 60 per cent). Whilst the demographics might be seen to indicate the classic rural to urban paradigm where push and pull factors (including agricultural rationalisation and urban industrialisation) pushed up the urban population but, as is well attested by several broad studies, the pull factors were greatly outweighed by push factors.<sup>26</sup> The evidence that the Limerick-born population had shrunk by over two thousand while those born in the ‘rest of Munster’ increased by over ten thousand, suggests the closest analogy is with cities experiencing a refugee crisis rather than any pattern of industrial expansion successfully absorbing rural immigrants.<sup>27</sup> Qualitative evidence strongly indicates the pressure operating on the Limerick artisans, and the efforts of the Guild of Masons, amongst others, to raise funds to help members emigrate illustrates the contraction of the local labour market (though the bakers were said to be maintaining their strength or even increasing their numbers).<sup>28</sup> The population of the city that was Limerick-born decreased by a further ten thousand – a reduction of twenty per cent – between 1851 and 1901; the number born in the ‘Rest of Munster’ dropped dramatically by 1861 – a reduction of forty per cent – but the rate of decrease slowed after this and overall number of non-local born residents in Limerick city remained between eight and ten thousand (roughly twenty to twenty five percent of the total population) in the 1861-1901 period.<sup>29</sup>

The 1901 census offers the most accurate guide to the social profile of the city and it shows that out of 1,105 local artisans (this figure excludes those stationed in military barracks), 786 (71 percent) were born in Limerick City and 922 (83.7 percent) were born in either

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<sup>26</sup> Hourihan and Smyth both outline how the major cities in Ireland – Dublin, Belfast, Cork and Limerick – bucked the national trend and recorded population increases because of the push and pull factors alluded to above. Kevin Hourihan, ‘The cities and towns of Ireland 1841-1851’, William J. Smyth, ‘The roles of cities and towns during the Great Famine’, in John Crowley, William J. Smyth and Mike Murphy (eds), *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-52* (Cork, 2013), pp 232-243, 252-254.

<sup>27</sup> See Appendix Eight.

<sup>28</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 11 June, 6 July 1847, 10 Oct 1848, 2 Jan, 23 Mar 1849.

<sup>29</sup> See Appendix Eight.

Limerick city or county.<sup>30</sup> This latter figure is slightly higher than the 81.7 percent of the total population (excluding everyone stationed in military barracks) of Limerick city that were born in either Limerick city or county. Overall, while there was a numerically stable population of non-Limerick born in the city, there was also a steady rate of inward migration in the post-famine period, although the figures suggest that many immigrants left, perhaps emigrating, only to be replaced by others, meaning that the city was always home to a transitory population (see Appendices 6 & 7).<sup>31</sup>

A number of broad patterns are evident from the demographic data. As a response to the largely negligible growth in population, economy and industry, the rural worker came to be seen as a hindrance to ‘locals’ and expressions of indifference or even hostility towards rural dwellers in general were often expressed during in the later part of the century. It was at this point that the ‘closed shop’ system was further developed; the concept of the ideal local worker was specified and veneration of the ‘local man’ actually intensified.<sup>32</sup> Though the anti-rural rhetoric reached its peak in the 1880s and 1890s, it is difficult to ascertain to what extent the rural artisan was *actually* marginalised in Limerick city during this period. The 1901 census

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<sup>30</sup> This figure represents the nine main trades, Smith/Blacksmith, Carpenter, Baker, Cooper, Mason, Housepainter, Coachbuilder, Cabinet-maker, Tailor. Birthplaces that were recorded as ‘Limerick’ alone were taken to mean Limerick city. Artisans who were part of military regiments were not included. See Appendix Eight & Nine.

<sup>31</sup> The number of military personnel should be taken into account if we want to accurately gauge the number of rural immigrants in the city and the numbers assigned to military barracks has been included in the Appendix Eight table. We cannot assume that all military personnel were from outside the city but, as a guide, it should be noted that of the 1104 military personnel in 1901 only two were Limerick born, see Appendix Eight.

<sup>32</sup> For more on the culture of localism in Limerick see McGrath, ‘Music and politics: Marching bands in late nineteenth-century Limerick’, pp. 97–106; John McGrath, ‘An Urban Community: St Mary’s Parish, Limerick and the Social Role of Sporting and Musical Clubs, 1885–1905’, Jennifer Kelly and R.V. Comerford (eds), *Associational Culture in Ireland and Abroad*, (Dublin, 2006), pp 127-140; Denis O’Shaughnessy, *A Spot so Fair*, (Limerick, 1998) pp. 85-86. Although the Amalgamated Carpenters gained supremacy circa 1900, the indigenous union, still referring to themselves as a ‘guild’ continued to trouble the amalgamated unions hegemony well into the twentieth century. In an era where the local was increasingly venerated, local politicians upheld the complaints made by the Limerick Guild of Carpenters regarding some Dublin men working alongside the Limerick members of the Amalgamated Union on building schemes. On other occasions carpenters who had served their apprenticeships outside the city were held in suspicion. The matter eventually resulted in a court case which saw the Guild sued by blacklisted carpenters for loss of earnings and by unemployed members for lack of relief money. *Limerick Leader*, 8, 12 June 1940, 5 Oct 1941, 9 Mar 1942; *Irish Examiner*, 12 Dec 1941.

returns show that 35 percent of artisans resident in the Limerick workhouse were born outside the city – compared to a 29 percent figure for the overall city artisan population – which suggests that aggressive marginalisation of non-local artisans was either non-existent or ineffective when one accounts for the fact that the Limerick workhouse served the entire Limerick union, including a considerable area of the rural hinterland.<sup>33</sup> The anti-stranger rhetoric of many of the trades continued irrespective, or perhaps because, of the continual presence of non-locals within the artisan ranks of the city and this dovetailed neatly with the anti-agrarian rhetoric of the popular local Fenian, John Daly, to produce an intolerant and yet vibrant local identity.<sup>34</sup> The lack of urban dynamism – in a demographic, social or physical context – was evidenced by the antiquity of the built environment in all late nineteenth century southern Irish cities when much of the urban working class were living in decaying edifices in a historical setting, something that inspired the folk mythology and reminiscences which buttressed the local sense of identity.<sup>35</sup> The whole phenomenon contributed to the creation of a strong sense of identity and by 1900 Irish urban populations were perhaps distinguished by the manner in which their sense of local identity and communal cohesiveness almost matched that of their rural counterparts, all of which was reflected by the tales of ‘Fair Lane’ that enticed Henry Ford; the harrowing yet rich accounts of Dublin tenements; or the complex communal identities reflected in Limerick’s early sporting clubs and musical bands.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> See Appendix Six.

<sup>34</sup> Timothy Moloney, *Limerick Constitutional Nationalism, 1898-1918: Change and Continuity* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2010), p 49-53, 79-85, 191. See also Chapters Five and Seven of this thesis.

<sup>35</sup> An aptly titled article, ‘Old Dublin’, appeared in *The Nation* in 1885 and perfectly detailed how a dilapidated urban environment with a rich history can have a certain romantic charm. In addition, Thomas Crofton Croker’s classic 1820s study of southern Ireland details the many old edifices and sites in the cities of Cork and Limerick that inspired powerful myth-making (much of which he does not critically examine). Thomas Crofton Croker, *Researches in the south of Ireland* (London, 1824), pp 37-60, 185-206. McGrath, Sociability and socioeconomic conditions in St. Mary’s Parish, pp 8-11; ‘Old Dublin’, *The Nation*, 23 May 1885; Erika Hanna, “‘There’s no Banshee now’: Absence and loss in twentieth-century Dublin”, Senia Pasetta (ed.), *Uncertain futures: Essays about the Irish past for Roy Foster* (Oxford, 2016), pp 223-234.

<sup>36</sup> Ford’s imaginings of his maternal grandfather’s origins in Fair Lane, Cork city, partly inspired him to locate some of manufacturing operations in the city and is a classic example of how nostalgic depictions of an urban environment (even a poverty stricken one) can foster a sense of attachment and identity. Thomas Grimes, *Starting Ireland on the road to industry: Henry Ford in Cork*, vol. 1, unpublished PhD thesis, Maynooth 2008, pp

The fusion of ‘primitive’ trade unionism and localism has been identified by some social commentators as being a crucial component of the city’s modern identity with Mastriani making particular reference to the dockers’ disputes: ‘Limerick has often been portrayed as a city particularly prone to labour disputes...these depictions have further reinforced Limerick’s reputation as a provincial city resistant to change and slow to adapt to influences from the outside world.’<sup>37</sup> Taking the issue of localism as an agent of the city’s identity formation, Mastriani also alluded to commentators who referenced McCourt’s divisive ‘Angela’s Ashes’ to illustrate how intense localism in the early to mid-twentieth century ensured that the lot of a poor family in Limerick was made worse by the fact that the father hailed from Ulster.<sup>38</sup>

Many artisan leaders felt the need to establish their familial ties to the city and the further back an urban ancestor could be traced the better. John Meade, President of the Congregated Trades, stated in 1866 that he was ‘descended lineally’ from people who had fought beside Sarsfield in defence of Limerick (1689-90), while as late as 1943 John Reddan, carpenter and former Secretary of the Mechanics’ Institute, was able to cite a number of ancestors who were artisans in the city as far back as the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>39</sup> Local roots and defence of the ‘closed shop’ therefore went together. The early interpretation of the ‘closed shop’ system simply meant that one had to be a member of the relevant trade society to obtain employment and with this it was generally expected that one had to be the son of a society man in order to gain admittance. The skilled building trades appear to have been the most stringent in applying this latter principle and the stonecutters repeatedly reinforced the point that only sons of stonecutters could practice the trade whereas the United Smiths recommended that only

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24-26; ‘The tenements’, *History Ireland*, Issue 5 (Sept/Oct), vol. 19, <http://www.historyireland.com/20th-century-contemporary-history/the-tenements/> accessed 17 Jan 2016; McGrath, *Sociability and socioeconomic conditions in St. Mary’s Parish*, pp 8-11.

<sup>37</sup> Margaret Mastriani, *Dialogues of Place: The construction of history and landscape in Limerick City*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2006, p. 66.

<sup>38</sup> Mastriani, *Dialogues of Place: The construction of history and landscape in Limerick City*, p. 154.

<sup>39</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 30 Oct 1866; *Limerick Leader*, 17 May 1943.

sons of smiths should gain entry to the trade but admitted that there may some rare occasions when this rule could be broken.<sup>40</sup>

## The Tramp system: Intercity artisan networks and impregnable local labour markets

It is difficult to gauge the full merits of the aggressive protectionism espoused by the Limerick artisans but absolute isolation would certainly have caused general labour force skill levels to stagnate and prevented local artisans from keeping abreast of the events and developments of the trades in other urban centres.<sup>41</sup> The tramp system served all of these roles as well as many others and Kevin Kearns's work on Dublin artisans gives some of the best evidence of the benefit of tramp workers to the wider artisan knowledge base although Hobsbawm's work qualifies the extent of that role.<sup>42</sup> The intercity network which underpinned the tramp system predated the amalgamation period and there were numerous references to such a network in the parliamentary committees in the 1820s, ranging from the relatively reliable testimony that men on tramp were recognised and welcomed by most trades to the wilder assertions that the intercity network was strong enough to allow early nineteenth century Dublin carpenters to

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<sup>40</sup> The stonecutters throughout Ireland appear to have made strenuous efforts to reinforce this edict in the 1890s and the Limerick stonecutters referred to the national discussion and the local opposition they faced from the Harbour Board (referred to as HB in the minutes of a meeting) in 1899. Mechanics' Institute of Limerick, Ledger 116, Stonecutters, 16 Mar 1899; Rules and regulations of the United Smiths Benevolent Sick and Mortality Society, 1861, bound pamphlet entitled *Nineteen Limerick printings* in the Limerick City Library Local Studies Section, p. 16.

<sup>41</sup> Reid makes a particularly good case showing that certain specialised skills in the late nineteenth century British shipbuilding trade were only known to tramp workers. Alastair J. Reid, *The tide of democracy: shipyard workers and social relations in Britain, 1870-1950* (Manchester, 2010), pp 26-27.

<sup>42</sup> Hobsbawm contends that, whilst the British tramping system served an important social function, it differed from the European model in that it was 'not part of the final polish in the craftsman's education, but devices for meeting seasonal or irregular unemployment.' By contrast, Reid contends that tramping may have been somewhat 'customary' amongst recently apprenticed ship-builders in mid-nineteenth century Britain. Reid, *The tide of democracy*, pp 26-27, 128; Eric Hobsbawm, 'The tramping artisan', *The economic history review*, new series, vol. 3, no. 3 (1951), p. 301; Kevin C. Kearns, *Dublin's surviving craftsmen: in search of the old masters* (Belfast, 1987), p. 109-110.

hold field meetings before a ‘Council of Five’ which featured representatives from all four provinces of Ireland.<sup>43</sup>

The tramp system presents a host of contradictions for anyone attempting to describe the worldview of nineteenth century Irish artisans for it suggested a communality that transcended localism. How was it that artisans ‘on tramp’ were often welcomed openly by societies that otherwise accepted no ‘strangers?’ First of all it is necessary to define the word ‘tramp’, for it was a much abused word in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and both the authorities and the wider public appear to have been relatively ignorant of the artisan tramp tradition which has been well covered by Hobsbawn and Leeson in the British context though only touched upon, in comparison, by studies of Irish labour. All itinerants, regardless of occupation, could be described or self-described as ‘tramps’ during the nineteenth century and most commentary took the form of a response to problems of vagrancy by local authority figures, in particular, looking upon tramps as unruly and intemperate individuals who needlessly utilised the local workhouse.<sup>44</sup>

The exact manner in which the tramp system worked in Ireland is not fully clear and it may have been the case that the complex social tradition – including a vast network of friendly public houses and societies – described by Hobsbawn and Leeson in Britain may not have extended in full to nineteenth century Ireland where economic conditions militated against migration, although the tale of shoemaker Thomas Preston (later a prominent British radical),

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<sup>43</sup> *First report from Select Committee on Artizans and Machinery*, pp 307-8. The information regarding the Dublin Carpenters was presented to the parliamentary committee investigating the effect and suitability of the Combination laws in 1825. It was presented as credulous evidence by W.P. Ryan but Boyle regarded it with much more scepticism, see Ryan, *The Irish labour movement*, pp 47-49; Boyle, *The Irish labor movement in the nineteenth century*, pp 12-14.

<sup>44</sup> At times the reports make use of the word ‘tramp’ in a general manner and at other times in a specific manner, consistent with the way it is used in this thesis where it describes a tramping artisan, see *Munster News*, 21 July 1860 (tramping whip maker asked to leave the city as he is a trouble maker); *Munster News*, 9 April 1879 (‘tramps’ are accused of being a drunken menace to the city); *Munster News*, 27 Aug 1887 (large numbers of tramps apparently reside in the workhouse during the winter and travel for work in the summer).



who found it quite easy to tramp from England to Ireland in the 1790s, may suggest that the tramp system was stronger in Ireland before the post-Napoleonic slump.<sup>45</sup> Conversely, evidence for Cork city shows that tramping actually increased during times of acute economic distress – particularly 1847 and 48 – although we can surmise that the welcoming spirit undoubtedly diminished.<sup>46</sup> Leeson does suggest that a ‘casual understanding or ‘reciprocity’ did exist between trade societies in England and Ireland, and Scotland to a lesser extent, in the early nineteenth century although he cites frequent instances where this was weak or decayed.<sup>47</sup> The primacy of the public house in the English tramp system appears to contrast with the Irish system; certainly Leeson’s portrayal of the local publican as the record keeper and facilitator of tramp affairs does not appear to describe the how the system worked in Limerick.<sup>48</sup> Some trades were officially amalgamated at an early stage and there is evidence that others, such as the coachbuilders, had a ‘general correspondence’ between urban centres in Ireland and Britain. This view is buttressed by the account of Limerick coach body-maker, Michael Conneen, who travelled freely between the sister kingdoms in the 1830s.<sup>49</sup> Some degree of amalgamation appears to have existed in the tobacco spinning trade in Ireland and Britain in the 1840s and exact definitions differentiating the ‘stranger’ from the tramp, and even the novice tramp from the veteran, were described to a Dublin court in 1841 whereby a colour coding system designated the ‘stranger’ the colour black; the novice tramp, blue; and the veteran, red (Leeson

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas Preston, *The life and opinions of Thomas Preston, patriot and shoemaker; containing much that is curious, much that is useful, more that is true* (London, 1817), pp 9-12.

<sup>46</sup> Maura Cronin, ‘Work and workers in Cork city and county, 1900-1900’, *Cork: history and society, interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1993), pp 750-752.

<sup>47</sup> R.A. Leeson, *Travelling Brothers: The six centuries road from craft fellow to trade unionism* (London, 1979), pp. 122-132.

<sup>48</sup> Lesson, *Travelling Brothers*, pp 122-131. Limerick artisans undoubtedly frequented public houses and ‘drink’ frequently appeared on the expense sheet of many society ledgers. Mechanics’ Institute of Limerick, Ledger 116, Stonecutters, 12 May 1881, Sept 1894, 11 June 1895, 4 July 1895. Some societies undoubtedly held their meetings in them and in the case of the United Trades the publican was entrusted with a considerable role but this appears to have been an exceptional instance and perhaps reflective of the Ribbon influence on the United Trades. Smiths sought to stop meeting in public houses see *Limerick Reporter*, 6 Dec 1842. Pubs were often used as an informal setting for trade discussions, see *Irish Examiner*, 5 Oct 1901.

<sup>49</sup> Bernard Reaney, ‘A Limerick coachmaker and trade unionist, 1833-34’, *Old Limerick Journal*, vol. 16, Summer 1984, p. 26.

describes a somewhat similar system in Britain).<sup>50</sup> In the pre-famine era, at least, the system does not appear to have been a hindrance, overall, to local artisan societies. Indeed, the case of Michael Conneen illustrated perfectly that not only were strong, complex trade networks able to exist irrespective of official amalgamation, but these tramp networks were in fact vital to the overall health of the wider artisan population, a fact which Cronin summarised as leading the artisans of urban Ireland, ‘out of narrow localism into awareness of trade-union growth in the United Kingdom as a whole.’<sup>51</sup>

### The ‘failure’ to amalgamate and the threat of localism to traditional artisan values

The fact that Limerick and the vast majority of urban centres in Ireland broadly experienced this same demographic pattern is well known, but we cannot underestimate how significant this was in a social and cultural context and all social theories based upon the experience of British artisans in this period cannot be assumed to apply to the provincial Irish urban setting. The bare quantitative data tells its own story and one cannot fail to notice the vastly different rates of population growth experienced by Irish urban centres and their British counterparts.

<b>Irish cities</b>	<b>1821</b>	<b>1831</b>	<b>1841</b>	<b>1851</b>	<b>1861</b>	<b>1871</b>
Limerick	40,000c	44,100 *	48,391	53,448	44,448	39,353
<b>English Manufacturing cities</b>	<b>1821</b>	<b>1831</b>	<b>1841</b>	<b>1851</b>	<b>1861</b>	<b>1871</b>
Birmingham	101,722	143,988	182,923	232,841	296,076	343,787
Blackburn	21,940	27,091	36,629	46,536	63,126	76,389
Bolton	32,045	42,245	51,029	61,171	70,895	82,858
Brighton	24,429	40,634	46,651	65,569	77,693	90,011
Bristol	85,108	104,408	125,140	137,323	154,093	182,552
Devonport	39,621	41,451	43,532	50,159	64,783	64,034
Leicester	31,086	40,639	50,853	60,642	68,906	93,220

<sup>50</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 22 April 1841; Lesson, *Travelling Brothers*, p. 129.

<sup>51</sup> *Cronin, Country Class or Craft*, p. 71.

Liverpool	138,354	201,751	286,487	375,935	443,938	493,403
London	1,378,917	1,654,994	1,948,417	2,362,236	2,803,969	3,254,260
Norwich	50,288	61,116	61,846	68,195	74,891	90,386
Nottingham	40,199	50,220	52,164	57,407	74,693	86,621
Plymouth	21,591	31,080	36,520	52,221	62,599	68,758
Portsmouth	46,743	50,389	53,058	72,126	94,799	113,569
Southampton	13,353	19,324	27,744	35,305	46,960	53,741
Stockport	21,720	25,469	50,154	53,835	54,681	53,016
Wolverhampton	18,350	24,733	36,382	49,983	60,869	68,201

\*The 1821 and 1831 censuses record the population of the County of the City of Limerick as being 59,045 and 66,554 respectively. The County of the City of Limerick included the large tracts of agricultural land in the Liberties. The population of the city proper for 1831 was estimated at 44,100. No estimate for 1821 is available but this author has estimated the figure to be circa 40,000.<sup>52</sup>

Clarkson noted in 1925 that nineteenth century Irish unions had ‘failed’ to amalgamate and could, consequently, be labelled as ‘defeatist’ for allowing localism to stand in the way.<sup>53</sup> There is undoubtedly some merit in the assertion but the point has been made in other labour studies that amalgamation was not always in the best interest of the Irish unions. The stark demographic differences between the Irish urban centres and their British counterparts, outlined above, merely hints at the often monumentally different macroeconomic and societal pressures experienced by urban artisans in the two islands. The siege mentality of the Limerick artisans was, to a large extent, shaped by these very same broad macroeconomic and societal pressures which they had little control over and we can largely discount the unbalanced theory put forward by Daniel O’Connell and others that the aggressive actions of the Irish artisans actually caused Irish industry to fail.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Parliamentary representation (boundary reports, Ireland)*, p. 89, H.C. 1831-2 (519), xliii.

<sup>53</sup> Delany, *The green and the red*, p. 318.

<sup>54</sup> Boyle, *The labor movement in nineteenth century Ireland*, pp 43-44.

By the post-famine era, at least, the world of Irish artisans was not the same as that of their British counterparts. In response to increasingly differing economic climates, the Irish and British labour markets were diverging culturally. To take one example, the burgeoning Amalgamated Carpenters' and Joiners' Union was spearheaded in the 1870s by Robert Applegarth – the son of a ship's captain who trained first as a leather worker before half completing a carpentry apprenticeship and subsequently becoming secretary to the vibrant carpentry union.<sup>55</sup> To say the least, his entry to the trade differed significantly from that of the vast majority of his Irish brethren and Applegarth's open-minded view of the world and class conscious radicalism also set him apart from the typical Irish artisan.

Leeson identified the 'hungry forties' as the point at which the tramp system began to unravel and it is from this period that the unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the city became perpetually wary of the rural interloper. The fact that some artisan bodies maintained the tramp system belies the fact that their localism became more entrenched in the latter part of the nineteenth century with the building trades most adamant in upholding their own particular brand of localism. Paradoxically, it was the mobility of local artisans in the building trades – who were recognised for their skill levels throughout Munster – that threatened the traditional practices of the building trades.<sup>56</sup>

Whilst members of the building trade societies appear to have been content to work for employers outside the city, problems arose when nomadic builders and their largely rootless team of workers entered Limerick. Building firms such as P. Molloy & Sons, Noonan Builders, Maher Builders and J & J Hayes were awarded contracts throughout southern Ireland and added

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<sup>55</sup> A.W. Humphrey, *Robert Applegarth, trade unionist, educationist, reformer* (Manchester, 1888), pp 1-15.

<sup>56</sup> Jim Kemmy, 'Limerick stone and stonemasons', *Old Limerick Journal*, vol. 31, Winter 1994, pp 21-25; Seamus Murphy, 'The best stonemason in the country', *Old Limerick Journal*, vol. 3, June 1980, pp 33-34.

new members to their work force as they moved from town to town.<sup>57</sup> Some of these mobile workers represented a particularly specialised skillset – the stonecutters were the best example of this – that was confined to large urban areas and they were drawn to elite building projects, such as church construction, throughout the north Munster area.<sup>58</sup> The other main type of mobile worker was the by-product of intense labour rationalisation on the part of small employers – oftentimes former members of the city’s trade societies – who aimed to cut corners and offer the lowest possible tender for building projects. Charges against these latter mentioned builders included the use of ‘foreign’ or machine-cut woodwork; failure to pay the standard wage (generally thirty-two shillings a week for the building trades); and, most particularly, the employment of non-society men. The latter offence seems to have been inevitable as these builders ranged throughout Munster travelling to wherever the next contract took them, adding men to their workforce along the way. Somewhat ironically, Noonan, the Hayes family and Molloy family appear to have formerly been operatives and paid-up members of the various building societies and their familiarity with the Congregated Trades appears to have bred contempt, prompting John Hayes, builder, to comment caustically in 1889 that what knowledge he had gained during his membership of the Congregated Trades ‘has saved me from bankruptcy which is the fate of many Limerick builders.’<sup>59</sup> The danger that the small master presented to artisan societies in Cork has also been highlighted by Cronin who detailed the complex relationship existing there which saw the small master class provide both the leadership of the local societies as well as a fair share of ‘grinding taskmasters.’<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> H & E Ashe, *The Limerick city and counties of Limerick and Clare directory 1891-2* (Limerick, 1891), p 40, 45, 54; William Bassett, *Limerick city and county directory 1884* (Limerick, 1884), p. 23; William Bassett, *Limerick city and county and principal towns of Clare, Tipperary and Kerry directory 1880-1* (Limerick, 1880), p. 51; Guy, *Directory of Munster* (Cork, 1886), p. 654.

<sup>58</sup> Census figures show stonecutters and paviors as being largely confined to urban areas, Census of Ireland 1901 <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/> accessed 3/4/14.

<sup>59</sup> *Munster News*, 2 Oct 1889.

<sup>60</sup> Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, pp 4, 186-187.

These mobile builders elicited little comment from the trades whilst out of sight and mind but their return trips to Limerick generally led to conflict as they arrived into the city with a workforce that was a mixture of local paid-up society men, locals whose society membership had lapsed, and non-locals who were not prepared to join the indigenous society. The worst offender of all was a builder named Maher who appeared intent on hiring as few society men as possible and, to compound matters, was actually a native, not of Limerick, but of the north Tipperary town of Roscrea. Maher epitomised the worst aspects of the ‘stranger’ and was used by the trades as the perfect example to prove their general economic argument. According to reports, Maher was not only from Roscrea himself but so were most of his team whom, allegedly, he housed in Limerick in a purpose built ‘fort’, even going to such lengths as to bring all food provisions from Roscrea where he owned a shop, so that the city of Limerick appeared to gain neither rent nor custom from him or his team.<sup>61</sup> His actions and presence in the city were anathema to the building trades who had always maintained that they had a better claim to employment in the city as they ‘remained in the city and left their money in the city and had large families to support and rates and taxes and church dues to pay whereas the stranger, who was here today and away tomorrow, was no support to the city.’<sup>62</sup> This point was certainly regarded by many as being particularly cogent and it fitted part of the general argument, which focused on the dangers of monetary remittance that underpinned their support of the home manufacturing movement and Home Rule (and indeed Repeal of the Union before that). Perhaps even more importantly, many within the City Corporation were swayed by the trades’ protectionist argument which inspired them to agree to the ‘Fair Wages’ policy and develop an

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<sup>61</sup> *Munster News*, 7 April 1888; *Limerick Leader*, 8 Jan 1894.

<sup>62</sup> *Munster News*, 7 April 1888.

informal understanding with the 1890s Trades Council that local artisans would be employed where possible.<sup>63</sup>

An increasingly vocal cohort opposed the localism of the trades, however, and many of these were themselves dissenting artisans who were often hindered by the inflexibility of the local societies. One mason from Listowel wrote to the *Munster News* rubbishing the idea that a fully qualified mason from any Irish town could be considered a ‘foreigner’ once he entered Limerick, labelling the building trades of Limerick city as the most ‘exclusive and bigoted’ in all of Ireland. The Listowel writer stated that he stood by the Limerick masons in opposition to the employment of unqualified workers, low wages, overly long hours, and the awarding of building contracts to farmers; but he could not resist pointing out the apparent contradictions in the stance of the Limerick building trades who often worked outside of the city and yet allowed no outsiders to work ‘within the walls of Garryowen.’<sup>64</sup> Many of the masons, stonecutters and carpenters who sought to work in Limerick city in spite of the local societies perfectly fitted the ‘blackleg’ model, working for less than standard wages, sometimes possessing less than the required training and so forth. In other cases, however, men apparently *had* to be brought in as the local labour bodies did not have the requisite number of specialised workers to adequately support a large construction project. This latter could be deemed to be particularly offensive to the pride of the local artisans, however, as was shown in 1886 when the Gas Company appeared to have overlooked local men who lacked the specific skillset required.<sup>65</sup> Local artisan societies generally rejected this argument and the coopers reacted in almost hysterical fashion in the 1840s when a small number of Belfast coopers was hired by a

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<sup>63</sup> By 1894, if not earlier, Corporation building projects contained a clause in the tender stipulating that local employers paying ‘Fair Wages’ (presumably those set by the Congregated Trades in accordance with the 1875 Limerick building trade resolution), see *Freeman’s Journal*, 12 Jan 1894.

<sup>64</sup> *Munster News*, 15 Sept 1886.

<sup>65</sup> *Munster News*, 11 Sept 1886.

local business to introduce new techniques to the local workforce.<sup>66</sup> The very notion that the local artisans did not have the skill or knowledge required for a job appeared to cause some affront to the pride of the masons in the case of the Gasworks project and one senior mason informed an assembled committee of the Congregated Trades that ‘it was a well-known fact in the city that the members of the guild [of Masons] were sufficiently competent to execute the work at the Gas House and that they would do it as well as any foreigner or stranger.’<sup>67</sup> In this instance the masons may well have had a point but in other cases it appears that the ranks of the local Limerick labour force lacked the requisite skills. When, for example, a number of artisan building projects in the late 1880s were reduced to a snail’s pace due to the extremely low numbers of local paviors (census figures suggest that there were approximately four in the entire city in 1901) the local masons steadfastly objected to calls to bring in men from Dublin and by the 1890s they attempted to resolve the matter by claiming that they themselves could do the job just as well – an ironic suggestion given that the same body would attack any carpenter or stonecutter who dared to carry out ‘mason’s work.’<sup>68</sup> Their actions amounted to desecration of one of the most sacrosanct tenets of traditional artisan culture (namely that each man respects the roles and remits of his trade and those of his brother artisans) and earned them a stern rebuke from the indignant Dublin Paviors’ Protective Society who scorned the Limerick masons’ unbridled localism and denigration of traditional artisan values.<sup>69</sup>

If localism was threatening the traditional respect for the division of labour it also appears that, within the building trades particularly, the tramp system was under pressure as well. At the very least the language regarding tramps became increasingly pejorative and when

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<sup>66</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 5, 9 Dec 1845.

<sup>67</sup> *Munster News*, 11 Sept 1886.

<sup>68</sup> *Munster News*, 4 Aug 1888; *Limerick Leader*, 30 April 1894. The masons zealously ensured that no carpenter or stonecutter would ever carry out masonry in the city, see *Limerick Evening Post*, 17 April, 5 May 1829; *Munster News*, 9 Oct 1880, 16 Dec 1885. Kemmy excellently details the distinctions between the trade of masonry and stonecutting, Kemmy, ‘Limerick stone and stonemasons’, p. 25.

<sup>69</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 30 April 1894.



describing the methods used by the Roscrea builder, Maher, the trades stated that ‘Maher introduced a lot of tramp labour from Roscrea’ and ‘he does not employ the regular tradesmen of is city but prefers the tramp or doubtful workman’ before summarising the situation by saying ‘tramps and ragamuffins wherever they came from would be employed, and for half the wages that would be paid to the men of the city.’<sup>70</sup> Denis Gavin, speaking as President of the Trades Council in 1894, attacked the use of outside labour but supported the tramp system, stating that

Limerick men did not want to build a wall around the city – what they required was that if other men come into the city they should come to the Mechanics’ Institute and arrange to work for the proper wages.<sup>71</sup>

The surviving ledgers of the building trades from this period include Gavin’s own trade, the housepainters, and the stonecutters and they certainly show some payments – relatively meagre in number – to tramps in the 1880s generally in the region of two shillings and six pence a day.<sup>72</sup>

With all this concentration on keeping outsiders out of Limerick there was little coverage of the fate of artisans who left the city. Certainly, some societies such as the stonecutters offered financial support (‘road money’) to their members who were leaving the city and there was an old tradition of supporting emigrants leaving the country that dated to the famine era at least.<sup>73</sup> Some men undoubtedly travelled through Britain and Ireland on tramp

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<sup>70</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 15 Dec 1893.

<sup>71</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 8 Jan 1894. From the earliest period covered by this thesis there was official disapproval of vagrant workers, see *Freeman’s Journal*, 3 Oct 1814.

<sup>72</sup> On some occasions extra payment was given to a tramp to help him on his way towards another city, for example the stonecutters sometimes paid six or seven shillings to send a tramp to Cork. The stonecutters were amalgamated by the 1890s and this may have facilitated the tramp system within this trade, see Mechanics’ Institute of Limerick, Ledger 77, Housepainters, June 1894, Oct 1895, 27 May 1897, Mar 11 1898; Mechanics’ Institute of Limerick, Ledger 116, Stonecutters, 12 May 1881, Sept 1894, 11 June 1895, 4 July 1895.

<sup>73</sup> Mechanics’ Institute, Ledger 116, Minute book of Guild of Stonecutters, 3 Feb 1880. There is further evidence that the Housepainters paid ‘road money’ in the 1850s, see Mechanics’ Institute, Ledger 97, Minute book of the Guild of Housepainters, 27 Jan 1853.

with varying degrees of success.<sup>74</sup> There are numerous accounts, however, of Limerick city men working on building projects – mainly church building – across Munster in smaller urban centres such as Kilrush, Adare and Kilmallock.<sup>75</sup> In defence of the ‘closed shop’ mentality in Limerick Richard Gleeson, builder and Congregated Trades member, contended that ‘the Trades of Limerick had never worked outside their own city without first consulting the men in the town where the contract might be declared.’<sup>76</sup>

There is little doubt, however, that the labour force in many of these small urban centres was not organised enough to control the encroachment of Limerick workers and even in such cases where there was a small local labour body, it is difficult to believe Gleeson’s assertion. Additionally, whilst the trades were adamant that no ‘foreign-made’ item was to enter Limerick it is worth noting that the local bakers supplied bread to outlying villages like Killaloe (twenty-four kilometres to the north) and Pallaskenry (twenty-one kilometres to the west) and the Limerick coopers supplied firkins for much of the north Munster area, so much so that they were considered a menace by the Nenagh coopers who sought to keep Limerick-made firkins out of their town.<sup>77</sup> The same building trades who opposed country workmen in the city looked upon building projects in the rural hinterlands as theirs by right and castigated any farmer who sought to build a house by himself, and when the stonecutters of Limerick were ignored during a building project in Mungret they not only condemned the action but elicited the support of the Shanagolden United Trades Association in opposing the man responsible.<sup>78</sup> The situation

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<sup>74</sup> The case of Michael Conneen is an excellent account of a tramping Limerick coachbuilder in the 1830s, see Reaney, ‘A Limerick coachmaker and trade unionist, 1833-34’, pp 26-29. Cronin has shown that some Cork trades accepted all tramps whereas some were notably more reluctant in this regard, see Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, p. 61.

<sup>75</sup> Stonecutters were recorded as working on a church in Kilrush in 1861, on a church in Kilmallock, on Adare Manor in 1858 and 1870. There were some other reports of other members of the city building trades working in areas such as Kilmallock, see *Limerick Star and Evening Post*, 17 July 1835, *Munster News*, 10 July 1861, 3 Sept 1870, 16 Dec 1885.

<sup>76</sup> *Munster News*, 13 Nov 1886.

<sup>77</sup> *Munster News*, 20 April 1892; *Limerick Reporter*, 18 April 1868.

<sup>78</sup> *Munster News*, 6, 23 Jan, 11 Sept 1886.

can be compared to that in Cork where the trades, in similar fashion, applied the ‘closed shop’ system to outsiders coming to the city but were unapologetic about members of the Painters’ Society working as blacklegs in Fermoy.<sup>79</sup>

The presence of the amalgamated building unions in the later period presented an even greater challenge than the mobile builders; the fact that amalgamation only became a serious issue in Limerick in the post-famine era, or the 1890s in the case of some trades, further illustrates the degree of localism in the city. Tenuous links between the local masons and British-based amalgamated unions existed in the 1830s but the latter appear to have given up quickly on the Limerick masons due to lack of reciprocity.<sup>80</sup> There were many successful amalgamations, and by the 1890s the stonecutters, amalgamated with the all-Ireland Stonecutters’ Union, successfully shortened their Saturday working hours while the tailors, with the strong support of their Amalgamated Tailor colleagues, were able to launch a powerful defence of their rights in 1898.<sup>81</sup>

The difficulties faced by mobile artisans was particularly problematic in the building trades as they, of all the skilled trade societies, resisted the encroachment of amalgamated unions, particularly the British-based ones. This resistance to amalgamation on the part of the building trades was noted in the broader Irish context by Boyle, and Charles Callan’s comment that the ‘painters unions [in the 1890s] were active in and played a crucial role in the establishment of many trades councils and wider trade union bodies, but did not apply the same principles to their own trade’ was one that could be applied to all the building trades and, with the exception of the stonecutters, was particularly apt in the Limerick context.<sup>82</sup> Whilst the

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<sup>79</sup> Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, p. 85.

<sup>80</sup> Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, pp 62-68, 75-76.

<sup>81</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 27 April 1898; Mechanics’ Institute, Ledger 135, Minute book of the Limerick Branch of the Stonecutters Union, *passim*; Liam Irwin, “‘The log, the hour and the halfpenny’: a case study of a nineteenth century Limerick industrial dispute”, Debbie Jacobs and David Lee (eds), *Made in Limerick Volume 1: History of Industries, Trade and Commerce* (Limerick, 2003), pp 265-83.

<sup>82</sup> Boyle, *The Irish labor movement*, pp 94-98, 122-23; Callan, ‘A tale of two unions’, p. 41.

amalgamated unions facilitated the mobile worker they were stubbornly resisted by the majority of the building trades of the city. The carpenters and house painters, in particular, fought resolutely to resist the encroachment of British-based amalgamated unions with many of the battles being fought in the 1897-1910 period. The local carpenters' society (Ancient Society of Carpenters of Limerick) kept the amalgamated union at bay as long as it could and appeared to be in control of the trade in the city as late as 1898 but internal disruptions and the persistence of the amalgamated union ensured that by 1902 the latter body spoke for the carpenters of the city and was able to name thirteen local builders who exclusively employed members of their society and amongst those named were P. Molloy and J. Hayes who had both been unable to comply completely with the local carpenters' society throughout the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>83</sup> By way of contrast, the Ancient Society of Carpenters had never been able to name more than two or three employers who complied with their rules entirely.<sup>84</sup>

The similar struggle of the Limerick Operative House Painters' Society to retain control of the trade in the city escalated in intensity in the 1905-1910 period. Crucial to the ultimate success of the local painters' society was their victory over the British-based National Amalgamated Society of Operative House and Ship Painters in a 1908 court case involving a Limerick painter named John O'Ryan who epitomised the mobile worker hampered by localism. He appeared to have been a paid-up member of the Limerick Operative House Painters' Society as late as 1906 before he moved to Dublin to secure work and, not surprisingly, opted to join the Dublin branch of the amalgamated union to whom he paid his dues during his two year stay in Dublin. Upon his return to Limerick in 1908 he encountered problems as the local society informed him that he was twenty-four months in arrears and when he declared that he had joined the amalgamated union he was informed that he was,

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<sup>83</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 8, 10 June, 11 July, 21, 24 Oct, 23 Nov 1898; *Freeman's Journal*, 25 April 1901, 2 July 1902, 13 April 1904; *Irish Examiner*, 5 Oct, 11 Dec 1901.

<sup>84</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 8, 10 June, 11 July, 21, 24 Oct, 23 Nov 1898.

consequently, no longer a member of the Limerick Operative House Painters' Society, the committee stating that members of the local house painters' society were forbidden to join any other society.<sup>85</sup> The last point was disputed in court, O'Ryan arguing that it did not appear in any of the society rules. The painters were certainly not alone in taking a hard line with returning members and the 1870s Guild of Coopers imposed a thirty shilling fine on one returning member and informed him that it would take twelve months of regular contributions before he would reclaim all of his privileges.<sup>86</sup> In any case, the inflexibility of the painters certainly reflected the most extreme form of localism – which had been hinted at by the actions of many societies in the late nineteenth century – whereby outsiders were actively discriminated against not because they were unqualified but merely because they were 'foreigners' and this measure went beyond even the extreme demands of the violent United Trades of the early 1820s who admitted outsiders for a fee of 18s 9d.<sup>87</sup> By 1910 O'Ryan had re-joined the Limerick Operative House Painters' Society which retained its hegemony in the trade in the city whilst the National Amalgamated Society of Operative House and Ship Painters licked its wounds and retreated permanently from Limerick.<sup>88</sup>

### Representing the semi and unskilled: Expansion of the 'closed shop'

The rationale and urban mythology which underpinned the localism of the local labour bodies was fervently believed in but there is no denying, however, that much of this was merely an *invention* of tradition, particularly when one looks outside the artisan class. The Dock Labourers' Society (founded c. 1861), the Builders' Labourers' Society (founded c. 1894) and the Pork Butchers' Society (founded c. 1870 and later part of the Amalgamated Pork Butchers' Society) were notable in the manner in which they adopted the 'closed shop' system of the

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<sup>85</sup> Callan, 'A tale of two unions', pp 41-44.

<sup>86</sup> Mechanics' Institute, Ledger 49, Minute book of the Guild of Coopers, 6 July 1871.

<sup>87</sup> *General Advertiser and Limerick Gazette*, 24 Oct 1820.

<sup>88</sup> Callan, 'A tale of two unions', pp 41-44.

artisan societies. These artisan societies constantly reinforced their stance by claiming that non-society men lacked the requisite skillset and could offer only shoddy workmanship, but with the unskilled and semi-skilled societies this argument could not be so convincingly made and it is not surprising that the strikes and lockouts of the pork butchers and dockers tended to be more violent in nature than those that affected their artisan contemporaries. Fair wages and working conditions were cited as the official objectives of these societies; one case in point was an 1896 dockland industrial dispute where the Dock Labourers' Society officially objected to a large number of opposing blackleg workers – who had collectively formed a rival society known as the Steam Labourers' Society – citing the fact that the latter accepted lower wages, but the threat of a rival society was undoubtedly also a factor.<sup>89</sup> Dockers were able to argue, to a point, that an element of skill and training was required to safely and efficiently unload port vessels but related occupational groups were entirely exposed to the whim of employers and the Builders' Labourers' Society's vain efforts to keep out non-society workers saw them unable to obtain a living wage – as early as 1876 they sought unsuccessfully to secure sixteen shillings a week but were forced to make do with thirteen shillings a week in 1895 – as they complained bitterly that 'the workingmen has nothing to protect them but their society.'<sup>90</sup>

The new unions representing the dockers, pork butchers, carters and so forth, were particularly characterised by localism and do not appear to have recognised the tramp system that the artisan societies had maintained since the guild era. Whilst card-carrying carpenters, masons or bakers might be recognised and accommodated by the local artisan bodies the dock labourer and pork butcher occupational descriptions were largely confined to port cities and (in the case of pork butchers particularly) to the cities of Cork, Waterford and Limerick.

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<sup>89</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 30 Nov 1896. 'New Unionism' announced itself in Ireland in the 1889-90 period and was associated strongly with a number of semi or unskilled occupational groups such as dock labourers and pork butchers, Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, pp 66-69, O'Connor, *A labour history of Ireland*, pp 46-60.

<sup>90</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 16 Feb, 2 Aug 1895.

Consequently, there is no indication – in the nineteenth century at least – that any workers from another comparable urban society were ever accepted as tramp workers in the artisan fashion. Similarly, whilst the pork butchers were amalgamated with their brethren in Waterford and Cork there is nothing to suggest that workers commonly moved from one city to the other and as a consequence the semi-skilled societies exhibited an even greater degree of localism than the artisan societies.

The lot of the unskilled worker was perfectly encapsulated by one strike in 1887 which featured a number of general labourers – not represented by any formal union at this stage – who had been employed to help repair part of the harbour wall. It was one of the few occasions when employment was readily available in the city and the labourers decided to strike for higher wages – first demanding an increase from fourteen to fifteen shillings a week and later from fifteen to eighteen shillings. The harbour engineer eventually tired of their demands, dismissing the workers and replacing them with men from the rural hinterlands and in this manner the strikers were easily overcome.<sup>91</sup> Faced with such odds the unskilled unions could only rely on the fists of their members as they hoped to defy any attempts to circumvent them and it is not surprising that the Builders' Labourer's Society featured only intermittently in the 1890s.<sup>92</sup>

### **Objectively assessing the extent of the authority of organised labour bodies in Limerick over the workers of the city**

The stance and rhetoric of organised labour bodies in nineteenth century Limerick, particularly those representing the skilled workers, indicate an exceptionally strong system which featured

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<sup>91</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 29 March 1887.

<sup>92</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 2 Aug 1895; *Statistics of trade unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Eight report by the chief labour correspondent on trade unions, 1894 and 1895; with statistical tables*, p. 88, H.C. 1896 [c.8232], xciii, 277.

a number of different bodies authoritatively representing all the city's artisans under the umbrella of the Congregated Trades. In this respect organised labour in the city appears to have been stronger and more resilient than in other Irish cities, and certainly the fact that a trades council such as the Congregated Trades lasted continuously from the 1820s onwards is unique in Irish labour history. Weaknesses in the system, however, certainly existed despite the bravado and the often desperate attempts to present a united front.

The United Trades, of the 1819-21 period, frankly stated that they did not represent all the trades of the city but added that they were on good terms with those that were not affiliated with them.<sup>93</sup> The Congregated Trades were vague as to how many trades were so affiliated and the number of different bodies they could muster for public processions varied between ten and forty. The body was in its infancy in 1826 and its authority was challenged by three trade bodies prior to the general election of that year.<sup>94</sup> Such instances were noticeably less common in subsequent decades, particularly in the political context, and the decisions of the Guild of Carpenters to support merchant Francis Russell prior to the 1852 general election and the Guild of Tailors to oppose industrialist Peter Tait's political ambitions in the 1860s were the only other similar cases of such defiance towards the parent Congregated Trades on the part of individual trade societies.<sup>95</sup> There were, in addition, two occasions in the late 1840s and late 1850s when political divisions on the wider political stage resulted in a split in the Congregated Trades but the cohesiveness of the body during the Parnellite split was considerable as the body, despite deep and bitter divisions within the city as a whole, remained steadfastly neutral (see Chapter Five). In 1898, in response to allegations in the Cork press that the Limerick

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<sup>93</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 Aug 1820.

<sup>94</sup> The Mason's, Cordwainers and Nailors all defied the Congregated Trades by supporting Samuel Dickson during this election, see *Limerick Chronicle*, 21, 25 Feb 1826.

<sup>95</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 July 1852, 4 May 1865, 8 May 1866, Jan 1 1867; *Limerick Reporter*, 6, 10, 13, 20 April, 4, 8, 22, 25 May 1866, 17 Nov 1868. There were some rumours that the printers, and possibly a few other trades, temporarily split from the Congregated Trades late in the 1890s, see *Limerick Leader*, 10 Aug 1898.



Mechanics' Institute (by this time the term 'the Limerick Mechanics' Institute' had largely come to replace 'the Congregated Trades of Limerick') was disunited, a statement was issued that the Mechanics' Institute was as united as ever but it was admitted that the printers had temporarily left at some unspecified time in the past.<sup>96</sup>

### **The authority of individual societies and the relationship between society rules and the law of the land**

Unlike other Irish urban centres there are few references to two opposing societies representing the same trade in nineteenth century Limerick with the Ancient Carpenters and Amalgamated Carpenters in the late 1890s being the only obvious example. How extensively, however, did trade societies represent the workers of the different trades?

The nineteenth century trades of the city were adept at ignoring the fact that they no longer enjoyed any legal privileges relating to the trade of the city. At times, there was an attempt to appease the trades in this regard or, perhaps, to play along with the pretence. The old-fashioned paternalism of the pre-reform Corporation in this regard was well received, particularly Mayor Marrett's 1820 promise to the city's weavers that imports would be opposed by the city authorities and native produce encouraged. Additionally, the mayoralty of Andrew Watson (1823-26) was recalled very favourably by various senior artisans in 1833 as Watson had been particularly inclined to heed the advice of the local artisans and directly challenge employers of non-local labour and importers of non-local footwear (Watson had no legal duty to perform these actions and actually denied aiding the trades in this manner when questioned by the Municipal Corporation Commissioners in 1833).<sup>97</sup> In later years many administrators of law and order appeared more than content to allow the trades to sort out disputes amongst themselves and when a particularly fractious dispute between the stonecutters and masons

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<sup>96</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 10 Aug 1898.

<sup>97</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 25 Mar, 14 Oct 1820, *Limerick Evening Post*, 11, 15 Oct 1833.

came before a presiding Jerome Counihan TC in 1880 he stated that he would have preferred to have seen it dealt with internally by the trades.<sup>98</sup> This reluctance on the part of local officialdom to overrule the internal authority of the trades was actually lamented by the officers of the Mechanics' Institute in 1869 when the petty sessions court opted not to take up a case involving an assault on the Institute's caretaker by a few expelled artisans, with the officers in question specifically asking the court to prosecute these particular offenders in future rather than refer them back to the Institute.<sup>99</sup>

Local officials were not, however, prepared to stand aside when it came to employer-employee disputes. When the question of non-society workers – or related matters – arose, the trades sometimes resorted to subterfuge and evasion but more often proudly announced their intention of open opposition, citing 'rights' or 'laws' without specifying (or caring) whether these were customary or legal. Thus in 1860 when a journeyman coach builder was charged with using violence and intimidation against a master, the offending artisan made no attempt to deny the fact and proceeded to produce a copy of the society rules and explain in detail to the court the specific rules that the master in question had broken in a prolonged rant that prompted the prosecuting lawyer to comment:

I don't like to interrupt you but it is for your own interest that I do so; for I can tell you that out of your own mouth you are making bad worse and establishing a clear case of combination against yourself.<sup>100</sup>

The coach builder in question continued to justify his action using the society rules as a reference until the exasperated presiding Mayor cut him off saying, 'They may be your own laws, but they are not the laws of the land which we sit here to administer.'<sup>101</sup> An intentionally

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<sup>98</sup> *Munster News*, 9 Oct 1880.

<sup>99</sup> *Munster News*, 12 Mar 1870.

<sup>100</sup> *Munster News*, 18 Feb 1860.

<sup>101</sup> *Munster News*, 18 Feb 1860.

selective adherence to the laws continued to prevail till the final decade of the century, despite frequent claims that the trades of Limerick were law-abiding to the point of saintliness, and in 1896 the Bakers Society – again using their society books as evidence – proudly informed a presiding judge that they had used society money to fund a team of bakers to aggressively picket a bakery, to which the judge replied that ‘all the men of the society are civilly and criminally responsible for every act done during the strike.’<sup>102</sup> In the latter case the judge in question commented that he was ‘very much struck by the way they told the truth whatever the consequences may be but I am sorry to say – these men, though generally respectable – I am struck by the demeanour of them.’<sup>103</sup>

Certainly, there was a suggestion that, in this sense, the actions of the trades were indicative of the wider Irish recourse to alternative law and order or the desire to see direct justice triumph regardless of legality, but the manner in which the trades were prepared so frequently, blatantly and publicly to stand over their actions differentiated them from the agrarian redresser who was content to hide behind the ‘Rory of the Hills’ moniker. Indeed this difference was evident as early as 1820 when the United Trades used the pages of the *Limerick Chronicle* to justify their attacks on those employing outsiders.<sup>104</sup> Certainly, their actions and stance were the result of an unwavering belief in the authority of the artisan societies in the context of the local labour market – all of which were evident when a number of guilds addressed the 1833 Municipal Corporation Commissioners and admitted that they were not prepared to tolerate non-society men although they were aware that they had no legal entitlement in this regard.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 15 April 1896. There were regular attestations as to how law-abiding the trades were, see *Limerick Reporter*, 5, 12, 15 Jan 1841.

<sup>103</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 15 April 1896.

<sup>104</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 Aug 1820.

<sup>105</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 11, 15 Oct 1833.

## Trade traditions and entry to the artisan class

Artisan societies limited entry to the sons of artisans who served a recognised apprenticeship but this was not the only way to gain the skills necessary to practice a trade, although there is little clear evidence of how the trade societies of Limerick treated these alternative means of training. One of the main purposes of the Limerick Protestant Orphan Society (LPOS), founded in 1833, was to ensure that the orphans in their care were established in a worthwhile occupation and there are a number of references to such orphans receiving LPOS sponsorship as they served apprenticeships in the coachbuilding, printing and carpentry trades.<sup>106</sup> There is no evidence to indicate how the organised labour bodies of the city dealt with such workers and we can only surmise that they disapproved of such an unorthodox method of qualification and possibly harboured latent sectarian impressions of the LPOS. There is slightly more evidence concerning those who acquired a skilled trade in a workhouse, Murray Davis, representing the Irish Bakers Federal Union, claiming in the early 1890s that bakers trained in workhouses were routinely used as blacklegs.<sup>107</sup> Investigations of the industrial schools system in Cork revealed a situation that almost certainly applied to Limerick as well and those who sought to acquire a skilled trade by this route,

Without completing their education as apprentices, after leaving these institutions, however, they cannot be recognized as journeymen or practice these trades in Ireland, and as a general rule they follow some other calling for a livelihood, or must emigrate.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> *Munster News*, 29 Mar 1858, 4 April 1860; *Limerick Chronicle*, 8 July 1865, 9 Mar, 5 Oct 1871, 4 April 1872, 3 April 1879; *Irish Independent*, 22 July 2003.

<sup>107</sup> *Royal Commission on Labour. Digest of the evidence taken before group C. of the Royal Commission on Labour. Volume III. Textile, clothing, chemical, building, and miscellaneous trades*, p. 68, 1893-94 [c.6894-xii], xxxiv, 781.

<sup>108</sup> United States Bureau of Foreign Commerce, *Trade guilds of Europe: reports from the consuls of the United States on the trade guilds of Europe* (Washington, 1885), p. 46.

The issue of technical education, increasingly available in the 1890s due to increased funding, was more vexed, and more of an affront and threat to the values and hegemony of the trades.<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, rather than opposing the issue outright, the trades approached the question of technical education and scientific instruction tentatively. Even in late nineteenth century Limerick craft knowledge was generally expected to be kept within the trade society – a legacy of the guild era when such knowledge was referred to as ‘the mysteries’ of the guild.<sup>110</sup> There seems to have been general support given to the proposed role that technical education was to have in the training of artisan apprentices. Indeed, with the Plumbers’ Society – representing a trade that did not have the guild heritage or associated tradition of dynastic succession that others did – it was generally felt that apprentices *had* to have been educated in a technical educational institution if they wanted to be recognised by the society. Many of the traditional trades were only paying lip service to the issue, however, and appeared to have been mindful of the fact that the fundamentals of the ‘closed shop’ were potentially undermined by these centres of education which could lead to an open labour market replacing the form of hereditary succession that prevailed. There were suggestions of open hostility to such education at times and during a dispute between the Guild of Harness-makers and an employer named John O’Donnell in 1894 it was implied that a ‘school’ in William Street was supplying the employer in question with non-society men.<sup>111</sup> Other voices from within the unionised artisan population suggested that the preponderance of theory-based academic education in these technical schools was of no help to the budding artisan, with one stonecutter named Clohessy remarking that ‘they got periodical outbursts on a certain system of education but he thought the man who

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<sup>109</sup> The promotion of technical education for workers gained pace following the 1885 Artisans’ Dublin Exhibition when increased funding was afforded to the cause. John Coolahan, *Irish education: Its history and structure* (Dublin, 1981), p 86.

<sup>110</sup> The term ‘mystery’ was still relevant in the Irish context well into the nineteenth century and there are a number of references to the ‘mysteries’ or the ‘art and mysteries’ of guilds representing the shoemakers and tailors in various Irish cities, see Irish, *Shipbuilding in Waterford*, p. 94; *Freeman’s Journal*, 31 Oct, 3 Nov 1845, 26 Jan 1846. For a broader discussion of the concept see Pamela O. Long, *Openness, secrecy, authorship: technical arts and the culture of knowledge* (London, 2001), pp 72-101.

<sup>111</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 5 Nov 1894.

would get employment for their chisels and saws and other instruments would go further towards relieving the wants of the city than by teaching a man how many thorns would cover an acre of furze.’<sup>112</sup>

This latter argument was one that had greeted the proponents of the early Mechanics’ Institute in the 1820s, 30s and 40s and the Literary Institutes that periodically flourished in the mid-nineteenth century. The ephemeral burst of middle-class enthusiasm for the early Mechanics’ Institute was not sustained and had dissipated by the 1830s but in the wake of this came the Limerick National School of Science and Mechanics (also referred to as the Limerick National Academy) which was sponsored by prominent employers such as the celebrated architect/builder James Paine, Henry Owens (master cabinet-maker and upholsterer) and John Fogarty (architect/builder). The annual proposed cost of running the institution came to £234 (employers were to pay two-thirds of these costs and the operatives the remainder) and children were to be admissible for five shillings a quarter and instruction was to be confined to ‘reading, writing, grammar, history, arithmetic, book-keeping, geometry, mensuration, algebra, geography and uses of the globe.’ Despite the good initial intentions, it did not make any lasting impact.<sup>113</sup> Patrick McDonnell, cordwainer and early Congregated Trades activist, had become secretary of the Mechanics’ Institute by 1835 and appeared somewhat sceptical of the new middle-class project, cautioning that

Unless the committee were active and energetic that all their efforts would be in vain, that from his own experience he could bear witness to the mischief created by apathy

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<sup>112</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 8 Jan 1894.

<sup>113</sup> Byrne makes the point that the intentions of patrons was not simply to instruct but to ‘encourage a more firm commitment to work’ and to promote temperate and orderly manners. Byrne, ‘Mechanics’ Institutes in Ireland’, pp 32-47; *Limerick Star*, 13 Nov 1835, 8, 11 Dec 1835. *Select Committee on Diocesan and Foundation Schools, and System of Education in Ireland, Report, Minutes of Evidence, Appendices, Index, Part II on Education in Ireland. Part II*, pp 94-95, 1836 (586), xiii, 583.

and indifference of committees, twice had the Mechanics' Institute fallen by criminal apathy.<sup>114</sup>

McDonnell's fears seem to have been realised as the Limerick National Academy failed to make any impact on the local artisan populations. In truth, given that it was to be run by employers – by contrast early patrons of the Mechanics' Institute were from the professional, landed and merchant class – one could have expected a conflict of interest developing, particularly since the secretary of the Academy, John Fogarty, was involved in a bitter trade dispute with the building trades in the 1840s.<sup>115</sup> Given that the establishment which Patrick McDonnell was involved in, the Mechanics' Institute, was run on a relatively modest £79 per annum and was still regularly running into difficulties, McDonnell could be forgiven for being slightly cynical about the latest local effort to enlighten the 'great unwashed', yet he did not discount the notion that such a type of education could serve a useful purpose but again cautioned as to how such an institute should be composed:

Have none on your committee but working-men – men who will take an interest in the welfare of the institution, and great is the responsibility of those who undertake such a duty. They will have to inspect and watch over the conduct of Masters and Pupils.

One expects, however, that such an institute would still have required middle-class patronage and it was abundantly clear that members of that class were extremely reluctant to advance cash to an artisan-run establishment and even their political ally, William Smith O'Brien, recommended financially supporting the Mechanics' Institute with the caveat that this be done 'without giving perhaps money, which might possibly be subject to mal-administration and misappropriation.'<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> *Limerick Star*, 13 Nov 1835.

<sup>115</sup> *Limerick Star*, 8 Dec 1835; *Limerick Reporter*, 2 April 1841, 9 April 1844.

<sup>116</sup> *Select Committee on Diocesan and Foundation Schools, and System of Education in Ireland*, p. 104.

The tension between the middle-class patrons of the Mechanics' Institute and the artisans they wished to instruct extended beyond the fickleness of the patrons and included the type of instruction itself. Whereas McDonnell's vision hinted at practical instruction overseen by senior artisans, many patrons appeared to have desired something that would enlighten rather than merely instruct and scientific lectures of questionable relevance were prioritised. The apathy, frustration and outright boredom that often greeted the high-minded lectures on general education was typified by one artisan in 1851 who, after sitting through a talk delivered by one Dr Kavanagh on aspects of vegetation, declared that *he* wanted to deliver a talk on 'the rights of labour.'<sup>117</sup> It is not surprising – when one considers the comment by the stonecutter Clohessy – that those involved in delivering technical education later in the century complained of the extremely poor attendance of young apprentices from the building trades.<sup>118</sup> Whilst the middle-class philanthropic spirit that guided the early Mechanics' Institute had relinquished control of the enterprise to the trades by the mid-nineteenth century, the same was not to be repeated with technical education. Much can be surmised from the fact that the local branch of the Amalgamated Carpenters was the most enthusiastic of the trades societies regarding technical education during the early phase of its advancement in the city, although by 1903 there was a repetition of patterns seen in the 1820s and 30s when the Mechanics' Institute complained of its lack of influence in determining the nature of the technical education in the city.<sup>119</sup>

## Summary

As discussed in this chapter, the code which defined Limerick's organised labour appeared, on a superficial level, to be ancient and rooted in tradition. In some sense this is true, but a detailed

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<sup>117</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 14 Mar 1851.

<sup>118</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 31 Oct 1898.

<sup>119</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 11 Feb 1903.



investigation reveals much of this ‘tradition’ to be a nineteenth century, reactionary response to economic conditions. The life of Mick ‘Bust-the-guts’ McNamara, the murderous tailor who encapsulated the primal dawn of the Limerick organised labour tradition, gives us some indication of the nature of the private laws of the trades (see Chapter Two for more on McNamara’s role with the United Trades). In 1821 McNamara was prepared to kill in defence of the precepts of the Limerick trades; years later Mick became a master tailor in Australia, after his consequent transportation, where he found himself faced with a striking workforce who objected that his business practices were not in accordance with their society rules.<sup>120</sup> McNamara’s story was not an isolated one – the majority of the objectionable builders mentioned in this chapter were themselves former members of the Congregated Trades. This was despite the trade societies’ attempts to carry the flame of the old guild tradition and to genuinely govern their respective trades in entirety and include, or at least accommodate, employers. The case of the Carrick family most accurately established the limits of the artisan ‘guild’ traditions. Charles I. Carrick was Secretary of the Congregated Trades in the early 1860s and was foremost amongst the myth-makers who embellished the history of the nineteenth century organised labour bodies: he was appointed Secretary of the Guild of House Painters in a ceremony that not only referenced guild heritage but actually referred to the trade body as ‘The Guild of St. Luke’ and he was once praised by an admirer for his efforts ‘to sustain the ancient and patriotic character of the “Congregated Trades of Limerick.”’<sup>121</sup> He was honoured with a testimonial in recognition of the work he did on behalf of the Congregated Trades of Limerick and was even honoured with a praise poem, penned by Michael Hogan (the

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<sup>120</sup> O’Mahony & Thompson, *Poverty to promise*, pp 91-94; Finn, *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne*, pp 941-42.

<sup>121</sup> *Munster News*, 19 Jan 1861, 11 Jan 1865. Carrick’s use of archaic guild language is recorded in the private correspondences of his own trade society and, whilst chairing an 1853 meeting, he referred to the society officers as ‘The Master’, ‘The Secretary’ and ‘The Warden’ at a time when other bodies had switched to using President, Secretary and Treasurer. The Guild of House Painters themselves began using President, Secretary and Treasurer in the early 1860s when Carrick had switched his focus from the Guild to the Congregated Trades. Mechanics’ Institute, Ledger 97, Minute book of the Guild of Housepainters, 29 Jan 1853; Ledger 68, Rules and Regulations of the Guild of House Painters, 28 April 1861.

‘Bard of Thomond’).<sup>122</sup> Carrick’s tenure at the helm of the Guild of House Painters had seen that body make strong efforts to fully govern the trade rather than simply act as a wage-earners trade union: members who failed to attend work were fined and employers in need of more workers than the society could supply were given permission to take on non-society men.<sup>123</sup> Given the fact that the Limerick trades strongly prioritised the sanctity of artisan lineage one would have expected Charles’s son Thomas to continue in a similar vein, but whilst Thomas appears to have joined the Guild of House Painters at one point (in fact there is no proof that he resigned or was expelled) he was considered a menace by the majority of the 1890s building trades – employing untrained men and refusing to pay standard wages.<sup>124</sup> Charles’s second son, Charles J., died in his twenties whilst training to be a veterinarian and Charles I. himself does not appear to have been close to the society in his final years and his gravestone records that he had been ‘Spirit Dealer’ in life.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, he went to his grave as the possessor of a significant quantity of memorabilia and guild artefacts pertaining to the culture of the Congregated Trades and the Guild of House Painters which was kept by the family until 1950.<sup>126</sup> Clearly it was possible for an artisan family, even one that epitomised the ‘tradition’, to leave and, alternatively, it was possible for a family like the Hogans (see the case of Thomas Hogan above) to relocate from Cork and become embedded in a tradition that prioritised localism. The organised labour system in Limerick was one that could only truly accommodate

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<sup>122</sup> *Munster News*, 14 Dec 1864, 4, 11 Jan, 15 Mar, 29 April 1865; Jim Kemmy Municipal Museum, Identifier: 0000.1724, [http://museum.limerick.ie/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object\\_id/1721](http://museum.limerick.ie/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/1721) accessed 10 Dec 2016.

<sup>123</sup> Mechanics’ Institute, Ledger 97, Minute book of the Guild of Housepainters, 29 Jan 1853; Ledger 68, Rules and Regulations of the Guild of House Painters, 28 April 1861; Ledger 117, Minute book of the Guild of Housepainters, 20 Aug 1872.

<sup>124</sup> Find a grave website, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=168453992&ref=acom> accessed 10 Dec 2016; *Limerick Leader*, 2, 12, 14 Aug 1895.

<sup>125</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 19 Mar 1901; Find a grave website, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=168453992&ref=acom> accessed 10 Dec 2016.

<sup>126</sup> These items were given to the Limerick City Museum by Michael Carrick, a grandson of Charles I., in 1950. They included an ornate wooden mace; an illuminated scroll with embedded photographs of Congregated Trades officers, including Charles I. himself (see Fig. 8 in Chapter Five); a seal of the Guild of Chandlers, dated 1461; and an address to William Smith O’Brien. The entire collection is now in possession of the Jim Kemmy Limerick Museum. *Limerick Leader*, 20 March 1950.

the wage-earner; it was the tool of the working man who looked for unity with his peers in a forbidding environment. If it wore the guise of eighteenth century guilds it was simply a means to an end.

The traditional craft unions of Britain were disrupted, though never eradicated, by the process of industrialisation as the workshop was superseded by the factory and mill. The latter contained a workforce that was inevitably ruled over by a paternalistic industrialist who not only refused to suffer the presence of a local union, but, in the slightly hyperbolic words of Thompson, demanded ‘a transformation of the human spirit’ as ‘the “working paroxysms” of the artisan or outworker must be methodised until the man is adapted to the discipline of the machine.’<sup>127</sup> In such an environment notions of a general union flourished and vast working class political movements such as Chartism were seen as the best means of political agency; general amalgamation was deemed to be the only way forward as any attempt at small-scale unity could be crushed.<sup>128</sup> In Ireland, particularly in cities such as Limerick, these factors – especially large-scale industrialisation – did not come into play and amalgamation was not countenanced. Static urban populations meant that communal ties were not eroded and intercity class consciousness did not develop to the extent that it did in Britain. Whilst the modern

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<sup>127</sup> The entirety of *The Making of the English Working Class* deals with this phenomenon but the segments which deal with factory discipline and the role of the factory owner best illustrate this phenomenon. Thompson, *The making of the English working-class*, pp 356-69. Prothero’s work describes the radical British artisan as an individual that profoundly affected by even the indirect influence of industrialization. Also of interest is Safley and Rossenband’s collaborative introduction to their study of *the workplace before the factory*. Iorwerth Prothero, *Radical artisans in England and France, 1830-1870* (Cambridge, 1997), pp 8 -16; Prothero, *Artisans and politics in early nineteenth century London*, pp 45-75; Thomas Max Safley and Leonard N. Rossenband, *The workplace before the factory: Artisans and proletarians* (London, 1993), pp 1-10.

<sup>128</sup> Prothero skilfully juxtapositions the radical and conservative impulses that led to the 1818 Philanthropic Hercules, one of the early attempts at a general union. Prothero, *Artisans and politics in early nineteenth century London*, pp 55-70. Different parties used distinct but coterminous rationale to urge workers to join a large general union with Robert Owen – focused on the improvement of the individual and calling for ‘the construction of a great social and moral machine, calculated to produce wealth, knowledge and happiness with unprecedented precision and rapidity’ – content that technology would improve the workers lot whereas others were slower to trust such progressive doctrine and more mindful of ‘the fearful change, which the workings of the last few years have produced in the condition of every class of labourer.’ Black, *Guild and State*, p. 183-86; MacRaild and Martin, *Labour in British society*, p. 2; Maxine Berg, *The machinery question and the making of political economy* (Cambridge, 1982), pp 285-290.

scholar might question why the Irish artisan did not abandon localism and adopt the more developed methods of his British counterpart it is important to appreciate Irish experiences of Britain as the land where the Irish artisan became Paddy the labourer and where the Irish worker, deemed to be a barrier to labour rationalisation in Ireland, became ‘a central component in Britain’s new economic machine.’<sup>129</sup> Mindful of such a paradigm, it is not surprising that the Irish artisan was suspicious of the progressive doctrines of the sister island.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Thompson extensively detailed how the Irish worker was confined to positions that the English worker did not want and MacRaild has shown how in northern England it was said that the Irish ‘were born builders’ labourers, and they die builders’ labourers.’ Thompson, *The making of the English working class*, pp 429-443; Donald M. MacRaild, *Culture, conflict and migration: The Irish in Victorian Cumbria* (Liverpool, 1998), pp 64-67.

<sup>130</sup> As Robert Applegarth and the Reform League were engaged in political lobbying in the 1860s they asked the Dublin trades for information regarding their numbers and activities. The consequent debate amongst the Dublin trades, where they questioned whether they should tell Applegarth anything at all and commented that ‘as a general rule, Englishmen were ignorant on Irish questions and it is only Irish tradesmen, having general and local experience, that would be capable of giving true and necessary evidence’, is a perfect example of the lack of trust they had in English reformers. *Freeman’s Journal*, 30 July 1867.

**Chapter Four:**

**The trades of**

**Limerick and broad**

**political trends in the**

**pre-Famine era**

Whilst Chapters Six and Seven of this volume deal with the personalities, class tensions and the struggle for power that defined the relationship between organised labour and politics, Chapters Four and Five take a more general view. The primary focus of these two chapters is the political ideas and the general world view of Limerick's local artisans or trade unionists and the social and political movements that were relevant to them. The relationship between the trades and public men is viewed in a broad political, ideological or social context (with some reference to economic factors where that is appropriate) whilst Chapters Six and Seven focus on aspects of power play or local political networks.

The methodology of these two chapters is decidedly micro-historical and involves detailed examination of local sources to highlight aspects of Irish artisan society more generally. The activities of the trades in the 1844-48 period, in particular, are discussed in detail here to fully illustrate the complexity of alliances between artisans and political factions and to underline the difficulties posed by metanarratives involving popular politics during this period.

### **Politics and the emergence of modern organised labour in Limerick**

As chapter one has shown, the 1819-1828 period saw the local organised labour movement developed a coherence that had been absent since the collapse of the guild system. Whilst this labour movement emerged in the late 1820s as a pseudo-guild continuum, the birth pangs of the Congregated Trades were a reflection of a much wider range of emerging social and political movements that were vying for control. Whilst the illegal pan-trade combination known as the United Trades of Limerick (1819-1822) and the more moderate Congregated Trades of Limerick (1824-1900s) which succeeded it, appear to be worlds apart it is likely that both were responses by largely the same set of artisans to changing social movements and political developments in Ireland and the wider world.

## The Congregated Trades and national politics

The Congregated Trades first appeared in 1824 – shortly after O’Connell had formed the Catholic Association – during an O’Connellite rally in the city.<sup>1</sup> For the local artisans this signalled a clear break from the United Trades period, and was an endorsement of O’Connellism and, with that, an espousal of values such as liberal constitutionalism, Catholic empowerment and methods such as peaceful advocacy and mass political mobilisation.<sup>2</sup> In this regard the trades played a role of national significance assisting O’Connell in his steep ascent from mere ‘Counsellor’ to ‘Liberator’; but much more than that they played a role of global significance by offering an early template for the potential of mass mobilisation as a form of political pressure.<sup>3</sup> Of almost equal significance was the part played by the Congregated Trades in blending their largely Catholic identity (increasingly confessional rather than merely cultural or tribal) with the struggle for democracy (on O’Connell’s terms) and the attack on the power of the political elites.<sup>4</sup>

The decision to align with O’Connell and adopt language that evoked legitimacy and guild legacy was marked by an almost total abandonment of violence, and these factors elicited from the politicised Catholic middle class and Catholic clergy a degree of tolerance that grew over time. Uniquely, in the Irish context, the artisans of Limerick were governed by an inter-occupational trades council (the Congregated Trades of Limerick) which was not only tolerated

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<sup>1</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 13 Oct 1840; Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: war, peace and beyond*, pp 30-32.

<sup>2</sup> Fergus O’Ferrall contends that a brand of popular liberalism was founded in the 1820s by O’Connell and Emancipation campaigners in response to the disruption of Ribbonism and the Rockite insurrection as well as the marginalisation of grassroots Catholics from the political process. Fergus O’Ferrall, *The growth of political consciousness in Ireland, 1824-1848*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, University College Dublin, 1978, p. 105 quoted in Hegg, ‘The nature and development of liberal Protestantism in Waterford, 1800-42’, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Donal McCartney, *Democracy and its nineteenth century Irish critics* (Dublin, 1979), pp 9-12; Donal McCartney, *The Dawning of Democracy: Ireland 1800-1870* (Dublin: Helicon, 1987), pp 153-155; Laurent Colantonio, ‘“Democracy” and the Irish people’, Joanna Innes and Mark Philip (eds), *Re-imagining democracy in the Age of Revolutions: America, France, Britain, Ireland 1750-1850* (Oxford, 2003), pp 166-168.

<sup>4</sup> Hroch regarded Ireland as particularly unusual in the European context, whereby the Catholic Church was not allied to the political elites and asserted that only Lithuania shared this distinction. Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 144.

but actually cherished by O'Connell and his local political allies whereas the previous council, the United Trades, had been described by the Bishop of Limerick as the work of 'Satan.'<sup>5</sup> The objectives of the United Trades, however, were retained and only the methods of achieving these goals changed. Efforts to avail peacefully and legally of the opportunities afforded by the repeal of the anti-combination laws were somewhat clumsy but still marked a new beginning.<sup>6</sup> By way of comparison, until the 1880s Dublin and Cork artisans frequently clashed with O'Connell and were led by ephemeral trades councils which were either political constructs unrepresentative of the operatives, or clandestine, violent bodies that were unpalatable to all outside of their class.<sup>7</sup>

As the trades altered their *modus operandi*, the local O'Connellite party and the local liberal elites (the latter referred to by Potter as the 'Shannon Estuary group') did their best to present the trades, and the general Catholic populace of the mid-west, as a naturally peaceful people.<sup>8</sup> O'Connell and his followers acknowledged the presence of subversive secret societies, claiming that this 'malady' could be cured by removing residual penal legislation. This line of argument formed part of the considerable effort to depoliticise 1798 retrospectively and transform the participants into 'reluctant rebels' and, as with later secret society groups such as the Ribbonmen, O'Connell characterised all Catholic aggression during '98 as a reactionary response to Orange oppression.<sup>9</sup> Conversely, the Shannon Estuary Group – presenting a local

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<sup>5</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 1 June 1822.

<sup>6</sup> 1824 court cases involving combination in Limerick were attended by large numbers of artisans eager to discover the workings of the new legislation. *Limerick Chronicle*, 28 July, 8, 22 Sept, 9 Oct 1824.

<sup>7</sup> Cork artisans remained violent for most of the pre-famine era, occasionally using acid (vitriol) as their weapon of choice and Dublin artisans increased in violence in response to the repeal of the combination laws. D'arcy, 'The murder of Thomas Hanlon', pp. 89-100; Fergus D'Arcy, 'The National Trades' Political Union, 1830-1848', *Éire-Ireland*, xvii, 3, Fall 1982, pp 7-16; Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, p. 231.

<sup>8</sup> See Potter and Ridden for details of the Shannon estuary group. This group included General Richard Bourke from Castleconnell, Matthew Barrington from Murroe, William Howley from Lisnagry and Thomas Spring Rice from Shanagolden. Ridden, *Making good citizens*, pp 158, 306, *passim*; Matthew Potter, "'The most perfect specimen of civilised nature": the Shannon Estuary Group - elite theory and practice', Ciaran O'Neill (ed.), *Irish elites in the nineteenth century* (Dublin, 2012), p. 113-124.

<sup>9</sup> Kevin Whelan, *Tree of liberty: radicalism, Catholicism and the construction of Irish identity, 1760-1830* (Cork, 1996), pp 150-165. O'Connell had been characterizing Ribbonism as a reaction to Orange violence since



version of Whig history – stressed that subversive politics was *entirely* absent from the region and all social disorder in the area was decentralised, unorganised and entirely a result of economic distress and political exclusion.<sup>10</sup> These two political parallel traditions were crucial in shaping the Limerick artisan community in the pre-famine era and present us with the strongest evidence of a broad political movement profoundly shaping the trades.

### Sources of influence: Dominant political doctrines

The Limerick trades consistently supported dominant political movements but always on their own terms, often prioritising aspects of political traditions that others overlooked. With Repeal and Home Rule they saw the chance of a glorious native parliament that would protect native industries – a yearning which echoed pre-capitalist guild ideals. There were aspects of late nineteenth century cultural nationalism that could be practically applied, whether it be Douglas Hyde’s call to reject English fashions (music to the ears of any local shoemaker, coach-maker or tailor) or the GAA’s insistence on using as many Irish-made products as possible (matches were occasionally called off if Irish made paper had not been used by the referee for his notebook).<sup>11</sup> From the point of view of the Limerick artisan they were was no need to adjust their world view to adapt to popular Irish nationalism: Irish nationalism came to them. Despite

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1813, about two years after the movement first appeared in East Donegal, and often used the existence of such groups to call for religious reform. *Freeman’s Journal*, 10 Dec 1813.

<sup>10</sup> O’Connell claimed that Ribbonism affected the tradesmen of the towns and cities, mainly because they were shut of the guild system and were politically alienated as a result. Consequently, he argued, the ‘working tradesmen’ of the cities and towns are the ones most affect by the penal laws. Speaking in 1824 General Richard Bourke from Castleconnell was particularly keen on presenting all social disorder in the mid-west area as a by-product of unemployment and poverty. Matthew Barrington had been the Munster Crown Solicitor during the tumultuous 1819-24 period and was perfectly aware of the presence of subversive politics during this period but told a parliamentary committee in 1839 ‘We have never had any case of Ribandism on the Munster Circuit. In fact, I hardly know what Ribandism is.’ NAI/CSO/RP/SC/1821/125 12 June 1821, NAI/CSO/RP/SC/1821/170 28 Nov 1821, NAI/CSO/RP/SC/1821/304 1 Dec 1821, NAI/CSO/RP/SC/1821/201 18 Dec 1821 and NAI/CSO/RP/SC/1821/199 21 Dec 1821; *Report from the Select Committee on Outrages (Ireland); together with the proceedings of the committee, minutes of evidence, appendix and index, 1852 (438)*, p. 525; *Report from the Select Committee on the state of Ireland, 1825, (129)*, p. 345; *Minutes of evidence taken before the Select Committee of the House of Lords, appointed to inquire into the state of Ireland, more particularly with reference to the circumstances which may have led to disturbances in that part of the United Kingdom. 18 February--21 March, 1825, (181)*, pp 148, 180.

<sup>11</sup> Gerard McLoughlin, *The GAA a contested terrain*, unpublished M.A. thesis, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2004, p. 37.

the shepherding presence of Tom Steele, the Limerick Congregated Trades was the most unhindered urban artisan community in Ireland – in contrast to the Dublin artisans who consistently felt the guiding hand of O’Connell in the form of the National Trades’ Political Union and the Cork trades that were not fully trusted as a consequence of their continual association with the ‘Union of Trades’ illegal combination.<sup>12</sup>

## **From reform to repeal: the development of nationalism amongst the trades of Limerick**

Traditionally, European nationalism has been described as a by-product of Kantian and later Hegelian philosophy.<sup>13</sup> In Ireland it can generally be described as having two sources of influence, with the United Irishmen and Young Irelanders indicative of European forms of nationalism and the Ribbonmen reflecting a pre-industrial response to colonialism that can be described as nationalist in the romantic, tribal or ethnic sense.<sup>14</sup> Whilst they have generally escaped the attention of nationalist historians to date, urban Irish artisans represent a less explored strand of Irish nationalism, namely economic nationalism.<sup>15</sup>

The Congregated Trades responded in 1830 to the dawn of the O’Connellite Repeal campaign with well-constructed arguments that borrowed from the pre-O’Connellite campaign – spearheaded by many Dublin Protestants, artisans and manufacturers and peaking in 1810 – and was subtly but distinctly different from arguments put forward by O’Connell himself at

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Sheahan, *Articles of Irish manufacture: portions of Irish history* (Cork, 1833), p. 186; The National Trades Political Union was a Dublin body which was tightly controlled by O’Connell with limited input from the actual artisan community it purported to represent, see D’Arcy, ‘The National Trades’ Political Union’, pp 7-16.

<sup>13</sup> Athena S. Leouss (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Nationalism* (London, 2001), pp 58-64; Ireneusz Pawel Karolewski, Andrzej Marcin Suszycki, *The Nation and Nationalism in Europe: An introduction* (Edinburgh, 2011), pp 50-57.

<sup>14</sup> Irish nationalism is discussed more clearly in Terry Eagleton, ‘Nationalism and the case for Ireland’, *New left review*, No. 234, March-April 1999, pp. 44-61.

<sup>15</sup> See ‘Introduction’ in this thesis for further discussion of Paul Pickering’s appraisal of economic nationalism and the neglect of the topic by Irish historians. Pickering, ‘“Irish First”: Daniel O’Connell, the Native Manufacture Campaign, and Economic Nationalism’, p. 598. More recently Charles Read has highlighted the extent to which O’Connell was influenced by economic nationalism in the wake of the 1842 tariff reforms. Charles Read, ‘The ‘Repeal Year’ in Ireland: an economic reassessment’, *The Historical Journal*, Volume 58, Issue 01, March 2015, pp 111 – 135.

that time.<sup>16</sup> The composition of the pre-O'Connellite Repeal campaign was very broad and included groups such as the Dublin Guild of Merchants (most definitely not a guild of operative artisans) whose character can be ascertained from an 1822 meeting where the two motions under discussion were the Repeal of the Union and the question of admission of Catholics to the Guild of Merchants. It is indicative of the pre-O'Connellite Repeal movement (O'Connell was, of course, involved in the Repeal movement since 1801 but the campaign can only be described as 'O'Connellite' from 1830 onwards) that the first motion was unanimously supported whilst the latter was defeated.<sup>17</sup> Urban artisans were seen as the ideal flag-bearers in 1830 for the new face of Repeal, with influential O'Connellite Cork journalist Denny Lane commenting that 'the rich could not be induced to bestir themselves; and it would be desirable should the working classes move on the matter.'<sup>18</sup> Concerns were voiced in Cork regarding the prevailing spectre of the 'Union of Trades' and the political involvement of the local artisans and in Dublin such concerns prompted the Repeal hierarchy to establish the National Trades' Political Union as a way of controlling the political expressions of the city's artisans.<sup>19</sup>

Whilst the emergence of a popular Repeal movement (Repeal was somewhat popular from 1830-34 and extremely popular from 1841-43) coincided with political upheaval in Europe, it was a response to local factors; namely the call to arms of a triumphant Liberator, worsening economic conditions, diminishing industrial strength, the lifting of tariffs between the sister kingdoms of the Union in the 1820s, and a provincial Catholic press that was responding to an unfavourable budget.<sup>20</sup> The influence of the latter was immediately felt and the individual artisan groups were afforded ample space in the pages of the *Limerick Evening*

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<sup>16</sup> The campaign was led by mainly Protestant manufacturers and master artisans. *Freeman's Journal*, 4, 14, 25 Aug, 12, 29 Oct 1810.

<sup>17</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 15 Oct 1822.

<sup>18</sup> Sheahan, *Articles of Irish manufacture*, p. 185.

<sup>19</sup> D'Arcy, 'The National Trades' Political Union', pp 7-16; Sheahan, *Articles of Irish manufacture*, pp 186-87.

<sup>20</sup> Martin McElroy, 'The 1830 budget and Repeal: Parliament and public opinion in Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 141 (May 2008), pp 38-39.

*Post* to publish a series of Repeal manifestos, all with arguments broadly in line but many placing specific emphasis on particular grievances. The rationale employed by the trades reflected their economic nationalism; it pertained to their own material affluence and identified problems such as industrial decline and absenteeism, which were consistently characterised as side-effects of the Union.<sup>21</sup> They were able to link these issues directly with their own material well-being, the Guild of Housepainters stating that ‘The mansions of our former resident nobility and gentry whereon we were used to be employed, now present but one uniform scene of neglect and decay’ and the shipwrights pointing out that English and Scottish ports were taking their work.<sup>22</sup> The fact that their nationalism was both constitutional and peaceful was clearly expressed – loyalty to the sovereign was emphasised by many of the guilds and separatism strongly denied.<sup>23</sup>

From 1830 onwards the political ambitions of the trades were shaped largely by the quest for an autonomous (or at least a devolved) parliament. By way of comparison their earlier alliance with the Limerick Independents lacked the commitment they later showed for Repeal and Home Rule. Indeed, they were frightened by the reformist spirit of Spring Rice and the Independents, which promised a brave new world characterised by economic liberalism. The correspondence between Spring Rice and the Guild of Cordwainers in 1831, where he informed them that ‘Since the Union a freedom of intercourse has opened to our industry the whole of England’, was a perfect illustration of where the local reformers and the trades differed.<sup>24</sup> Despite their prominence in Spring Rice’s electoral victory over the Limerick Corporation faction in 1820 (the culmination of a struggle that pitted the wealth and property of the city against a kleptocratic clique) there was only so much of the old Corporation that they actually

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<sup>21</sup> Absenteeism was also referred to by O’Connell as a by-product of the Union. McElroy, ‘The 1830 budget and Repeal’, p. 49.

<sup>22</sup> *Limerick Star and Evening Post*, 11, 14 Feb 1834.

<sup>23</sup> *Limerick Star and Evening Post*, 21 Feb 1834.

<sup>24</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 14 Jan 1831.

wanted to change, in effect they wished to retain municipal regulation but to eradicate ‘Old Corruption.’<sup>25</sup> Even the demands of the Guild of Coopers – who were very close to prominent Independents such as John Boyse – amounted to nothing more than a full restoration of their civic rights – particularly the ability to attain freeman status once an apprenticeship had been served to a freeman – and a drastic alteration of the sectarianism that was ingrained in the city’s corporation. However, they generally retained cordial relations with mayors of the unreformed corporation who fulfilled a benevolent patriarchal role, including maintenance of a closed economy and labour market, prevention of the importation of foreign goods and dispensation of charity at crucial times.<sup>26</sup>

The core of the disagreement between the Limerick trades and Spring Rice – a member of the Political Economy Club by the late 1820s – regarding Repeal of the Union reflected the differences that lay between economic nationalists and liberal reformers during this period.<sup>27</sup> Spring Rice made it clear that he saw the Union as a crucial component of reform and future prosperity as a whole, stating:

If I am asked to compare the proceedings of Parliament before and after the Union, I can do so easily and conclusively. Before the Union your trade was fettered – our agriculture was depressed – and we were excluded from the British market.<sup>28</sup>

The differences with the trades was insurmountable here and the Guild of Tobacconists best exemplified the position of the trades on the matter when they stated:

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<sup>25</sup> In giving evidence, many of the Independent Party bemoaned the fact that the Corporation did not represent the ‘property of the city,’ see *Report from Select Committee on petitions relating to the local taxation of the city of Limerick*, pp 26, 37.

<sup>26</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 1 Oct 1833.

<sup>27</sup> Spring Rice was a member of the Political Economy Club along with a number of allied Liberals by the 1820s, see Jessica M. Lepler, *The many panics of 1837: people, politics, and the creation of a transatlantic financial crisis* (New York, 2013), p. 169; Eric J. Evans, *The forging of the modern state: early industrial Britain, 1783-1870* (London, 2001), p. 275-85.

<sup>28</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 14 Jan 1831.

despite any calculations got up by the *political economist* [Spring Rice] or heartless absentee... Ireland has been and is still robbed of millions yearly.<sup>29</sup>

The *political economist* in question, Spring Rice, reiterated his position in 1836 – as a guest of honour in Limerick whilst he was a sitting MP for Cambridge and Chancellor of the Exchequer – and even declared that Limerick was prospering from the Union with Britain generally, and specifically from the reforms he had promoted:

I rejoice to think, that in all respects, this city has rapidly advanced and, that in Commerce, Navigation, Manufactory and Industry, your condition is far different from what it was when my political connections with you first began. And, that this prosperity may long continue, and may increase, is my most ardent prayer.<sup>30</sup>

One is tempted to enter into the debate here, but it is suffice to say that the level of poverty in the city in the 1830s was deplorable in the extreme.<sup>31</sup> There undoubtedly was an increase in exports from the port of Limerick – which roughly doubled between 1822 and 1835 - but the ‘trickle-down effect’ that was taken for granted with many economic models was not apparent here.<sup>32</sup> The relationship between Rice and father-in-law and principal political patron, the Earl of Limerick (one of the worst examples of an absentee in the region if not the country as a whole), is certainly worth considering as a factor.<sup>33</sup> However, overall it would appear that Rice

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<sup>29</sup> *Limerick Star and Evening Post*, 18 Feb 1834.

<sup>30</sup> *Limerick Star and Evening Post*, 21 Oct 1836. The following year Spring Rice informed the King that Irish agriculture, education and industry were all improving and prospering and only sectarianism remained a problem, see Hoppen, *Governing Hibernia*, p. 86.

<sup>31</sup> Daniel Griffin, ‘An Enquiry into the Mortality Occurring Among the Poor of the City of Limerick’, *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (January 1841), pp 305-30.

<sup>32</sup> Lenihan explains in detail how, despite the fact that exports from the port of Limerick were booming, the ‘working classes’ were even more destitute than ever, Lenihan, *Limerick: Its history and antiquities*, p. 489. See also Kieran Deverry, ‘Trade and manufactures in Limerick 1821-41’, *Made in Limerick: history of industries, trade and commerce, vol. 1* (Limerick, 2003), p. 47.

<sup>33</sup> O’Connell once claimed in the 1830s that the Earl’s property in St. Francis Abbey, Limerick City, was the only such property in the whole country where people regularly died from starvation. There were numerous other claims regarding the Earl’s character and role as an absentee and the manner in which his funeral cortege was attacked by a vast mob in 1844 is ample proof of how he was viewed by the public at large, see *Limerick Reporter*, 24, 31 Dec 1844, 10 Jan 1845; Henry David Inglis, *Ireland in 1834: A journey throughout Ireland, during the Spring, Summer and Autumn of 1834, Volume 1*, p. 312; *Limerick Star and Evening Post*, 30 June, 3, 14, 17, 21 July, 4, 7, 14 Aug, 1, 4, 8, 11, 15, 18, 29 Sept, 2 Oct 1835.

was simply acting out of principle rather than any untoward agenda.<sup>34</sup> As the trades developed and broadened their protectionist argument, however, they did begin to ascribe a degree of malevolent design to the schemes of their perceived enemies – something which was broadly mirrored in Dublin during the Operative Board of Trade meetings there when rumours abounded that ‘a fund being collected in England to cover any losses incurred in "putting down" the Irish manufacture movement.’<sup>35</sup> Conspiracy theories containing allegations of a vast plot against Ireland on the part of ‘the English’ began to emerge during Limerick home manufacturing rallies. A petition from the wool-combers to O’Connell, for example, contained somewhat confused and inaccurate references to hostile acts of parliament whilst the weavers attending the Limerick Board of Trade were adamant that:

English stocking-manufacturers were in the habit of sending over purchasers to Ireland to buy up all the stocking-looms in the country for the purpose of destroying them.<sup>36</sup>

At times, the more dramatic claims of the Home Manufacturing proponents appeared less far-fetched, particularly allegations that English manufacturers were selling goods at below cost rates.<sup>37</sup> Overall the arguments were indicative of a labour body that perceived a malevolent design guiding overall trends where many of their social betters simply saw market forces and ‘competition.’ It was also reminder that their brand of nationalism was not entirely based upon economic premises; the residual anti-Englishness that defined much of Irish nationalism occasionally surfaced. Post-famine politicians of a more aggressively nationalist persuasion were sometimes eager to add to the notion of malevolent design and William Abraham

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<sup>34</sup> Ridden has detailed Rice’s world view more thoroughly than is done here, see Ridden, ‘Irish reform between 1798 and the Great Famine’, pp. 273-281; Ridden, *Making good citizens*, pp 8-10.

<sup>35</sup> D’Arcy, *Dublin artisan activity*, p. 74. Pickering, “‘Irish first’”, Daniel O’Connell, the native manufacturing campaign and economic nationalism’, p. 613.

<sup>36</sup> O’Connell, *Correspondence Vol. 6*, pp. 392 – 393, letters 2777 – 78, both letters dated 13 December 1840; *Limerick Reporter*, 2 Feb 1841.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

informed a meeting of the trades in 1881 that ‘England had seen that it would not do for her to allow them to make their own laws so she destroyed their manufactures.’<sup>38</sup>

The trades’ economic rationale for a native parliament required a dominant island-wide political movement to gain full expression. The perseverance they showed in pursuit of the ‘national cause of legislative independence’ as late as 1852 contrasted with the local political class who had abandoned the issue by 1849.<sup>39</sup> Their calls to arms in 1852, however, fell on deaf ears and they were unable to push forward issues related to parliamentary autonomy or economic nationalism and the trades appeared bereft of a political ideology for the 1850s and much of the 1860s. Their political reawakening was evident in the early 1870s by the attendance of occupational groups such as the chandlers, wool-combers, weavers and tobacco spinners – many of whom were numerically insignificant and virtually invisible since the 1840s – at Home Rule rallies and there are clear analogies here with the huge O’Connellite demonstration of October 1840 which illustrated the role that the cult of personality and popular national movements play in the politicisation of the Limerick artisan.<sup>40</sup>

When the economic nationalism of the trades was fully expressed, as it was in the National League branches of the 1880s, it invariably elicited criticism from the local political class revealing a critical difference in terms of the rationale used to legitimise Repeal and Home Rule. The war of words waged in the National League branches (see Chapter Seven) was not an indication of something new, however, and closer examination of the O’Connellite period reveals that the trades’ approach to the Repeal question was out of step with the political

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<sup>38</sup> *Munster News*, 20 Aug 1881. The work of John Gordon Swift MacNeill – an economic nationalist very much underappreciated by urban artisans with coterminous views – in the 1880s further expanded the notion of a malevolent English presence stifling Irish industry, John Gordon Swift MacNeill, *English interference with Irish industries* (London, 1886), *passim*.

<sup>39</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 2 Apr 1852.

<sup>40</sup> *The Nation*, 27 May 1871; *Munster News*, 30 July 1873; *Freeman’s Journal*, 9 Oct 1840; *Limerick Reporter*, 13 Oct 1840. This parade welcoming O’Connell to Limerick was reportedly attended by 100,000 people; 881 individual artisans were named by the *Freeman’s Journal*.



hierarchy. Their response to the reformist Precursor Society of the late 1830s was muted though, unlike their colleagues in Cork and, more particularly, Dublin, they never actually clashed with the *Liberator* during this period.<sup>41</sup> In contrast to the consistent support for Repeal amongst the Limerick artisan community since the issue was introduced in 1830, Kerr traces the widespread national support for Repeal to 1843 and Geoghegan, concentrating on the purely political context to the campaign, similarly describes how momentum gradually built following the Butt debates (February 1843) through to the crest of the wave in October.<sup>42</sup> With Geoghegan, we are presented with a *Liberator* whose argument rested on historical precedents of misrule since the Union and an insistence that the Act itself was a product of outright bribery.<sup>43</sup> Among the trades the argument for Repeal could be made using pseudo-guild principles: a protective native legislature would cater for their interests and recreate a half-imagined bygone age. For O'Connell, Repeal was needed because the people of Ireland were not properly represented and therefore full civil and religious reforms were impossible.<sup>44</sup> In truth, there was actually little in O'Connellism that directly corresponded with the artisan world view as summed up by Garvin: 'O'Connell's obdurate opposition to such cherished artisan objectives as the closed shop and the minimum wage kept his relations with them uneasy.'<sup>45</sup>

Regarding O'Connell's actual support of protectionism, which bound the Repeal arguments of the trades together, both McCaffrey and Lee contend that it was, at best, inconsistent, citing O'Connell's utilitarianism and early speeches favouring Free Trade.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> D'Arcy, *Dublin artisan activity*, pp 34-52; Holohan, 'Daniel O'Connell and the Dublin trades', pp 1-17; Cronin, *Country, class or craft?*, pp 182-83..

<sup>42</sup> Patrick M. Geoghegan, *Liberator: the life and death of Daniel O'Connell, 1830-1847* (Dublin, 2010), pp 129-159.

<sup>43</sup> Geoghegan, *Liberator: the life and death of Daniel O'Connell, 1830-1847*, p. 52-57.

<sup>44</sup> McCaffrey, *Daniel O'Connell and the Repeal year*, p. 29; Geoghegan, *Liberator: the life and death of Daniel O'Connell, 1830-1847*, p.129.

<sup>45</sup> Tom Garvin, *The evolution of Irish Nationalist politics* (Dublin, 1981), p. 50.

<sup>46</sup> McCaffrey, *Daniel O'Connell and the Repeal year*, p. 29; J. J. Lee, 'The social and economic ideas of O'Connell', Kevin P. Nowlan and Maurice R. O'Connell (eds), *Daniel O'Connell: portrait of a radical* (Belfast, 1984), pp 70-84.

Pickering contended that O'Connell was deliberately vague in his support of economic nationalism, presented O'Connell's initial wooing of the Board of Trade in 1841-42 as a political stroke and marked August 1842 as O'Connell's first definitively economic nationalist speech.<sup>47</sup> Whilst O'Connell (as with Parnell after him) was skilled enough as a politician to generally remain vague on the issue, his son John was blunt on a number of occasions that Repeal would not be followed by tariff reform aimed at blocking British goods.<sup>48</sup> In a more specific study of this issue, Read asserts that O'Connell was undoubtedly a Protectionist by 1843 with the 1842 removal of protective tariffs and the consequent deterioration of the Irish economy swaying the *Liberator*.<sup>49</sup> McCaffrey's summation of the period is broadly in line with this and he cites a particular case in Dublin whereby a Dublin coachbuilding firm was undercut by a Scottish rival under dubious circumstances when seeking the contract to construct mail coaches for the entire country.<sup>50</sup> Even in this case, O'Connell's support for Irish manufacturing appears to have been reactive.<sup>51</sup> D'Arcy's account offers a view of O'Connell from the perspective of the Dublin trades, which does include a number of very vague pronouncements from the *Liberator* as early as 1840 that national economic prosperity was hampered by the Union, but there was never any depth or genuine commitment to economic nationalism shown on his part.<sup>52</sup>

The October 1840 Repeal rally in the city offers the best evidence from which we can compare and contrast the respective Repeal arguments. The address of the trades was expressed in plain and direct language: 'Ireland [prior to the Union] was making rapid strides towards national improvement: her commerce was reviving – her manufacturers were on the increase –

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<sup>47</sup> Pickering, "'Irish first', Daniel O'Connell, native manufacturing and economic nationalism', p. 610.

<sup>48</sup> McCaffrey, *Daniel O'Connell and the Repeal year*, p. 33.

<sup>49</sup> Read, 'The 'Repeal Year' in Ireland: an economic reassessment', pp 111 – 135.

<sup>50</sup> McCaffrey, *Daniel O'Connell and the Repeal year*, p. 48.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> D'Arcy, Dublin artisan activity, pp 61-62.

her people were becoming united.’ They also addressed the issue of export-led macroeconomic growth in a pertinent fashion which, in some ways, pre-empted Mitchel’s summation of affairs a decade later,

The opponents of Repeal tell us that Ireland is improving under an imperial parliament and add to the argument the increase of our exports. It is true we have seen our port crowded with ships carrying off beef, pork and corn and this at a time when the inhabitants of the city were compelled by hunger to break through stone walls.<sup>53</sup>

The manufacturing trades – smiths, harness-makers, cabinet-makers, nailors, brogue-makers, pipe-makers, weavers and hatters – all espoused broadly similar arguments although many of the numerically strongest trades, such as the carpenters, bakers and coopers, were present but silent on the issue of Repeal. Most of the Repeal rationale relied on the ‘tan-yard argument’ whereby the number of tan-yards (or related industries) in 1800 was compared to figures at the time of discussion and the obvious decline was used to illustrate the effects of the Union. Later in the century the number of pawnbrokers buttressed the argument – there were twenty tanneries and one pawnbroker in Limerick in 1800 and over twenty pawnbrokers and only two tanneries in 1865 (the numbers and years varied but the fundamentals of this statistic were often repeated).<sup>54</sup> Thomas Ahern, smith, used the 1840 rally to articulate a persuasive and detailed version of this ‘tan-yard argument’ which he linked to macroeconomic factors. Other trades showed less impressive understanding of Repeal and the Union in their arguments, with the harness and saddle makers implying that the Union was the reason why so many employers only hired apprentices and not journeymen.<sup>55</sup> Other manufacturing trades linked wage

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<sup>53</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 9, 21 Oct 1840. The last point made by the trades referred to the 1840 Limerick food riot. McGrath, ‘Riots in Limerick city’, pp 155-163. Mitchel made similar comments some years later, see John Mitchel, *The last conquest of Ireland (perhaps)* (London, 1876), p. 208.

<sup>54</sup> Lenihan, *Limerick: Its history and antiquities*, p. 529.

<sup>55</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 9, 21 Oct 1840.

depression to the Union without properly describing how the former was caused by the latter.<sup>56</sup> Undoubtedly, many simply saw Repeal as a panacea to a myriad of problems.

The home manufacturing movement of the early 1840s represented a vain attempt on the part of the trades to separate their economic nationalism from politics and from political personalities. Run by a number of politically diverse local business men – conservatives allied to the city's corporation, English-born manufacturers and political chameleons such as Samuel Dickson of indeterminable political character – the board sought to revive local industry with the support of the landed class, the business community and the public at large. Headed by John Bindon Alton, Secretary of the Limerick Board of Fishery Conservators, the board members were capable of making some prescient and logical summations of macroeconomics, particularly of the imbalances between rural and urban development, and the failure of commercially driven agriculture to sustain the wider population in comparison to a strong manufacturing sector.<sup>57</sup> Despite the succinct, persuasive nature of their arguments, the Board disbanded months after it was established, having failed to keep politics from impinging upon discussion – they were unable to even establish what bank they would use without politics intervening – and having failed to attract the interest of landed magnates.<sup>58</sup>

At this point in 1841 the shortcomings of the respective political and social movements were apparent to the trades. Whilst the initial Repeal movement which peaked in 1810 perfectly encapsulated their objectives, O'Connellism did not explicitly offer much to the urban artisan. The 1841 Board of Trade more closely fitted the profile of the early Repealers but whilst they championed core fundamentals such as industrial revival; Repeal itself was now linked with a

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<sup>56</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 9, 21 Oct 1840.

<sup>57</sup> Alton's summation of macroeconomic trends – made in the *Limerick Reporter*, 17 Aug 1841 – was particularly prophetic as he foresaw calamity as a consequence of the profit driven agricultural sector and failure of Irish manufacturing.

<sup>58</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 9 Mar 1841, 17 Aug 1841.

divisive political figure and internal debates within the Board could mention manufacturing decline but not political remedies. Equally, O'Connell's Repeal party was, of course, willing to discuss legislative independence but without much mention of manufacturing revival and scarcely any mention of the tariff reforms that the trades so desperately wanted. In truth, the Board of Trade and the city artisans were uneasy bedfellows, the latter allegedly requiring payment in return for support.<sup>59</sup> Somewhat understandably, the Board sought to entice capitalist investors by emphasising the widespread availability of cheap labour and proposing business plans featuring women and/or apprentices as workers.<sup>60</sup> It is difficult to imagine that the trades approved of such plans although they more than forgave the industrialist Peter Tait in the 1860s when he championed such an approach with his clothing factory (see Chapter Five). Given that popular politics and the local business community failed to offer a satisfactory political option the only tangible alternative was the corporation clique – headed by Lord Gort who had opposed Repeal in 1800. This faction contained the only politicians who had actually endorsed the 'closed shop' dictates of the trades (albeit in somewhat reluctant fashion).<sup>61</sup> As early as 1831, however, Gort informed the Guild of Boot-makers that he would not support Repeal despite his initial opposition to the Union in 1800.<sup>62</sup> Ultimately, the Corporation clique could only offer the benefits of *noblesse oblige*; relief could be offered and courtesy extended in times of distress but systematic change was opposed strenuously. For example, the corporation faction generously sponsored assisted emigration measures for distressed artisans during the unemployment crisis of the early 1840s but they failed to support home manufacturing and one prominent individual, Major Vereker, directly opposed the notion in 1840 commenting: 'If I want a good carriage I'll go over to London to get the best one.'<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Devery, 'Trade and manufactures in Limerick 1821-41', pp 47-51; *Limerick Reporter*, 27, 30 April 1841.

<sup>60</sup> Devery, 'Trade and manufactures in Limerick 1821-41', pp 47-51; *Limerick Reporter*, 27, 30 April 1841.

<sup>61</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 11 Oct 1833.

<sup>62</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 28 Jan 1831.

<sup>63</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 13 Nov 1840.

Internal divisions within the trades arose in 1841 as sections of the manufacturing crafts became hyper-politicised. The senior cooper in the Congregated Trades, Jeremiah Forrest, voiced his qualms regarding the over-politicisation of the trades during the 1841 pre-election campaign stating that

[The Congregated Trades] were always on good terms with the Liberal Press of the city and he did not see why they should mix themselves up with the political movements of any Club, or any other Body, being well able to manage their own movements at present, as they had hitherto, without connection with any Body.<sup>64</sup>

This failed to calm sections of the trades who were frustrated with the Repeal party's parliamentary candidate that year and with the futile attempts to spark a manufacturing revival, forcing many artisans to turn to the hard-line Citizen's Club to the dismay of the local political class and liberal press. Matters came to a head following the embarrassment of the 1841 election (despite much activity the trades utterly failed to affect any influence on the nomination process) which prompted the prominent cooper Jeremiah Forrest to berate the more politicised members of the trades, disown the unsuccessful alliance with the politically radical Citizen's Club (best described as an ultra-Repeal club), successfully demand a reorganisation of the Congregated Trades hierarchy and initiate a change in policy where local and economic agendas were pursued (see Chapter Six).<sup>65</sup> The same issue of the *Limerick Reporter* that covered Forrest's address to the Congregated Trades featured a letter from Thomas Ahern, smith, urging the public to consider his goods over English ones – he was certainly not willing

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<sup>64</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 16 Mar 1841.

<sup>65</sup> The Citizen's Club is described as politically radical in the sense that it deviated sharply from political elite in the city, see Chapter Two. Forrest was responsible for the eradication of the Vice-President position in the Congregated Trades which he had described as a 'permanent chairmanship.' He had first spoken out regarding the dangers of aligning the trades to a political body in March 1841, see *Limerick Reporter*, 16 Mar, 17 Aug, 19 Oct 1841.

to abandon the war with English manufacturers and he, along with many of his colleagues, increasingly pressed for a radical political solution to this problem.<sup>66</sup>

The confused situation of the Repeal party in Limerick following the 1843 Clontarf debacle, made it impossible to equate many local factions with broader national political divisions. Roughly, we can conclude that there were three different factions struggling for control of the local Repeal party throughout the 1843-48 period and two of these factions were chiefly composed of artisans. The first faction was backboned by highly politicised artisans – all hard-line Repealers overwhelmingly drawn from the manufacturing trades and aggressively espousing economic nationalism. This group generally had little or no relationship with the local clergy; were intolerant of parliamentary alliances with Whigs; and were sharply critical of several local MPs, including John O’Brien, David and William Roche, whom they perceived as being either lukewarm Repealers or uncooperative liberals. The second group – backboned by coopers, bakers, butchers and the building trades – was far less interested in national politics. They had a better relationship with public men and the clergy and were ostensibly more aligned with Tom Steele than the hard-line Repealers. They spoke little of the merits of economic nationalism and were generally present but silent at Repeal rallies and vague, but consistent, in their support of Repeal. The third group was generally small, featured no artisans and consisted of the direct representatives of O’Connell in Limerick. Tom Steele, when he was in Limerick, was the principal leader of this third group, as were the local MPs but other individuals with titles such as ‘Repeal Inspector’ also featured including the noisy agitator John Raleigh, an apothecary and Town Clerk, and later Pat Spillane, a tobacco merchant. This later group had

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<sup>66</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 17 Aug 1841.

an increasingly fraught relationship with the trades of either faction whose stringent opposition rendered them increasingly irrelevant.<sup>67</sup>

The divisions caused in 1841 by the Citizen's Club's aggressive championing of the Repeal cause were roughly synonymous with the later factional alliances, with Jeremiah Forrest's opposition to the Citizen's Club in 1841 foreshadowing his harsh denouncement of hard-line Repealers in 1846. Significantly, Forrest was almost entirely absent from the political agitation that accompanied the 'Monster Meeting' mania of 1843. He represented the trades in 1844 and 1845 in campaigning on a number of 'non-political' issues such as home manufacture, restoration of the local weaving industry, reduction of toll prices for pedestrians on Wellesley Bridge and the development of a railway network in Ireland.<sup>68</sup> Conversely, other artisans during this period were immersing themselves in political matters, particularly John Nunan, sawyer, and Thomas Ahern, smith, the former consistently advocating Repeal and corresponding directly with O'Connell in an attempt to organise political banquets and meetings, and the latter establishing the highly influential Richmond Ward Repeal Club. Evidence for the dichotomy within the trades was clear from the financial contributions to the Repeal cause during 1844-45 and one significant fundraising drive July 1844 called for a fund to be raised to help the cause of 'Repeal, Incarceration of the Liberator' and was particularly revealing with the tobacconists, fifty-six strong, contributing £4 10s; the masons, 162 strong, contributing £3; the cordwainers, approximately three hundred strong, contributing £2 18s; the stone-cutters, eighty-one strong, contributing £2 12s; the coach-builders, thirty-nine in number, contributing £2 10s; the cabinet-makers, 115 in number, contributing £2 3s; the painters, 128 in number, contributing £1 14s; the tailors, 438 in number, contributing £1 13s; the slaters and

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<sup>67</sup> John Raleigh, in particular, was opposed by the trades, so much so that Timothy Ray suggested replacing him, *Tralee Chronicle and Killarney Echo*, 31 May 1845; O'Connell, *Correspondence of O'Connell Vol 7*, p. 336, letter 3163, 8 Sept 1845.

<sup>68</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 12 Nov 1844, 31 Jan, 14 Mar, 1 April 1845.



plasterers, 141 in number, contributing £1 11s; the smiths, 196 in number, contributing £1 5s; the pipe-makers, twenty-two in number, contributing £1; and the chandlers, fifty-one in number, contributing seventeen shillings.<sup>69</sup>

The extent of Repeal fatigue within the trades was clear as were the internal divisions resulting from political divisions. The bakers, for example, do not appear to have contributed any money to the Loyal National Repeal Association until February 1846 – precisely the moment when the hard-line Repeal artisans were ousted as leaders of both the Congregated Trades and the local Repeal movement – when they donated the considerable sum of six pounds towards the Association. Notwithstanding the fact that the bakers had problems of their own in the 1840s – night work, poor working conditions etc. – they represented a trade with a consistent supply of money that not even the famine could interrupt.<sup>70</sup> The relative underrepresentation of the coopers was significant as they were by far the most politicised occupational group during the 1820s when the two reform issues – that of local government and Catholic Emancipation – were popular political causes. The trend is most noticeable when we examine those individual coopers who were part of the Congregated Trades hierarchy during the earlier period, particularly William O’Grady, cooper and Secretary of the Congregated Trades in the 1828-31 period and a vocal supporter of Spring Rice and Emancipation, whose last involvement with the trades in November 1831 saw him amongst the minority trying to defend Spring Rice’s position on Repeal at a meeting.<sup>71</sup> Another example was the prominent master cooper Edmund Ryan (d. 1829) whose close relationship with

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<sup>69</sup> Figures based on the 1841 census returns. No figure was given for Cordwainers (independent of shoemakers) in the 1841 census and this figure is based upon figures from the 1830s, see *Limerick Evening Post*, 15 Oct 1833 & *Limerick Star and Evening Post*, 21 Mar 1834; *Limerick Reporter*, 2 July 1844.

<sup>70</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 19, 22 July, 19 Aug 1842, 12 Sept 1843, 6 July 1847; *Irish Examiner*, 23 Nov 1846. Local historian Frank Prendergast, himself formerly a baker, recalled how the bakers financially backboned the Congregated Trades and were known as the ‘gold finders’, Frank Prendergast, ‘The Mechanics’ Institute’, Mechanics’ Institute Files, Local Studies, Limerick City Library, <http://www.limerickcity.ie/Library/LocalStudies/LocalStudiesFiles/M/MechanicsInstitute/> accessed 10 Dec 2016.

<sup>71</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 27 Oct 1825; *Limerick evening Post*, 27 July, 20 Aug 1830, 16 Nov 1831.

O'Connell and Steele in the 1820s was recalled in a number of heartfelt eulogies throughout the 1830s and 40s.<sup>72</sup> Comprising both employers and employees, the Guild of Coopers appeared to have the most legitimate claim to guild legitimacy at a time when all other 'guilds' were overwhelmingly composed of operatives.<sup>73</sup> In contrast to the disastrous drop in wage levels that the coopers of Cork experienced in the 1820s and 1830s, the Limerick coopers appear to have been relatively prosperous – largely as a result of the fact that exports from the port of Limerick were rising during this era – and upwardly mobile.<sup>74</sup> It should be noted, however, that none of the trade societies actually opposed Repeal and both the coopers and bakers issued manifestos in 1830 and 1834 alongside all the other major guilds. Indeed, city groups such as the victuallers and masons, with little immediate cause to embrace economic nationalism, were amongst the trades noted for being good financial contributors to the Repeal cause in 1842, but in terms of activism and vocal support there was an obvious imbalance.<sup>75</sup>

A number of local factions swapped sides during the politically tumultuous period that began with the Citizens Club Repeal campaign of 1841 and terminated in August 1848. The *Limerick Reporter* clashed acrimoniously with the hard-line Repeal artisans and the Citizen's Club in 1841 but was reconciled with these artisans by 1843 and the owner and staff of the paper were prominent members of the Richmond Ward Club (increasingly the bastion of the economic nationalists within the trades who later merged with the Limerick Young Ireland faction). Patrick Lynch, soda water manufacturers and journalist, and Joseph Murphy, solicitor,

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<sup>72</sup> O'Connell once claimed that the Ryan family were amongst his closest friends and Steele referenced his friendship with Ryan many times and wore colours and garments associated with the Guild of Coopers allegedly as a result of some deathbed promise he had made to the Limerick cooper. *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 June 1826; *Limerick Evening Post*, 29 Sept 1829; *Limerick Reporter*, 25 April 1843; *Munster News*, 4 Jan 1860; Cronin, "'Of One Mind?": O'Connellite Crowds in the 1830s and 1840s', p. 160; Potter, *First Citizen*, p. 110.

<sup>73</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 9 May 1828, 15 Dec 1829, 5 Jan 1830.

<sup>74</sup> Maura Murphy, The role of organized labour in the political and economic life of Cork city, 1820-1899, unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Leicester, 1980, pp 313-314. There are a number of cooper dynasties who were producing merchants, butter buyers or local government officials by the 1850s, in particular the Ryan, Forrest, McKnight, McMahan and Pegum families, *Limerick Star*, 1 Dec 1835; *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 Dec 1851 (death of Timothy McMahan butter buyer.) *Limerick Leader*, 8 Dec 1894 (McMahan is Cooper employer).

<sup>75</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 24 November 1842; *Limerick Evening Post*, 19 Nov 1830.

were fervent supporters of the Citizen's Club and the Repeal faction in the trades in 1841, but were stridently supporting Old Ireland by 1847. Equally, Richard Raleigh, tobacconist, was the most prominent Repeal artisan from 1841 till 1844 when he temporarily vanished only to emerge on the hustings during the 1847 General Election campaign on the side of Old Ireland and in opposition to his former Repeal allies such as Thomas Ahern, smith, Charles O'Neill, smith; James McGrath, coach-builder; Edward Reilly, iron-founder and John Nunan, sawyer who all remained rigidly focused solely upon Repeal and somewhat aligned to Young Ireland (and later the Irish Confederation).

Whilst the two factions within the trades had by 1847 aligned themselves clearly with Old Ireland and the Irish Confederation, respectively, the political journey of either group towards this point was largely independent of national events and developments and often more a reflection of local perceptions and reactions to economic conditions. By 1845 the repeated calls of hard-liners such as Nunan and Ahern for greater support for Repeal in the face of rapidly dwindling financial contributions resembled shrill harangues to the backdrop of chronic unemployment and rising food prices.<sup>76</sup> A growing alliance of artisans coalesced around Forrest, who was increasingly focused on socioeconomic causes in favour of political ones, and a tangible opposition to the economic nationalist leadership within the trades became manifest by mid-1845. This division first became evident in August 1845 when Thomas Ahern's position as principal Repeal Warden was challenged by one John Hickey – a victualler

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<sup>76</sup> Both Ahern and Nunan, as Repeal Wardens, acknowledged that Repeal rent had fallen considerably since 1843 as well as referring vaguely to local 'obstacles' which were impeding their collection as well as the 'treason and treachery of pretended friends', see *Nation*, 8 Nov 1845. Repeal fatigue and Repeal frustration was exacerbated by poor labour relations and high unemployment coupled with rising food prices in 1846. The question of subsistence and labour relations were discussed at an enormous open-air meeting in waste land that reportedly included 3,000 workers; a figure which, if accurate, included a massive portion of the male labour force and not just those affiliated with the Congregated Trades. At one point only 400 of the approximately 1200 Congregated Trades were regularly employed. Relations with employers were very low and the Sawyers and Slaters in particular addressed the public concerning these issue with the Slaters further stressed by the fact that there was a major split in the guild concerning the interpretation of combination, see *Limerick Reporter*, 17 June, 12 Aug 1845.

recently emerged as a vocal member of the Congregated Trades. Hickey had gained the trust of the clergy at that stage – the pro-Ahern *Reporter* alleged that he had intimidated them – and gradually succeeded in alienating Ahern and his cohort of allies from the bulk of the trades. Ahern appeared to be passing on the Repeal rent to Smith O’Brien, a situation that prompted T. M. Ray, General Secretary of the Loyal National Repeal Association, to return some monies whereas Hickey apparently adopted a more approved means of relaying the rent under his charge.<sup>77</sup> By February 1846 the change of the guard within the trades saw John Nunan removed as secretary of the Congregated Trades after a relatively innocuous *faux pas* involving the 1845 Mayor of Limerick and O’Connell.<sup>78</sup> The extent of his political involvement meant he was unable to disentangle himself from the affair, drawing upon himself the sharp criticism of Steele who, in typical fashion, publicly and dramatically resigned as President of the Congregated Trades.<sup>79</sup> Forrest responded swiftly, calling a general meeting of the Congregated Trades whereupon he castigated Nunan, painting him as a lonely figure purporting to act on behalf of the trades but without the required quorum of fifteen.<sup>80</sup> Steele gleefully acknowledged their decision to remove the ‘scheming’ Nunan and was reinstated as honorary President of the Congregated Trades.<sup>81</sup>

Whilst this would appear to be a victory for Old Ireland over Young Ireland in the Limerick Repeal party, neither faction was viewed favourably by the Repeal hierarchy and a

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<sup>77</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 1 July, 19 Aug 1845.

<sup>78</sup> O’Connell was invited to a political banquet, organised by Mayor William Geary, in Limerick but took offence when he saw one of the judges who had passed sentence upon him in 1844. Nunan attempted to defend the Mayor but only succeeded in evoking a rebuke from O’Connell and Steele. *Limerick Reporter*, 30 Jan, 3, 6 Feb 1846; *The Nation*, 7, 14 Feb 1846; Lenihan, *Limerick: Its history and antiquities*, p. 504; Potter, *First Citizen*, pp 109-110.

<sup>79</sup> *The Nation*, 7 Feb 1846.

<sup>80</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 30 Jan, 3, 6 Feb 1846. There appears to be some truth to the contention that Nunan had been pursuing his own mission, to a large degree, during this period and many amongst the trades seem to have been more concerned with employers attempting to circumvent the Guild of Tailors and a Cooperage that was introducing machine made firkins. The most important address from the Congregated Trades during this period concerned the aforementioned Cooperage and yet was signed ‘By order of the Congregated Trades’ (with the seal attached) whereas usually the Nunan’s public decrees were invariably only signed by himself, see *Limerick Reporter*, 5 Dec 1845, 30 Jan 1846; *The Nation*, 6 Sept 1845.

<sup>81</sup> *The Nation*, 14 Feb 1846.

series of correspondence with O'Connell shows a state of confusion, with Tom Steele, T.M. Ray and the Limerick representatives of the Loyal National Repeal Association (principally John Raleigh and later Pat Spillane) all agreeing that the Limerick Repealers of either faction were out of control. In truth, Limerick Repealers had been viewed as extremely troublesome by the Dublin hierarchy as early as 1841 (see Chapter Six) and although this situation improved somewhat thereafter, John O'Connell noted disapprovingly in December 1842 that Limerick Repealers were regularly attempting to establish unruly, independent Repeal bodies.<sup>82</sup> Additionally, John Raleigh, the man responsible for liaising between the Limerick and Dublin Repealers, was imploring Ray and O'Connell to quash the local Repeal bodies throughout 1844 and 1845.<sup>83</sup> The lack of respect for any senior Repealer save O'Connell and possibly Steele, was identified by Ray as the principal reason for this situation and he bluntly stated to O'Connell – 'You alone can make them agree.'<sup>84</sup> O'Connell, mindful of the importance of the trades to the local Limerick Repeal movement, informed Smith O'Brien that he planned to meet them late in 1845 but this meeting did not materialise and the trades were left to their own devices without O'Connell's direct guidance.<sup>85</sup> Despite his role in ousting Nunan in February, Steele felt he had lost control of the trades by mid-1846, declaring that, according to his exacting standards, the trades had expressed seditious and illegal views and twice asking O'Connell if he should resign again as President of the Congregated Trades.<sup>86</sup> Understandably, the Dublin Repealers were confused regarding the factional divisions in the trades at this point (Steele still seemed to think that the ousted Nunan was controlling matters as late as June 1846) but Ray appeared to have a rough idea of the different personalities involved and aligned each faction with either of two competing local popular newspapers. Thus the hard-line Repealers

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<sup>82</sup> *The Nation*, 31 Dec 1842.

<sup>83</sup> O'Connell, *Correspondence of O'Connell Vol 7*, p. 336, letter 3163, 8 Sept 1845.

<sup>84</sup> O'Connell, *Correspondence of O'Connell Vol 7*, p. 336, letter 3163, 8 Sept 1845.

<sup>85</sup> O'Connell, *Correspondence of O'Connell Vol 7*, pp 341-43, letters 3168, 3170, 17 Sept, 1 Oct 1845.

<sup>86</sup> O'Connell, *Correspondence of O'Connell Vol 8*, pp 29, 50-51, letters 3211a, 3229a, 14 May, 18 June 1846.

headed by Ahern, Nunan and many of the manufacturing trades were labelled the *Reporter* faction and the faction headed by Forrest, Hickey and many bakers, coopers and building trades was described as the *Examiner* faction. Whilst the *Reporter* faction was identified as potentially dangerous and treasonous, the *Examiner* faction was described by Raleigh and Ray as a disorganised rabble of street fighters who quickly built up a debt of over one hundred pounds holding drunken soirées and banquets that they could not afford.<sup>87</sup> Ray admitted, however, that the disorderly *Examiner* faction, who openly boasted their disloyalty to Loyal National Repeal Association, had won the backing of Mayor Walnutt – a man whom Steele regarded as having a less than perfect understanding of the Association’s commitment to peaceful methods – and a number of renegade members of the 1782 club.<sup>88</sup> The most worrying aspect, from O’Connell’s perspective, was the close relationship between both factions of the trades and William Smith O’Brien.<sup>89</sup> Smith O’Brien’s political rebirth as a Repealer coincided with O’Connell’s incarceration and was greeted with fanfare in Limerick where a massive assemblage of the Congregated Trades greeted him in December 1843.<sup>90</sup> In turn, Smith O’Brien’s incarceration for parliamentary misconduct in mid-1846 was viewed with disdain

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<sup>87</sup> O’Connell, *Correspondence of O’Connell Vol 8*, pp 52-53, letter 3232, 20 June 1846.

<sup>88</sup> The 1782 club had been established by Davis and others within the *Nation* as a middle-class body that the Association hoped would provide calm sensible leadership to the wider Repeal movement throughout the country. The Young Irelanders soon lost control of these clubs to O’Connell. Bryan P. McGovern, *John Mitchel: Irish Nationalist, Southern secessionist* (Knoxville, 2009), pp 16-17; O’Connell, *Correspondence of O’Connell Vol 8*, pp 52-53, letter 3232, 20 June 1846.

<sup>89</sup> The cordial relationship between Smith O’Brien and the trades had existed since the early 1830s when Smith O’Brien won them over with his financial and vocal encouragement of the Mechanics’ Institute. They often took the unusual decision to recommend him to county voters and even acted as electioneering muscle in the 1841 County Election. The fact that Smith O’Brien often resided at his father-in-law’s residence in George Street helped make him a local hero in their eyes. *Limerick Star*, 16, 23 Jan 1835, 4 Mar 1837; *Limerick Reporter*, 13 July 1841; Robert Sloan, *William Smith O’Brien and the Young Irelander Rebellion of 1848* (Dublin, 2000), p. 39; Richard Davis, *Revolutionary imperialist: William Smith O’Brien, 1803-1864* (Dublin, 1998), pp 65, 104, 347.

<sup>90</sup> The reception for Smith O’Brien appeared to be every bit as enthusiastic as those laid out for O’Connell in previous years, with twenty-seven guilds in attendance, *Limerick Reporter*, 5 Dec 1843. According to Sloan the coolness between Smith O’Brien and O’Connell by mid-1846 was public knowledge in Limerick but he was nevertheless greeted as a conquering hero, Sloan, *William Smith O’Brien*, p. 156.

by O'Connell and his close advisors but, to their alarm, it only endeared him all the more to the trades who – always partial to a felon – further pledged their support to him.<sup>91</sup>

On the eve of the fateful split in the Repeal movement (mid-1846) both factions of the trades appeared somewhat disloyal to the Loyal National Repeal Association which was increasingly ridiculed by the trades and the popular local press despite the efforts of the new Repeal Inspector, Pat Spillane, to improve matters.<sup>92</sup> The *Examiner* faction, however, soon proved its worth to O'Connell by opposing Young Ireland, although they were still eager to differentiate Smith O'Brien from Young Ireland. O'Connell, during a brief visit to the city in September 1846, praised their decision to make this distinction but his private correspondence revealed equal concern in relation to both Smith O'Brien and Young Ireland at this point.<sup>93</sup> Regardless of O'Connell's concerns, the *Examiner* faction had by July 1846 identified its members as Old Irelanders and whilst they refrained from attacking Smith O'Brien during O'Connell's September visit to Limerick they also made it clear that they were merely neutral whereas the *Reporter* faction took it upon themselves to publicly align with Smith O'Brien and eventually became Young Ireland supporters and Irish Confederation members in turn, though only as a matter of course rather than conviction.<sup>94</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, prior to 1847 the hard-line local artisan Repealers appeared unaware or unappreciative of the economic nationalism of the *Nation* and Young Ireland.<sup>95</sup> Frustrated by O'Connell's lack of appreciation

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<sup>91</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 8, 12 May 1846; O'Connell, *Correspondence of O'Connell Vol 8*, pp 24-25, 28-29, letters 3208, 3210, 11, 13 May 1846. O'Connell said little of what he thought of Smith O'Brien in these letters but Sloan is probably correct in his interpretation of this correspondence that Steele's utter disapproval of Smith O'Brien would not have been put to paper if O'Connell was not of a similar mind, see Sloan, *William Smith O'Brien and the Young Irelander Rebellion of 1848*, pp 156-57.

<sup>92</sup> O'Connell, *Correspondence of O'Connell Vol 8*, pp 24-25, 28-29, letters 3208, 3210, 11, 13 May 1846.

<sup>93</sup> At this point it was still somewhat possible to disassociate Smith O'Brien from the Young Irelanders. *Limerick Reporter*, 11 Sept 1846; O'Connell, *Correspondence of O'Connell Vol 8*, *passim*.

<sup>94</sup> Whilst the *Reporter*, referring to a deputation of artisans who visited Smith O'Brien in Cahermoyle to show support, claimed that the trades were behind him, this was quickly corrected by James Gleeson, mason and Secretary of the Congregated Trades, who made it clear that the deputation in question, led by Ahern and Nunan, did not represent the trades and that 'The Committee of the Congregated Trades' had decreed that they would not interfere in 'unhappy political differences.' *Limerick Reporter*, 1, 4 Sept 1846.

<sup>95</sup> Thomas Davis set a particularly good example here but George Gavan Duffy's published works on the 1840s also highlight the ways in which the Union was a 'disastrous compact' for Irish industry and manufacturing and

for economic nationalism, some of the trades did correspond with Smith O'Brien regarding the subject, most notably Thomas Ahern who shared with Smith O'Brien detailed plans regarding iron ore extraction and the promotion of national self-reliance.<sup>96</sup> Whilst Smith O'Brien recommended the plans to the Loyal National Repeal Association he was probably not the best choice for such plans and most scholars of the period consider him far less supportive of economic nationalism than many Young Irelanders or contributors towards the *Nation*.<sup>97</sup> Ahern, it would appear, sought out the local rather than the most suitable man; something undoubtedly indicative of his limited social network. Smith O'Brien was largely responsible for bringing Ahern's Repeal Rent to the Loyal National Repeal Association and the smith was unlikely to have been able to seek out other political figures to discuss grand schemes for national self-reliance. In Cork, by way of contrast, influential middle-class men such as Michael Joseph Barry and Denny Lane were confidantes of Davis and part of 'the circle' from which the *Nation* emerged whereas there was a relative shortage of such individuals in mid-1840s Limerick.<sup>98</sup> With Smith O'Brien, Limerick was exposed to the most conservative element of the Young Ireland phenomenon as a whole although Cronin admits in Cork, too, political topics championed by the *Nation* (e.g. the Colleges Bill) had little local relevance prior to 1845.<sup>99</sup>

By 1847 what had begun as 'the *Examiner* faction' (ironically this group later disowned the *Limerick Examiner*) had adopted all the attributes of popular Old Irelandism, including a

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suggest a wider held belief amongst the Young Irelanders in economic nationalism. George Gavan Duffy, *Young Ireland: a fragment of Irish history, 1840-1850* (London, 1880), pp 29-30. Richard Davis's chapter 'The economics of Young Ireland' gives a good account of the economic nationalism of *The Nation*. As early as 1841 Thomas Davis, with his essay 'Udalism and Feudalism', was advocating an alternative to the Benthamite, Free Trade dogma of O'Connell and the Repeal hierarchy, see Richard Davis, *The Young Ireland movement* (Dublin, 1987), pp 185-200. See also Sara L. Maurer, *The dispossessed state: narratives of ownership in nineteenth century Britain and Ireland* (Baltimore, 2012), pp 118-125.

<sup>96</sup> *The Nation*, 22 Feb 1845.

<sup>97</sup> Richard Davis likened Smith O'Brien's support of protectionism to that of O'Connell's post 1843. Davis, *The Young Ireland movement*, p. 191.

<sup>98</sup> Cronin, 'Young Ireland in Cork', pp 114-117.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*.



strong street presence (and widespread intimidation of political opponents), greater adherence to clerical direction and a more ostensibly Catholic identity.<sup>100</sup> Many Limerick artisans mirrored the noisy street belligerents that impeded Young Irelanders in all Irish urban centres with their 1847 attack on the Irish Confederation strongly resembling a similar incident involving the ‘Hercules Street Butchers’ and the Confederation in Belfast.<sup>101</sup> In this environment, the bakers – deafeningly silent during the prime Repeal years of 1841-43 – became prominent participants in popular local politics, disrupting several political meetings attended by members of the Richmond Ward Club and penning a letter that strongly criticised Young Ireland.<sup>102</sup> Conversely, the political allegiance of the Richmond Ward Club became unequivocally linked with the Young Ireland movement when the club was transformed into one of the earliest provincial branches of the Irish Confederation (officially named the Sarsfield Branch of the Irish Confederation but generally referred to as the ‘Sarsfield Club’) in September 1847.<sup>103</sup> The deep division within the trades – or at least the politicised element of the trades – was made evident during the noisy and extremely partisan parliamentary election campaign of August 1847 (one month prior to the founding of the Limerick Irish Confederation branch, i.e. the Sarsfield Club) when the Congregated Trades hierarchy, by now staunch Old Irelanders, proudly announced that the Congregated Trades of Limerick supported ‘Conciliation Hall candidates’ as they appeared at the hustings shouting and intimidating any

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<sup>100</sup> The Old Ireland faction of the trades were particularly influenced by the charismatic Fr. Richard Baptist O’Brien. The firmly Old Ireland Trades Literary Society (founded in late 1847) was more heavily influenced by the Catholic Clergy than any other body associated with the trades prior to that point or since. *Limerick Reporter*, 23 Nov 1847.

<sup>101</sup> There were a number of commonalities between the Old Ireland street fighters who disrupted Irish Confederation meetings in several Irish cities. In particular the fact that butchers featured prominently was significant. *Nation*, 23 Oct 1847; *Limerick Reporter*, 22 Oct 1847; Sloan, *William Smith O’Brien*, pp 194-197; George Gavan Duffy, *Four years in Irish history* (London, 1883), pp 440.

<sup>102</sup> On one such occasion Charles O’Neill, smith, alleged that bakers from a certain establishment had been bribed to attack members of the Richmond Ward Club attending a political meeting. In a similar vein, John Nunan claimed that an anti-Young Ireland letter purportedly originating with the bakers was inauthentic or, at the very least, did not originate with the actual Guild of Bakers. *Limerick Reporter*, 15 June, 2, 6 July 1847.

<sup>103</sup> Fenton, *Young Ireland rebellion and Limerick*, pp 40-41; *Limerick Reporter*, 3, 10, 14 Sept 1847.

Young Ireland supporters they could find.<sup>104</sup> The core of the Old Ireland faction at this stage was formed by John Hickey, victualler; James Gleeson, mason; Denis Grimes, mason; Thomas Dwyer, baker; and Richard Raleigh, tobacconist. By way of contrast, the Guild of Cabinetmakers immediately contributed to the Sarsfield Club (the Limerick Branch of the Irish Confederation) and Nunan suggested, no doubt with some exaggeration, that many guilds were prepared to join the club *en masse*.<sup>105</sup>

Artisans such as John Nunan, Charles O'Neill and Thomas Ahern formed part of the leadership of the Richmond Ward Club but were relegated to a more subservient position in the Sarsfield Club which had Smith O'Brien as president and many journalists and lawyers to the fore. This did, however, allow many artisans to interact with middle-class individuals who can be described as Young Irelanders, in particular John O'Donnell, solicitor and one-time newspaper proprietor; Daniel Doyle, solicitor; John McClenahan, editor of the *Limerick Reporter*; William and Daniel Griffin, both physicians and brothers of the famed playwright Gerald; and Fr. John Kenyon, an exceptionally eccentric and unorthodox Limerick-born priest.<sup>106</sup> This undoubtedly introduced the trades to a more uncompromising nationalism. O'Donnell was particularly eager to establish an alternative to O'Connell's 'moral force' dictates and described the Liberator's apparent fawning attitude towards Queen Victoria in uncomplimentary terms, declaring that such 'respectful gratitude' made him want to chop off his hand.<sup>107</sup> It was possibly their first exposure to romantic and cultural nationalism as well and O'Donnell's firm commitment to the Irish language as a cultural emblem of their nationality is

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<sup>104</sup> Conciliation Hall was at this stage the Dublin headquarters solely of the Old Ireland faction. The resolution in favour of 'Conciliation Hall candidates' was signed by John Hickey, victualler and Repeal Warden, James Gleeson, Secretary of the Congregated Trades and mason, and two other masons who were present. *Limerick Reporter*, 23 July, 3, 6, 10 Aug 1847. Loud and public criticism of Young Ireland artisans featured during the campaign with John Nunan in particular coming in for criticism.

<sup>105</sup> Thirty-four members of the Guild of Cabinetmakers donated seventy shillings a few days after the Sarsfield Club was formed with pledges to donate more, *Limerick Reporter*, 14 Sept 1847.

<sup>106</sup> O'Donnell and Doyle were active during the ill-fated rebellion of 1848, after which they fled to Paris and England respectively for a short while. McClenahan likewise fled to America after the rebellion. Fenton, *Young Ireland rebellion and Limerick*, pp 36-39, 180-81.

<sup>107</sup> Fenton, *Young Ireland rebellion and Ireland*, p. 65.

likely to have been a new concept to them.<sup>108</sup> There was undoubtedly an even exchange of political philosophies and Thomas Ahern impressed the middle-class members with his doctrine of economic nationalism which O'Donnell, in particular, took to heart.<sup>109</sup>

The most dramatic evidence for a transfer of political philosophy was the emergence of separatism, physical force nationalism and revolutionary spirit amongst the artisan community in 1848. Thomas Ahern's journey from economic nationalist to pike-making revolutionary (he openly announced that he was manufacturing pikes at his forge) was indicative of how far some artisans had travelled since their initial Repeal manifestos of 1830 and 1834 when their espousals of nationalism were tentative and accompanied by proclamations of loyalty to the sovereign.<sup>110</sup>

The whole period prompts many questions but probably offers little from which to draw firm conclusions. From March until June 1848 the trades and the wider Repeal community attended public rifle rallies under the watching gaze of the law and spoke boldly of open rebellion.<sup>111</sup> Thomas Ahern's ironworks

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<sup>108</sup> Laurence Fenton, 'We disagreed in the desert, only because we loved the promised land so much: Young Ireland in Limerick, 1848', *Old Limerick Journal*, no. 43, Summer 2009, pp 34-35.

<sup>109</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 22 Oct 1847.

<sup>110</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 9, 16, 19, 23, 26 November, 3, 10, 21 Dec 1830, 28 Jan 1831.

<sup>111</sup> This period was of course very much a reaction to events in Europe, particularly France. Fenton, 'Young Ireland in Limerick, 1848', pp 34-41. Parties of Young Irelanders were reportedly parading through the city with rifles on their shoulders and even discussed shooting technique with members of the military.



**Figure 7 Pikehead manufactured by Thomas Ahern in 1848. Source – Jim Kemmy Municipal Museum**

in Catherine Street brazenly sold pikes of various descriptions (the smiths of the city were said to be ‘overworked’ with pike-making) which were advertised openly in the shop window.<sup>112</sup>

At one point government spies were hunted from the shop by Ahern and a crowd of supporters, the incident later prompting the *Reporter* to issue a warning that such men were ‘not safe’ in the city.<sup>113</sup> Fr. Richard Baptist O’Brien, previously an Old

Ireland demagogue who fiercely supported ‘moral force’, now gave dangerous public speeches that hinted at revolution and stated somewhat cryptically that ‘allegiance and freedom may sometimes be incompatible.’<sup>114</sup>

At one point the trades looked as politicised and united as they ever were and yet in the middle of this period the much publicised attack upon William Smith O’Brien (dubbed the ‘Battle of Limerick’ by *Punch Magazine*) by Old Irelanders inspired by Fr. Richard Baptist O’Brien was the worst example of factionalism in the entire 1840s.<sup>115</sup> In short, nothing concrete

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<sup>112</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 20 April 1848.

<sup>113</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 4, 11 April 1848.

<sup>114</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 20 April 1848; *Freeman’s Journal*, 8 April 1848.

<sup>115</sup> Most historians and contemporaneous commentators of the attack upon Smith O’Brien and the confederates in April 1848 conclude that the incident was unreflective of the general mood at the time, McGrath, ‘Riots in Limerick city’, pp 155-163.

can be said about the 1844-48 period apart from the fact that it was politically tumultuous. There is enough evidence to suggest that much of the peaceful and orthodox rhetoric that had characterised the Congregated Trades until this point had been merely a veil obscuring their truer character. One particular speech given by the principal Old Ireland artisan, John Hickey, in April 1848 emphasised the need to question the true political character of Limerick artisans up to that point. Addressing an assemblage of ‘United Repealers’, Hickey announced that

The lethargic sleep that lay on Europe has broken – it is now beyond the reach of tyranny to stop the mighty movement that was made for democratic liberty. The trumpet blast has gone forth and the nations have been aroused from their sleep of slavery; and whilst the nations of the earth are throwing off their chains, shall Ireland alone remain fettered. As well may the hand of despotism attempt to stop the wave that rolls on the mighty Atlantic.

Hickey went on to reference revolutionary events in Vienna, Palermo, Paris and Warsaw before mentioning the blighted district of Skibbereen (a by-word for famine and death) in his native Ireland.<sup>116</sup> Given the fact that Hickey’s pronouncements on politics outside of this revolutionary period were banal and predictable one might well ask where he had been hiding such rousing rhetoric till that moment.<sup>117</sup>

## Summary

How do we characterise the nationalism of the pre-famine trades? On the surface it appears to be lineally descended from relatively innocuous eighteenth century traditions such as the ‘Consumer Nationalism’ of Swift (‘burn everything English except their coal’) and many of

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<sup>116</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 28 Mar 1848.

<sup>117</sup> Hickey generally gave loud platitudinous endorsements of candidates without much serious explanation of credentials and at one point in 1852 he described the artisans of the Congregated Trades as being Catholics interested in ‘defending the faith of their fathers.’ *Limerick Reporter*, 11 Jan 1850; *Munster News*, 7 April 1852.

the Protestant mercantile class of that followed.<sup>118</sup> Objectives were initially firmly in line with the Grattanite tradition; so much so that it is likely that Steele or O'Connell had a hand in outlining the template from which to work. The manner in which the politicised core were so easily swept along with the revolutionary mood of 1848 suggests that some of the trades were inclined towards more overtly nationalistic goals than their inoffensive manifestos suggested, although it also clear that throughout the 1840s some artisan groups prioritised the national question less than others did. The influence of O'Connell was ubiquitous and yet, paradoxically, did not define their political objectives. The most intimate interactions between O'Connell and the trades suggest a Liberator who was wilfully ignorant of the agenda of the trades. Although the nationalism of the trades seems somewhat out of line with later definitions of Irish nationalism or classic definitions of European nationalism, it is clear that they *were* indeed nationalists whereas O'Connell, by way of comparison, appears more the Catholic liberal reformer as characterised by Whelan.<sup>119</sup> This subtle distinction between the trades and O'Connell was clear as early as 1830, the dawn of his popular Repeal campaign, when he characterised the Belgian nationalists (protectionists with similar goals to the Limerick trades) as Catholic reformers and failed to mention the economic nationalism that inspired the Belgian revolution.<sup>120</sup> It could be argued that O'Connell's fostering of associational culture, particularly the news rooms, reading clubs and Independent Clubs of the late 1820s and early 1830s, created

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<sup>118</sup> Sarah Foster, 'Buying Irish: consumer nationalism in 18th-century Dublin', *History Today*, Apr '97, Vol. 47, pp 44-51.

<sup>119</sup> Whelan contends that O'Connell had formed his opinion on the Union in the few short years of its passing when Emancipation was withheld and saw it as a means to achieve religious and civil reform. Whelan, *Tree of liberty*, p. 152.

<sup>120</sup> There are rough similarities with the ideology of the Limerick trades and the economic nationalists of Belgium, indeed both sought legislative independence so as to protect local industries from English competition. Nationalism in Belgium, both early nineteenth century movement to separate from Holland and the later campaign for Flemish independence, was driven by economically goals, with linguistic and religious distinctions assuming a more minor role. *Tralee mercury*, 17 Aug 1830, Victor Conzemius, 'The Place of Daniel O'Connell in the Liberal Catholicism', Donal McCartney (ed.), *The world of Daniel O'Connell* (Dublin, 1980), pp 146-48; Timothy Baycroft, *Culture, identity and nationalism: French flanders in the nineteenth century and twentieth centuries* (New York, 2004), pp 51-53, 193-95; Els Witte, Jan Craeybeckx, Alain Meynen, *The political history of Belgium from 1830 onwards* (Brussels, 2000), pp 19- 24, 40-44; H.R.C. Wright, *Free trade and protection in the Netherlands 1816-30* (Cambridge, 2013), pp 207-249.

urban social networks that gave rise to nationalism.<sup>121</sup> In particular, the crucial role that the trades played in the O'Connellite rallies and parades of the 1820s and 1830s gave them a platform to develop their political ideology, imagine themselves as participants in a national cause and interact with people throughout the country.<sup>122</sup>

The micro-historical examination of events in the 1840s shows that the nationalism of the trades was, to some extent, born of materialistic self-interest – it was strongest amongst the manufacturing trades who saw Repeal as a panacea and described English industry as the malevolent 'other.' The section of the trades that was out of line with the economic nationalist core was composed of artisans from the non-manufacturing trades such as bakers, butchers, the building trades and coopers who, whilst they were manufacturers, were apparently unconcerned of the threat of English competition and more concerned, at this stage, with the English appetite for Irish firkins. A cult of personality, centred on O'Connell, became distinct from the quest for Repeal, competed with the nationalism of the trades and was most apparent during the 1847-48 period. The political split with the artisan class, when examined in fine detail, did not develop in tandem with the national Young Ireland versus Old Ireland debate but rather as a response to the pace of politicisation and the question as to whether the trades were loyal to O'Connell or to Repeal. The 1847 alignment of the two divergent branches of the trades with Young Ireland/Irish Confederation and Old Ireland, respectively, was not the reaction of a homogenous body reacting to a sudden political development but rather marked

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<sup>121</sup> Webb particularly focuses on the role that O'Connell's role in developing associational culture in the late 1820s and early 1830s was crucial to identity formation whereas she describes O'Connell's notions of nationhood as vague, tinged with Catholicism and expressed by way of ambiguous terms such as 'the people.' Sharon Webb, *A study of associational culture and the development of Irish Nationalism, 1780-1830*, with the construction of a software information environment, unpublished PhD thesis, NUI Maynooth, 2011, pp 169-170; Daniel Druckman, 'Nationalism, patriotism and group loyalty, a social psychological perspective' in *Mershon International Studies Review*, xxxviii, no. 1 (1994), pp 43-68.

<sup>122</sup> There were limits to the extent of their interaction during this period but by 1842 they were regularly corresponding with Repeal leaders and the 'monster meetings' of 1843 saw a core group attend political rallies throughout Munster. *Limerick Reporter*, 11 Nov, 13 Dec 1842, 7 Feb, 21 Mar, 21, 25 Apr, 2, 19, 26 May, 6, 16 Jun 1843; *Freeman's Journal*, 24 Nov, 6 Dec 1842.

the moment that an already fractured artisan class decided upon the political party that would best suit their local factional allegiances. The arch-Repealers within the trades were transfixed by the national question but did not have any awareness of the economic national theorists within the Young Ireland movement and Thomas Davis's espousal of protectionism remained a relatively unappreciated treatise just as the trades remained an unused support base for a popular protectionist campaign.<sup>123</sup> Equally, the Old Ireland artisans within the trades was regarded as an ugly mob by the Conciliation Hall leaders to whom they professed loyalty, displayed no appreciation of the Whig alliance and undermined their espousal of 'moral force' by violently attacking Young Ireland leaders at every opportunity.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Though Davis was dead by time the trades aligned with the Irish Confederation but his legacy was immense and there was still potential to resurrect his work on protectionism and build a popular movement around it. As mentioned earlier, Duffy was also an option and, closer to home, Fr. John Kenyon wrote a number of articles in the *Limerick Reporter* promoting home manufacturing that appear to have gone unnoticed by the local trades. Davis, *The Young Ireland movement* (Dublin, 1987), pp 185-200; Duffy, *Young Ireland: a fragment of Irish history, 1840-1850* (London, 1880), pp 29-30; *Limerick Reporter*, 13, 27 Nov, 4, 8, 15 Dec 1847.

<sup>124</sup> The opinions of the Old Ireland section of the trades were most clearly expressed during the 1847 election campaign, see *Limerick Reporter*, 27 July, 3 Aug 1847. The extent to which the views of the Old Ireland trades differed from the Conciliation Hall leadership can be gleaned from their dealings with John O'Connell in 1848, see *The Nation*, 8, 15 Jan 1848, *Limerick Reporter*, 11 Jan 1848, *Freeman's Journal*, 10 Jan 1848.



**Chapter Five:**

**The trades of**

**Limerick and broad**

**political trends in the**

**post-Famine era**

Whilst organised labour in Limerick was very much shaped and defined by Irish nationalism, in all its nineteenth century forms and at all times through the prism of their own economic nationalism, the rekindling of this relationship between the trades and the dominant political discourse of the day was unconventional and featured alliances between seemingly discordant socio-political groupings. These irregular political developments which occurred during this period form the crucial context to consider when explaining the world view of the trades and their reasoned political stance.

### **Political background**

The trades emerged in the post-famine era as a financially weakened group with no clear idea as to where their political loyalties should lie. The electoral contests in 1850s Limerick were increasingly devoid of clear-cut political ideas. Hoppen described the era as an ideal one for the social historian as one can examine the dynamics of localism, patronage and clerical dictation without the distraction of national politics.<sup>1</sup> In the context of Irish nationalism, the political manifesto issued by the Congregated Trades prior to the 1852 election was noteworthy in that it revealed the extent to which they persisted in calling for a national legislature when their political superiors had fallen silent on the subject.<sup>2</sup> The relevance to the trades of this unifying political objective over the following decade is difficult to determine as they became embroiled in the internecine and conflict-ridden eight electoral contests between 1852 and 1865. In Limerick, Liberalism reigned supreme during this period but there was little substance what appeared more to be a rejection of national politics in favour of local interest groups with the Catholic clergy acting as power brokers (see Chapters Six and Seven). As late as July 1865

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<sup>1</sup> K. Theodore Hoppen, *Ireland Since 1800: Conflict and Conformity* (New York, 2013), p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 2 April 1852.

the trades were acting nominally in the Liberal interest, clashing violently with some Spaight (Conservative candidate) campaign supporters.<sup>3</sup>

Fenianism undoubtedly became established amongst elements of the Limerick populace by the early 1860s and subsequent reminiscences, along with contemporary records of arrests made between 1863 and 1865, illustrate the extent to which it existed as a strong underground movement.<sup>4</sup> The strong presence of the Cork artisans at the McManus funeral in 1861 was evidence of the widespread support for the movement but there is no corresponding evidence amongst the Limerick trades at this point.<sup>5</sup> Fenianism's political potential became evident in 1867 in response to the execution of the 'Martyred Three' in Manchester which sparked a massive ceremonial march – taking the form in Limerick of an enormous 'mock' funeral procession originating in the Mechanics' Institute. Supporters of and participants in the Manchester Martyrs ceremony fell into two categories: those who were uncompromisingly dedicated to the doctrine of physical force separatism and those who sympathised somewhat with Fenianism but sought to incorporate it into traditional electoral politics. There was no clear division between these two groups: an attack on a 'tenant right' meeting in 1869 (dubbed the 'Battle of the Markets') featured a relatively large number of advanced Nationalists (Thornley puts it at two hundred) intolerant of any deviation from separatism and yet a similar attempt to attack a massive Home Rule demonstration in 1876 pitted a small number of advanced Nationalists (less than fifty) against thousands.<sup>6</sup> The relatively meagre figures attributed to the

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<sup>3</sup> *Munster News*, 12, 15, 22 July 1865; *The Nation*, 22 July 1865; *Nenagh Guardian*, 15 July 1865.

<sup>4</sup> Fr. Richard Baptist O'Brien was warning the public of the dangerous nature of Fenianism in 1862 and this is probably an indication it was making inroads and arrests were carried out in 1865, see *Munster News*, 12 April 1862, 27 Sept 1865. There were some hints at Fenianism amongst the trades in early 1866 when Michael Gavin, prominent member of the Guild of Painters, was apprehended as part of a conspiracy to infiltrate the military stationed in Limerick, see *Freeman's Journal*, 9 Feb 1866. Stephen O'Mara, later a prominent bacon merchant, was apparently sworn in in 1862 at the age of 16. Patricia Lavelle, *James O'Mara: A staunch Sinn Feiner* (Dublin, 1961), p. 12. See also John Daly's recollections of the movement during the early 1860s in *Irish Freedom*, Feb 1912.

<sup>5</sup> Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, pp 106, 168.

<sup>6</sup> McGrath, 'Riots in Limerick, 1820-1900', pp 154-157; National Archives, Fenian Papers, 4853; Thornley, *Isaac Butt and Home Rule*, pp 191-93, 242-44, 269, 277-78.

1876 advanced nationalist contingent compare closely with that of the Manchester Martyrs procession where, out of the thousands who took part, only thirty were positively identified as members of the IRB and the rest were sympathisers later absorbed by the Home Rule movement.<sup>7</sup>

The Manchester Martyrs procession signalled the wider Catholic populace's sympathy with Fenianism but not the demise of liberalism as a political force in Limerick. Whilst the clerical/liberal hegemony had achieved unbroken electoral success in the eight electoral contests between 1851 and 1865 (included here are Whig-Liberals, Independent Liberals and even James Spaight who stood as a Conservative but at the behest of the local clerical/liberal faction) they were often reliant on patronage (generally drinks for a hired mob or promises of work or favours for voters), threats and electoral intimidation – a situation, which Hurst asserts, applied to the island as a whole.<sup>8</sup> The support they garnered was ephemeral but every election earned them a growing number of bitter enemies – typically independent men whose businesses or property had at some point been attacked by election mobs. By the mid-1860s this group had coalesced to form a significant counter-faction to the clerical/liberal one. They were led by Laurence 'Larry' Kelly, a self-employed butcher and town councillor (1857-86) whose capacity to defend himself physically allowed him to blend in with the ubiquitous election mob.<sup>9</sup> Ranked alongside Kelly were John Ellard, town clerk and campaign manager for Peter Tait in 1868 and Isaac Butt in 1871; Richard Gamble, feather and skin merchant; William

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<sup>7</sup> Brendan Mac Giolla Choille, 'Mourning the martyrs', *Old Limerick Journal*, vol. 22, Christmas 1987, pp 32-33.

<sup>8</sup> Instances of priests getting work for local slaters and prominent employers strongly influencing shoemakers were just some examples of what preceded elections in the 1852-65 era. With regard to mobs for hire, the going rate appeared to be 2s 6d a man per day although a hardened core group were often hired for a half crown plus three glasses of whiskey a day with weapons supplied. *Munster News*, 10, 20 Feb 1858, 22 Mar, 15, 19, 29 May 1858; *Limerick city election. Minutes of evidence taken before the Select Committee on Limerick City Election Petition; with the proceedings of the committee.* (1859), pp 46-96, HC, 1859 (147) iv 40-90; Michael Hurst, 'Ballot Act', Alan O'Day (ed.), *Reactions to Irish Nationalism* (Dublin, 1987), pp 37-39.

<sup>9</sup> For Kelly's obituary see *Limerick Chronicle*, 8 Nov 1887; *Munster News*, 9 Nov 1887. For examples of his pre-election behaviour see *Limerick city election petition*, pp 52-54; *Limerick Chronicle*, 10, 14 Nov 1868; *Limerick Reporter*, 27 Nov 1868.

Abraham, seed merchant, brother-in-law to Peter Tait and later an Irish Parliamentary Party MP; Denis Grimes, a tobacconist, previously a mason and one-time treasurer of the Congregated Trades; and Charles O'Neill, possibly a smith previously active in the Irish Confederation in the 1840s. Although this group identified, to some extent, with (an ill-defined) Irish nationalism, there was a sense that old scores were simply being settled: individuals such as Richard Gamble, William Abraham and Denis Grimes had all been on the wrong side of mob violence, inspired in many cases by politicised and demagogic priests, in election battles in the late 1850s.<sup>10</sup> Whilst they sympathised with Fenianism – at one point Kelly appeared to identify himself as one – they were separate from the John Daly-led Fenian core and Kelly made it clear to the trades in 1871 that he was not a separatist.<sup>11</sup> This faction helped establish a branch of the Irish Working Man's Association (IWMA, a popular-based advanced nationalist society, distinct from the *International Working Man's Association* which dovetailed neatly with the Amnesty Movement and featured Isaac Butt as Honorary President) in Limerick in 1868 and was the core of the nascent Home Rule movement in the city.<sup>12</sup>

By the 1880s a familiar political pattern was re-established whereby a strong national leader led the call for legislative independence. Whilst O'Connell unapologetically linked Catholic advancement with Repeal, Home Rule as a popular political force in Limerick, and to an extent nationally, was founded upon a disparate alliance united by its members' antipathy to clerically controlled politics. The aforementioned Larry Kelly-led anti-clerical faction, along

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<sup>10</sup> *Munster News*, 10 Feb 1858, 4 Jan 1860, 4 Jan 1862; *Limerick Reporter*, 9, 12 Feb 1858; *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 Feb 1858; *Report from the Select Committee on Parliamentary and Municipal Elections; together with the proceedings of the committee, minutes of evidence, and appendix*, pp 295-298, H.C. 1869 (352), viii.1, 274-277; Thornley, *Isaac Butt and Home Rule*, p. 55, 191-3, 263; *Limerick city election. Minutes of evidence taken before the Select Committee on Limerick City Election Petition; with the proceedings of the committee 1859*, pp 26, 29-31, 44-60, H.C., 1859 (147) iv.

<sup>11</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 16 April 1869, 30 June 1871.

<sup>12</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 2, 16 Feb 1869.

with local Conservatives, Fenians and the Congregated Trades all worked together to dismantle the clerical/liberal hegemony in the late 1860s and early 1870s.

Adding to the confusion of the competing political dynamics was the electoral emergence of Peter Tait, industrialist, whose lack of a clear political stance made him somewhat enigmatic.<sup>13</sup> Tait's political ascent began in September 1865 winning an ugly mayoral election – later dubbed the 'Battle of Limerick' – which saw a large mob intimidate councillors holding a casting vote whilst an uncharacteristically unprepared clerical/liberal faction was unable to mobilise an opposing mob.<sup>14</sup> The core section of this latter faction (pig buyers, parochial clergy and the *Limerick Reporter*) opposed the otherwise popular Tait after this point and his Conservative/Fenian/anti-clerical supporters had to turn to the Protestant, Conservative *Limerick Chronicle* for help – despite this being the only paper to unequivocally condemn the Manchester Martyr demonstration of 1867.<sup>15</sup> The nature and extent of the opposition to the clerical/liberal faction mirrored developments across the country in 1868: G.H. Moore's success as a 'Independent Nationalist Liberal' in Mayo, M Downing's similar success in Cork signalled a burgeoning opposition before the election of O'Donovan Rossa, then a felon, in Tipperary in 1869 cemented the threat to the political hegemony.<sup>16</sup> The opposition to the Liberal party took many in the country by surprise: as late as March 1868 Bishop Moriarty of Kerry had declared privately to William Monsell that 'the minds of the Irish people are in the hands of the Irish priests,' whilst disregarding the rapidly changing tide of popular opinion.<sup>17</sup> The *Reporter* – now owned by the ultramontane Maurice Lenihan –

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<sup>13</sup> Peter Tait was born in the Shetland Islands and immigrated to Limerick in the 1850s to work for Scottish employers as a young draper. He built up his own business in an unorthodox and ingenious fashion by selling cheap clothing by the dockside. Peter Tait Files, Local Studies, Limerick City Library, <http://www.limerickcity.ie/Library/LocalStudies/LocalStudiesFiles/T/TaitPeter/> accessed 10 Dec 2016.

<sup>14</sup> *Munster News*, 25, 29 Nov 1865; *Tralee Chronicle and Killarney Echo*, 28 Nov 1865. The voice of the liberal interest in Limerick, Maurice Lenihan, by way of his newspaper the *Limerick Reporter*, was particularly keen to remind the public of this subject in 1868. *Limerick Reporter*, 27 Nov 1868.

<sup>15</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 7, 17 Dec 1867.

<sup>16</sup> Hurst, 'Ballot Act', pp. 37-40.

<sup>17</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 Nov 1868, Hurst, 'Ballot Act', pp 39-40.

described Tait's disparate alliance, and the nascent Home Rule movement which followed it, as being composed of 'the orange and the green.'<sup>18</sup> Leading Conservative James Spaight, speaking before a parliamentary committee in 1869, stated that although the Limerick Conservative party had not supported the Tait/Piggott ticket many prominent Conservatives, including his brother William, voted for both Tait the industrialist and Richard Piggott the 'Fenian.'<sup>19</sup> Tait himself was largely inconsequential – he was nominated *in absentia*, did not appear during his campaign and it was later admitted in 1871 by Larry Kelly that Ellard, Abraham and himself had orchestrated the entire campaign.<sup>20</sup> Tait's political career had begun at municipal level in 1864 and what little political rhetoric he had used revealed little more than a utilitarian world view centred on economic issues, although there are a number of sources that inaccurately attempt to assign him various political identities with local historian Hannan incorrectly commenting:

Many citizens were flabbergasted by Tait's association with the Tories - long-time enemies of all nationalist ideals - and his opposition to the two Liberal candidates, who were pledged to support Gladstone's movement to disestablish the Protestant Church in Ireland.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The 1868 election featured two Whig candidates pitted against Peter Tait and his unlikely running mate Richard Piggott, editor of *Irishman* who was slater embroiled in the Parnell forgeries scandal. *Limerick Reporter*, 7, 10 Dec 1869; David Thornley, *Isaac Butt and Home Rule* (London, 1964), p. 96.

<sup>19</sup> *Select Committee on Parliamentary and Municipal Elections*, pp 264-265.

<sup>20</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 3 Dec 1872.

<sup>21</sup> Aside from his biographer, historians have scarcely looked at Tait's political career and the few who did cover the Limerick industrialist haphazardly attempted to describe him as a Conservative. Thornley identifies him as one of the 'Conservative Home Rulers' but even this was an improvement on a trend started by Lenihan in the 1860s and continued by Finegan in the 1940s whereby Tait was cast as the overbearing Conservative attempting to defeat the popular candidates by patronage and intimidation. This trend was repeated by local Limerick historians Hannan and Kemmy who cite Finegan to assert that Tait opposed Disestablishment and was a somewhat tyrannical, unpopular figure and a 'doughty and unscrupulous' political opponent. Accurate indications of Tait's politics in the 1860s are difficult to find and are, in any case, largely irrelevant when ascertaining the competing forces in the 1868 election as Tait was not present and his campaign was run by Larry Kelly, William Abraham, John Ellard and a core group of Fenians and anti-clericalists. Thornley, *Isaac Butt and Home Rule*, p. 189; Francis Finegan, 'Maurice Lenihan: Historian of Limerick: Part III', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 36, No. 143 (Sep., 1947), pp. 358-365; Kevin Hannan, 'Sit Peter Tait', *Old Limerick Journal*, vol. 30, winter 1993, pp 26-30; Jim Kemmy, 'The Tait's in Limerick and Melbourne', *Old Limerick Journal*, vol. 23 Australian edition, 1988, pp 82-87.

Spaight commented that Tait's colourless political outlook was what endeared him to both Conservatives and Catholics prior to the 1868 election:

There was really no information upon that point [Tait's politics]; Sir Peter Tait had not committed himself to a policy which the Conservatives objected to; whereas the others had, and upon that ground the Conservatives preferred him..... Sir Peter Tait occupied a very peculiar position. I believe that a very great many Roman Catholics voted for Sir Peter Tait, under the impression that he would vote in religious matters in accordance with their views, and their opponents were under the other impression; he never gave any significance himself of how he would vote.<sup>22</sup>

As Spaight hinted, Tait's self-portrayal as a blank canvass was what infuriated his opponents who appeared aghast at his ability to capture both the Conservative and Fenian vote with the staunchly pro-clerical *Southern Reporter* commenting,

He has no fear of the Fenians because he is a national benefactor; and while he censures criminal undertakings, he uses language with which no one can find fault, because he abstains from national reproaches.<sup>23</sup>

By the time of his third consecutive term as mayor (1868) his opponents were instigating a two-pronged attack upon him, with the politicised clergy using the print media and the pig buyers – effectively the street-level lieutenants of the clerical/liberal faction – assailing his character in a number of noisy, tumultuous ward meetings.<sup>24</sup>

By 1880 the city artisans had unequivocally aligned themselves with Charles Stuart Parnell, but their journey towards this point, where they were again associated with a powerful

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<sup>22</sup> *Select Committee on Parliamentary and Municipal Elections*, pp. 264, 273.

<sup>23</sup> Waite, *Peter Tait: a remarkable story*, p. 121.

<sup>24</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 13 Oct, 27 Nov, 8 Dec 1868.



and personable national leader, did not follow a linear route.<sup>25</sup> This journey began with in 1863 when they cast their lot in with Tait and convinced him to enter politics.<sup>26</sup> Whilst aspects of Tait's humble man-of-the-people persona and approach to public relations, as discussed in Chapter Seven, explain his popularity with the trades, it is necessary here to discuss what this relationship tells us about their overall world view and concept of nationalism. Whilst the leadership of the Congregated Trades repeatedly asserted their admiration for Tait, he was bitterly opposed by the Guild of Tailors since 1866, an unusual situation in a century marked by artisan unity.<sup>27</sup> The neo-luddism of trades such as the bakers, coopers and the building trades lasted well into the twentieth century and was one the core tenets of their trade unionism. It is impossible to marry this fact with their support of Tait, whose streamlined, efficient business model (characterised by largescale replacement of male workers with females, the assembly line system and the consequent erosion of craft skills) epitomised the type of labour rationalisation they normally viewed as offensive. No doubt the money Tait brought into the local economy meant more buildings were been erected and repaired and more bread was being bought, so the majority of the Congregated Trades were happy to ignore the threat to the tailoring trade. Equally important, Tait's tenure as mayor occurred during a particularly acute economic depression that directly affected many artisans.<sup>28</sup> One could suggest that the trades were bought by Tait, but the evidence suggests that they shaped his political outlook far more than he shaped theirs. The trades appeared to be captivated by the macro-economic potential of Tait's business empire and regarded him as weapon to wield against British industry; from

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<sup>25</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 28 Oct 1880; *Munster News*, 3 Nov 1880; Jim Kemmy Municipal Museum, 'Illuminated address, copy of, presented to C.S. Parnell, by the Congregated Trades of Limerick, Oct. 28th 1880', Identifier: 1989.0075.

<sup>26</sup> *Munster News*, 30 May 1863.

<sup>27</sup> For an indication of Tait's early popularity see *Munster News*, 30 May 1863, 30 Sept 1865. For details on his rift with the Guild of Tailors see *Limerick Chronicle*, 4 May 1865, 8 May 1866, Jan 1 1867; *Limerick Reporter*, 6, 10, 13, 20 April, 4, 8, 22, 25 May 1866, 17 Nov 1868. See also his biographer's account of Tait and his relationship with the Tailors of Limerick in *Limerick Chronicle*, 11 June 2006.

<http://www.limerickcity.ie/media/tait,%20peter%202014.pdf> accessed 16 Nov 2015.

<sup>28</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 12 April 1867.

a purely economic nationalistic perspective he was a heroic figure.<sup>29</sup> This explanation, however, in no way eradicates the paradoxes; the trades had shown little interest in the Board of Trade's mixture of economic nationalism and labour rationalisation in the 1840s (see Chapter Four) and yet accepted Tait's espousal of the same principles.

Whilst the Congregated Trades supported the cult of Tait without hesitation, the trades' leadership was more cautious when dealing with his political allies in the city. Their unflinching support of Tait naturally aligned them against the clerical/liberal faction but they treaded carefully in this regard and when courted by the city's most politicised priest, Fr. Denis Shanahan, in favour of the two 1868 Liberal candidates they firmly but *politely* refused.<sup>30</sup> Equally they acquiesced with Tait's agent, John Ellard, but remained independent in their support of Tait and aloof from Larry Kelly, Ellard and Charles O'Neill who all took part in the public exchange of polemics, street pageantry and the general chicanery that preceded that particular election.<sup>31</sup>

Whilst the relationship between the trades and Fenianism was close, the caution of the 1860s leadership ensured a degree of independence from the physical-force movement. Police reports indicate that artisans constituted a significant proportion of the active Fenian population and while seven of the twelve Manchester Martyr processionists identified in 1867 as 'Fenians of the worst character' were artisans (three tailors, three bakers and a mason) this represented only a small percentage of the total artisan population.<sup>32</sup> Mac Giolla Coille asserts, and contemporary newspaper reports agree, that the decision to hold the funeral procession originated with the city trades but the officers of the trades were noticeably absent; a situation

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<sup>29</sup> This portrayal of Tait was first evident in 1863 and later repeated during the early Home Rule era, see *Munster News*, 30 May 1863, 15 June 1870; *Limerick Reporter*, 30 June 1871.

<sup>30</sup> *Munster News*, 18 Nov 1868.

<sup>31</sup> *Munster News*, 18 Nov 1868; *Limerick Reporter*, 17, 20, 24, 27 Nov 1868; *Limerick Chronicle*, 14, 17 Nov 1868; *Irish Examiner*, 19 Nov 1868.

<sup>32</sup> Brendan Mac Giolla Choille, 'Mourning the martyrs', *Old Limerick Journal*, vol. 22, Christmas 1987, p. 41.

which probably suggests a degree of subterfuge on their part rather than any divide between the rank and file and the officers of the trades.<sup>33</sup> Of the 438 individuals identified as participants in the procession, 191 appear to be artisans by trade and Mac Giolla Coille estimated that well over two thousand artisans marched as part of the Congregated Trades.<sup>34</sup> The *Chronicle* estimated that eleven thousand marched whereas the constabulary claimed that three thousand adult men marched and another eight thousand intermittently participated.<sup>35</sup> Two prominent members of the Congregated Trades were also identified as principal participants in the Manchester Martyrs procession and/or leading Fenians at the time, namely Denis Grimes and Thomas Hogan.<sup>36</sup> Grimes, Congregated Trades Treasurer for much of the 1850s and 60s, had been politically active since the 1840s and Hogan, baker, would shortly become President of the Congregated Trades but it is unlikely that either of them were prominent in the IRB at the time and neither sought to involve the trades in Fenian affairs. In short, the Congregated Trades represented in the local context a larger and more powerful body than Fenianism, and the trades held the dominant position and lent assistance on their own terms.<sup>37</sup> Events in 1869 such as a sympathy procession marking O'Donovan Rossa's election victory and an anti-Tenant's League riot (dubbed the 'Battle of the Markets') were organised by the Irish Working Men's Association, led respectively by Larry Kelly and the anti-clerical faction, and John Daly's Fenian cohort, artisans contributing in an individual capacity.<sup>38</sup> The Amnesty Association was fully supported by the trades but this type of action, as with the Manchester Martyrs procession,

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<sup>33</sup> Mac Giolla Choille, 'Mourning the martyrs', p. 30; *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 Dec 1867.

<sup>34</sup> Mac Giolla Choille, 'Mourning the martyrs', pp 31-34. MacGiolla Coille gives estimate of the numbers of each trade that attended and these figures total to 1, 910. He gives no estimates for the number of masons, tobacconists and smiths marching and this must indicate a total figure exceeding two thousand.

<sup>35</sup> Mac Giolla Choille, 'Mourning the martyrs', pp 31-34.

<sup>36</sup> Mac Giolla Choille, 'Mourning the martyrs', pp 31-38; National Archives, Fenian Papers, 1566R. The constabulary simply noted that Hogan was particularly active in organizing the procession but did not elaborate beyond this.

<sup>37</sup> Fenian organisers were turning first and foremost to the Congregated Trades to organize a public response to the execution of Allen, Larkin and O'Brien. Mac Giolla Choille, 'Mourning the martyrs', p. 35; National Archives, Fenian Papers, 2903R.

<sup>38</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 26 Nov 1869; National Archives, Fenian Papers, 4853R.

was more akin to that of Thornley's 'moderate sympathiser' whose 'feelings were emotional rather than revolutionary.'<sup>39</sup>

The three-way relationship between local Conservatives, local Fenians and the Congregated Trades was a tumultuous one with shifting alliances. The *Limerick Chronicle* responded strongly to the Martyrs procession, condemning it outright, whereas the *Limerick Reporter* and the local clergy deplored the actions of the Manchester Fenians but expressed strong disapproval of the fate of Allen, Larkin and O'Brien.<sup>40</sup> The Congregated Trades were initially singled out by the *Chronicle* as the party mainly responsible for the mass show of sympathy for revolutionary separatism, with the paper labelling the 1867 procession as a 'mock Fenian funeral' and adding that 'it cannot be denied that it [the procession] was an exhibition of Fenianism.'<sup>41</sup> In black and white terms the *Chronicle* and its readership concluded that the Congregated Trades were undoubtedly subversives, commenting that 'there is a treasonable spirit lurking in the hearts of the working classes' and 'the Mechanics' Institute has been made the focus of Fenian emissaries in the city.'<sup>42</sup> Letter writers to the *Chronicle* used stronger expressions and lamented the fact that so many 'Protestant gentry and merchants' had contributed funds towards the Mechanics' Institute:

If the Mechanics [a term synonymous with artisan] of Limerick have not Patriotism enough amongst them to enable them to pay the rent of a few rooms and provide coals to keep their treason warm, I think it ill-becomes Protestants and other loyal subjects to afford support and countenance to this so called Institute.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 5, 26 Oct 1871; *Munster News*, 5 Nov 1873; Thornley, *Isaac Butt and Home Rule*, p. 67.

<sup>40</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 10, 14 Dec 1867; *Limerick Reporter*, 10, 13 Dec 1867.

<sup>41</sup> Mac Giolla Choille, 'Mourning the martyrs', pp. 33-44.

<sup>42</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 12 Nov 1867, 10 Dec 1867.

<sup>43</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 14 Dec 1867.

The fact that Limerick Conservatism was reconciled with the trades and Fenianism illustrated how antipathy to clerically-controlled liberalism bound these groups together. Most tellingly, the more extreme expressions of anti-clericalism and Fenianism were omitted from the Catholic/liberal papers (the *Limerick Reporter* and the *Munster News*) but the *Chronicle* seemed to get satisfaction in publishing such extremist views as a way of kicking the clergy and thrilling their readership with alarming portrayals of revolutionary spirit. One such letter, addressed ‘To the Nationalists of Ireland’, in 1868 epitomised this:

At first I thought that the Protestant Church was the English garrison to keep down the Irish people, and accordingly issued my Revolutionary Bull against the Scarlet W\_\_\_\_\_ [Whore] of England! But I am now convinced that the Catholic Hierarchy is the real assassin of Irish Liberty. Cardinal Cullen, Bishop Moriarty, Bishop Gillooly, Dean O’Brien and old Father Hally having said that ‘Eternity was not long enough, nor Hell hot enough to punish a Fenian’, entered into a secret treaty with Gladstone and Bright to disendow [sic] the English Church as their compensation for destroying Fenianism or the nationality of Ireland! Gladstone’s visit to the Pope and Bright’s visit to Dean O’Brien, prove it..... These bishops in the pay of England enslave the mind.’<sup>44</sup>

Following the Manchester Martyrs procession, Conservatives led the campaign for the release of jailed processionists with the city’s principal Conservative, James Spaight, particularly conspicuous. The local constabulary viewed this unfavourably, commenting that one suspected Fenian had announced in a public market that Spaight would secure his release should he ever be imprisoned.<sup>45</sup> By the eve of the 1868 election the *Chronicle* was once again charmed by

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<sup>44</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 12 Nov 1868.

<sup>45</sup> National Archives, Fenian Papers, 1566R.

Fenianism declaring that Ireland was no longer blindly subjected to sacerdotal will, ‘thanks to Fenians and Fenianism, though we deplore their ill-directed patriotism.’<sup>46</sup>

Maintaining a position independent of Nationalism in the 1868-71 period was no easy task and there were some definite indications that the officers of the Congregated Trades were at odds with sections of the artisan body. In one instance in 1870 a number of artisans supported the mayoral candidacy of Conservative councillor John Watson Mahony, an ally of Larry Kelly and the IWMA, only for the trades hierarchy to condemn the ‘not legally constituted’ artisan meeting.<sup>47</sup> Isaac Butt was warmly greeted by many in the city as he visited in May 1871 and met with interest groups such as the Limerick and Clare Farmers’ Club (a powerful recently established association) but the trades insisted upon a private meeting with him in their own rooms and whilst they were content with his politics and rhetoric they were more enthusiastic in greeting Tait the following month.<sup>48</sup> We cannot suggest too much here, they undoubtedly supported Home Rule and suggested that Tait run on a Home Rule ticket at next election as: ‘he was a friend of the working classes, and because he was a friend of the working classes, I assume and take it for granted that he is a friend of my country’ to which an unprepared, and possibly uncomfortable, Tait meekly responded that:

With regard to the management of Irish affairs by Irishmen...there was sufficient evidence in the manner in which the Boherbouy factory [Tait’s clothing factory] was managed, that they were able as well to manage their own affairs as any people on earth.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 Nov 1868.

<sup>47</sup> *Munster News*, 30 Nov 1870; Potter, *First Citizen*, p. 131.

<sup>48</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 30 June 1871; *The Nation*, 27 May 1871; *Freeman’s Journal*, 19 May 1871; *Irish Times and Daily Advertiser*, 19 May 1871.

<sup>49</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 30 June 1871.

Tait's previous visit to Limerick in 1870 also saw him attend a large meeting of the trades with Larry Kelly, speaking far more than the verbally reticent Tait, announcing confidently that all Tait wanted was 'the old '82 parliament back.' Clearly Tait was being groomed for a particular political purpose.<sup>50</sup>

Matters came to a head during the September 1871 by-election. Butt was quickly mooted as a candidate, complicating Tait's position as champion of the disparate alliance opposed to clerically controlled liberalism.<sup>51</sup> Initially, the trades leadership refused to allow Buttites to use their rooms, forcing the Butt committee to use the rooms of the recently established Labourers' Society (a union which catered for a few non-artisan occupational groups, most notably the dock labourers).<sup>52</sup> A quick visit from Butt himself, who was evading debt collectors at this time, soon followed and a large political rally was held which the trades avoided but those that did attend included the IWMA cohort, hard-line Fenians such as John Daly, and prominent Conservatives.<sup>53</sup> The support of the latter group exceeded that shown previously for Tait, with local Conservative leader James Spaight standing aside, publicly endorsing the Home Rule cause and stating that 'five hundred Irishmen sitting in the old house in College Green would make better laws for Ireland than the imposture called the Imperial Parliament.'<sup>54</sup> Daly claimed years later that he didn't support Butt but this contradicts his actions and rhetoric at the time and his allies' role in scuppering the fortunes of the clerical/liberal candidate Charles Barry by refusing to allow his campaign team exit a train at Limerick.<sup>55</sup> Significantly, Butt had won the support of a small but influential section of the Limerick clergy, notably Richard Baptist O'Brien (now Dean of Limerick) and his protégé Fr.

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<sup>50</sup> *Munster News*, 15 June 1870.

<sup>51</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 2 Sept 1871.

<sup>52</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 2 Sept 1871.

<sup>53</sup> Michael McDonagh, *The Home Rule Movement* (London, 1920), pp. 44-51.

<sup>54</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 5, 8, 12, 15, 18 Sept 1871; *Freeman's Journal*, 4, 15, 21 Sept 1871; *Glasgow Herald*, 9 Sept 1871; *Limerick Chronicle*, 2, 5, 7 Sept 1871.

<sup>55</sup> Thornley, *Isaac Butt and Home Rule*, p. 122; *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 Sept 1871.

Edward O'Dwyer (at this time a highly active curate in St. Michael's parish and later Bishop of Limerick). O'Brien's 'Limerick Declaration' of 1869 was of national significance and heralded him as an important conciliatory figure laying the groundwork for moderate nationalism, namely Home Rule, to grow but his efforts were opposed by many local nationalists who regarded the move as a political power play by a power-hungry cleric.<sup>56</sup> Although Butt remained close to O'Brien during his visit, the Dean's presence on the hustings only inflamed the crowd, who refused to allow him be heard.<sup>57</sup>

Butt deliberately courted the city artisans using class-based rhetoric at the initial rally which prompted them to attend the second Home Rule rally, although their presence was understated with no mention of banners in tow.<sup>58</sup> The fact that the Labourer's Society had supported Butt from the first instance appears to have worried the artisan body and the Secretary's promise that the Congregated Trades 'were prepared to join the labourers to secure for Mr. Butt his election in Limerick' ensured their position as Limerick's pre-eminent working class body.<sup>59</sup>

### **Post-Tait: reengagement with national politics**

Tait's financial troubles scuppered his parliamentary aspirations – he ran unsuccessfully in 1872 in his native Shetland as a Liberal and in 1874 in Limerick as a Home Ruler.<sup>60</sup> Following his 1871 by-election victory the trades began shifting their allegiances to Butt and a political rally welcoming Butt to the city in January 1872 saw Tait attendant in Butt's favour with, perhaps not coincidentally, a fuller attendance of the trades which the *Chronicle* detailed accordingly: Cabinet-makers, 23 in number; Carpenters, 100 in number; Chandlers, 22 in

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<sup>56</sup> The full title of the declaration was the 'Declaration of rights and resolve', see Michael I. Egan, *Life of Dean O'Brien, founder of the Catholic Young Men's Society* (Gill 1949), p. 111; O'Day, *Irish Home Rule, 1867-1921*, p. 25; *Limerick Chronicle*, 12 Sept 1871.

<sup>57</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 12 Sept 1871.

<sup>58</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 8, 12 Sept 1871; *Limerick Chronicle*, 7, 12, 14 Sept 1871.

<sup>59</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 12 Sept 1871.

<sup>60</sup> Waite, *Peter Tait*, pp 194-220.



number; Tobacconists, 21 in number; Coopers, 100 in number; Bakers, 100 in number; Tailors, 90 in number; Boot and Shoemakers, 40 in number; Painters, 45 in number; Plasterers, 90 in number; Stonecutters, 80 in number; Millers, 20 in number; and Masons, 100 in number.<sup>61</sup> The total of 831 which, if reliable, constituted a relatively numerous gathering of the trades (reportedly over two thousand attended the Manchester Martyr's procession which would be an extreme gathering if true).<sup>62</sup>

The symbiotic relationship between the trades of Limerick and national politics did not match the O'Connellite peak, however. Much of Butt's political success in Limerick relied upon local factors: his entire campaign was run by locals with Thornley noting that the national Home Government Association's input was negligible.<sup>63</sup> In truth, this had also applied to much of the O'Connellite era but for the trades the new national leader was merely their local representative whose campaign was locally run; there was no need for them to broaden their horizons or engage with a political movement that stretched beyond the confines of their own city. The election in 1874 of Richard O'Shaughnessy, whose background and support structure were the embodiment of the clerical/liberal prototype (O'Shaughnessy had originally been favoured by some of the local clergy as a parliamentary candidate in 1868), marked a return to form as the Fenian/Conservative support for Home Rule waned.<sup>64</sup>

Home Rule certainly awoke the economic nationalism of the trades but surprisingly Butt, the former political economist who was now championing limited self-government, barely explored the subject with them. His pre-election speeches in 1871 hardly linked Home

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<sup>61</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 11 Jan 1872.

<sup>62</sup> Mac Giolla Choille, 'Mourning the martyrs', pp 31-34.

<sup>63</sup> Thornley, *Isaac Butt*, p 121-124.

<sup>64</sup> There was some attempt on the part of the physical force party to have Spaight (running as a Conservative) and Butt returned but this alliance lacked the strength it previously enjoyed. The editorial and commentary from the *Munster News* remarked that O'Shaughnessy's supporters were strongly motivated to return at least one Catholic representative. O'Shaughnessy's pre-election speeches make numerous references to his religion and the views he held on religious issues. *Irish Examiner*, 19 Nov 1868; *Munster News*, 4, 7, 11 Feb 1874; Thornley, *Isaac Butt*, p. 189.

Rule and home manufacturing and his second private meeting with the trades (January 1872) appears to have been the only occasion upon which he discussed protectionism with them.<sup>65</sup> Whilst he dealt briefly with evils of absenteeism – he estimated that eight million pounds were remitted in rent – and how this diverted wealth could sponsor home manufacturing revival, he failed (perhaps intentionally) to explore fully the topic or to mention tariff reform, and resorted to ambiguous, populist rhetoric: ‘Are you getting a fair days wage for a fair days work?’ A similar meeting with the trades in September of that year saw even vaguer arguments which barely touched the general subject of economic nationalism, omitted protectionism and only vaguely referenced the ‘herds of flocks’ that large graziers sent to England.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps he considered a cogent, detailed argument to be unsuitable for an audience of workingmen but this ignores the fact that he was one of the finest exponents of economic nationalism, a doctrine which defined trades’ ideology. Butt’s 1840 lectures, whilst he was the holder of the Whately Chair, on the promotion of home industry in Ireland (published in 1846) were a calculated dismantling of many erroneously held assumptions by political economists of the day.<sup>67</sup> Most importantly though, were the trades aware and appreciative of Butt’s record on the subject? Equally, were they aware of others such as Irish political economist Robert Torrens, the English Conservative John Barnard Byles or, later in the 1880s, John Gordon Swift MacNeill? The arguments made by the Torrens, in particular, throughout the 1840s dovetailed very neatly with those made, in rougher but more concise form, by the trades in their Repeal petitions in 1830 and 1834 and in their Repeal speeches of the 1840s.<sup>68</sup> Was this merely convergent thought? Were the trades aware of the parallel arguments made by political and intellectual heavyweights such as Butt, Torrens and, later, MacNeill? The lack of evidence suggests that

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<sup>65</sup> *The Nation*, 27 May 1871; *Freeman’s Journal*, 19 May 1871; *Irish Times and Daily Advertiser*, 19 May 1871.

<sup>66</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 20 Sept 1872.

<sup>67</sup> Laurence Moss, ‘Value and distribution theory at Trinity College Dublin, 1831-1844’, Thomas Boylan, Renee Prendergast and John Turner (eds), *A history of Irish economic thought* (New York, 2011), pp 128-130.

<sup>68</sup> R. D. Collison Black, *Economic thought and the Irish question, 1817-1870* (Cambridge, 1960), pp 140-141.

they were largely ignorant of these figures and their economic nationalism was almost entirely their own creation. Of course, it is also a reflection of the dearth of national figures who echoed the economic nationalism of the trades; Black, in his detailed study of Irish economic thought in the nineteenth century, commented,

The arguments of Irish nationalists on the subject of industrial development during the period here covered must be pieced together from speeches, articles and pamphlets; there is no reasoned statement of any generally accepted view.<sup>69</sup>

In all, Black argued, protectionism was only advocated by an ‘uninfluential minority’ in nineteenth century Ireland.<sup>70</sup>

The fleeting political opportunities presented to the trades during the 1868-1873 period require further investigation. Given that the trades seriously considered the fundamentally conservative Lord Gort as a political candidate in 1831, due to his initial opposition of the Act of Union in 1800, coupled with their later support of perennial Conservative candidate James Spaight in 1879 and 1880 (see Chapter Seven); were the trades truly amenable to Conservative nationalism?<sup>71</sup> The latter concept received brief attention from Thornley, in the context of the early Home Rule movement, who contended that it was not nationalism at all. Foster, however, described the Conservative Nationalist landlord as a definite phenomenon:

Conservatives, Protestants, often landlords; interested in the potentialities of devolution, antagonistic towards English party politics, disposed towards education and

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<sup>69</sup> Black, *Economic thought and the Irish question*, p. 140

<sup>70</sup> Black, *Economic thought and the Irish question*, pp 141-142.

<sup>71</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 28 Jan 1831.

land reform. Allegiances could be curiously confused, ‘interests’ hard to define, the circle often squared.<sup>72</sup>

Foster’s attempt to rescue ‘Conservative Nationalism’ from the harsh treatment it received from Thornley allows us to reconsider the strange alliance that existed in 1868. If we accept Foster’s denial of the contention that ‘Irish Toryism and Irish proto-nationalism [were] incompatible’ it would seem that the trades were equally at ease with conservatives and liberals as long as they promised legislative independence and protectionism.<sup>73</sup> Their problem, in this regard, stemmed from their social detachment from the luminaries of economic nationalism. Butt came from a High Church background and his initial political outlook was shaped in part by Orangeism.<sup>74</sup> Whilst Torrens was a constructive conservative in the Burkite tradition, his espousal of protectionism in the 1840s preceded calls for mass emigration, earning him the nickname ‘the Irish exterminator.’<sup>75</sup> Indeed, although Butt referred to Fenians in sympathetic terms in his Limerick speeches, many subsequent historians have argued that his federalism was merely a refined version of Unionism and it was not until Parnell’s declaration that ‘no man can set bounds to the march of a nation’ that Home Rule properly captured the imagination of the trades.<sup>76</sup> In contrast with Butt, Parnell had no pedigree in economic nationalism. He was consistent but vague in his calls for tariff control to be included in any Home Rule bill and he

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<sup>72</sup> Roy Foster, ‘Parnell, Wicklow and Nationalism’, Donal McCartney (ed.), *Parnell: The politics of power* (Dublin, 1991), p. 19.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 19-20.

<sup>74</sup> Alvin Jackson, *The two unions: Ireland, Scotland and the survival of the United Kingdom, 1707-2007* (Oxford, 2012), p. 290.

<sup>75</sup> Torrens was highly regarded as an early scholar of Political Economy and was one of the earliest critics of Ricardian theories. Patrick Maume, ‘Robert Torrens’, *Dictionary of Irish biography*, <http://dib.cambridge.org.libraryproxy.mic.ul.ie/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a8601&searchClicked=clicked&quickadvsearch=yes> accessed 18 Nov 2015; Alessandro Roncaglia, *The wealth of ideas: A history of economic thought* (Cambridge, 2006), pp 209-15.

<sup>76</sup> Colin Read, ‘An experiment in Constructive Unionism’: Isaac Butt, Home Rule and Federalist political thought during the 1870s’, *The English historical review*, vol. 129, April 2014, pp 332-361; John Kendle, *Ireland and the Federal Solution: the debate over the United Kingdom constitution, 1870-1921* (Kingston, 1989), pp 11-15, 26-28.

presided over a party that was indifferent to the pursuit of industrial development and captivated by land reform.<sup>77</sup>

Whilst the local political class fought within itself at the dawn of the Home Rule period, the trades showed greater unity than they had experienced during the Repeal era. Gone was the undercurrent of dissent or ambivalence within certain trades on the topic of legislative independence. Significantly, whilst the influential cooper Jeremiah Forrest had represented a political threat to economic nationalists such as Thomas Ahern in the 1840s, his son Benjamin Forrest chaired the 1872 meeting between the trades and Butt, and opened proceedings by detailing how the absence of a native parliament drastically affected the provision trade. Specifically, he outlined how, under the Union, the victualing of the army and navy was taken from Irish merchants – he claimed this amounted to about ten to fifteen thousand casks annually of native pork from local Limerick merchants, twenty to thirty thousand from Cork and even more from Dublin. As the appreciative crowd of artisans greeted Forrest with shouts of ‘Home Rule will keep it at home’ one is certainly struck by the contrast with his father and other pre-famine coopers.<sup>78</sup> The bakers were also transformed from being a numerous but politically silent component of the Congregated Trades to the financial and spiritual backbone of the trades’ nationalist activism.<sup>79</sup> Early indications of their politicisation are evidenced by constabulary reports of the 1867 Manchester Martyrs procession showing three bakers amongst the twelve individuals considered to be ‘Fenians of the worst character.’<sup>80</sup> The politicisation process was gradual, many bakers being politically ambivalent enough during the 1868 election

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<sup>77</sup> Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism*, p. 150; Laurence Marley, *Michael Davitt: freelance radical and frondeur* (Dublin, 2007), pp 147-154.

<sup>78</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 13 Jan 1872.

<sup>79</sup> UCD Archives, TUI/1, Minute book of the Guild of Bakers, 2 Sept 1886, 14 Oct 1886, 7 Mar 1888. *Munster News*, 16 Aug, 17 Sept, 29 Oct 1884, 30 Oct 1886, 15 Aug 1888, Frank Prendergast, ‘The Mechanics’ Institute’, Mechanics’ Institute Files, Local Studies, Limerick City Library, <http://www.limerickcity.ie/Library/LocalStudies/LocalStudiesFiles/M/MechanicsInstitute/> accessed 10 Dec 2016.

<sup>80</sup> Mac Giolla Choille, ‘Mourning the martyrs’, p. 41; National Archives, Fenian Papers, 2511R.

to accept bribes of drink in return for political support. By the late 1880s, however, the guild was dominated by highly politicised extreme nationalists and young members were strongly encouraged to partake in political demonstrations.<sup>81</sup>

Fenianism may explain the evolution of the trades' nationalism from the pre-famine economic version arguing that the trades were materially affected by the Union to a more emotive type that required no such explanation. Certainly, bakers were required to bake bread no matter what the political relationship between Britain and Ireland and yet they were the most nationalistic of all the post-famine trades. The coopers, as Forrest explained, were beginning to perceive the economic model that relied overwhelmingly on the export of provisions as flawed, and increased competition from Scotland and other areas buttressed the economic arguments against the Union.<sup>82</sup> The economic nationalism of the trades, however, survived Fenianism, absorbing and co-opting the extreme nationalist approach and reaching its zenith in the 1880s and 1890s. Bakers, with no vested interest in protectionism, also sang from the same hymn sheet as their fellow artisans and were particularly active in the 1880s in identifying mill owners who used foreign flour, even threatening to boycott such flour.<sup>83</sup>

Strong efforts, on the part of the trades' leadership, to disassociate the city artisans from popular nationalism in the 1868-71 period were reversed in accordance with leadership changes. This political redirection was first indicated in 1871 when Thomas Hogan, baker, and principal organiser of the 1867 Manchester Martyrs procession, was elected as President of the Congregated Trades and the swing towards the nationalist extreme became abundantly clear in 1874 with the election of John Godsell, baker, as President.<sup>84</sup> Given the extent of Godsell's

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<sup>81</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 19 Jan 1869; UCD Archives, TUI/1, Minute book of the Guild of Bakers, 15 Aug 1888.

<sup>82</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 23 Nov, 5 Dec 1898.

<sup>83</sup> *Munster News*, 29 Nov, 13, 17 Dec 1884, 25 Feb, 21 Mar 1888.

<sup>84</sup> Mac Giolla Coille and the police authorities of the day differed in whether Hogan was a Fenian. Mac Giolla Choille, 'Mourning the martyrs', p. 41; National Archives, Fenian Papers, 2511R; *Limerick Reporter*, 28 July 1871; *Munster News*, 1 July 1874.

political influence over the trades coupled with his uncompromising nationalist agenda, the Congregated Trades might well be included amongst the many social institutions (the GAA and the Gaelic League to name but two) that were successfully infiltrated by the IRB. Certainly, subsequent leaders of the Congregated Trades such as James Kett, cooper, and John McKnight, cooper, were Fenians and the hierarchy of Daly's 1890s Labour Party (see Chapter Seven) were described as 'permanent members of the IRB' by Kelly.<sup>85</sup> We cannot surmise too much from this association, however, and even if the relationship between advanced nationalism and the leadership of the trades was close this ignores the extent to which Irish Nationalism acquired a certain local flavour amongst the Limerick trades.

### **Distinguishing characteristics of nationalism amongst the Limerick trades**

John O'Connell's 1842 pronouncements regarding the independently minded Limerick Repeal movement paralleled the manner in which extreme nationalism acquired its own idiosyncrasies in the 1870s-90s.<sup>86</sup> In both cases the trades played a central part in making the local political movements distinctive.

### **The trades, agrarian issues and Irish nationalism**

Many of the aforementioned distinctive traits – particularly the antipathy towards farmers and all agrarian movements – were originally fostered and encouraged by the Fenian John Daly, 1867 participant, IRB propagandist and later alleged dynamiter, and then inflamed following his release in 1895.<sup>87</sup> Daly's anti-agrarian sentiment first showed in 1869 when he led an attack

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<sup>85</sup> M. J. Kelly, *The Fenian Ideal and Irish Nationalism, 1882-1916* (Suffolk, 2006), pp 77-78, 112.

<sup>86</sup> *The Nation*, 31 Dec 1842.

<sup>87</sup> Daly was sworn into the IRB as a teenager in 1863. He took part in the attack on the Kilmallock police barracks in 1867, was temporarily imprisoned and upon release moved to America. He returned in 1869 and from this point until 1884 he appears to have been fully employed by the IRB as an organizer, recruiter and propagandist. He was imprisoned in 1884 after being dubiously implicated as a dynamiter in Britain. He was confined to Portland prison and released in 1895. Recent historical research of this incident has strongly suggested that Daly was innocent and that planted evidence and an *agent provocateur* were used to incriminate him. His health suffered in prison and he became the cause célèbre of the amnesty movement who highlighted the harsh conditions he was forced to endure. He was released, largely as a result of this campaign, in 1896 and returned to Limerick city. He served an apprenticeship as a lath-splitter in his teenage years before being briefly imprisoned but he never practiced the trade for very long and the artisan community never viewed him as 'one

on a Tenant Right meeting in the city. His 1871 anti-farmer speeches in the Mechanics' Institute were extremely well received by the bakers, in particular, but the trades never matched Daly's more excessive actions and chose not to join him and his seventy close supporters who attacked the immense 1876 Home Rule procession.<sup>88</sup>

The Limerick trades shared this often irrational dislike of farmers and agrarian political movements with their Cork peers who, as Cronin has shown, clashed with agrarian groups on the issue of fox-hunting and consistently identified farmers as a consumer group who preferred imported goods over locally produced ones.<sup>89</sup> As shown in Chapter Seven, farmers were socially and politically reliant upon the urban traders and middle class nationalists – a phenomenon best described in Sam Clark's examination of the Land League's social composition – and, combined, they tended to act as a natural bulwark against the ambitions of urban labour groups.<sup>90</sup> Cronin has also hinted at parallels in the Cork situation and was, furthermore, able to illustrate specifically how agrarian groups stifled Cork trades' efforts to establish fraternal links in the county towns.<sup>91</sup> Dublin artisans similarly expressed broad dissatisfaction with their political representatives' political priorities; in short, they felt, agriculture received too much attention and urban/industrial matters not enough with one leading artisan quipping,

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of their own' in this sense. Desmond McCabe and Owen McGee, 'John Daly', in James McGuire and James Quinn (ed), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009) <http://dib.cambridge.org/> accessed 16 June 2014; Ciarán Ó Griofa, 'John Daly, The Fenian Mayor of Limerick', David Lee (ed.), *Remembering Limerick: Historical essays celebrating the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Limerick's first charter granted in 1197* (Limerick, 1997), p. 197–204; Joseph McKenna, *The Irish-American dynamite campaign: a history, 1881-1896* (Jefferson, North Carolina, 2012), pp 148-156; Collins, Labour Church and nationalism in Limerick, pp 160, 169-178.

<sup>88</sup> *The Nation*, 22, 29 Apr 1876; McGrath, 'Riots in Limerick, 1820-1900', pp 153-174.

<sup>89</sup> The antipathy to farmers and the perception that their concerns were overindulged was not confined to artisans and the Dock Labourers Society were particularly vocal in this regard, see Collins, Labour, church and nationalism in Limerick, p. 83. Maura Murphy, 'The working classes of nineteenth century Cork', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, vol. 80, 1980, pp 30-31.

<sup>90</sup> Sam Clark, 'The Social Composition of the Land League', *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 68, Sep., 1971, p 448.

<sup>91</sup> Murphy, 'The working classes of nineteenth century Cork', p. 31.



Any intelligent foreigner would come to the conclusion that in Ireland nothing was understood but the growing of potatoes, turnips and wheat. There was very little said about Irish industries, and not a word about the artisans and workingmen.<sup>92</sup>

The first signs of the trades' antipathy and mistrust of farmers coincided with the extreme nationalist attacks upon Tenant Right and related movements, all deemed by the extreme Nationalists to be unwanted competition.<sup>93</sup> For the trades, the farmers were latecomers to the nationalist cause and Godsell commented in 1884, as the agrarian agenda continued to dominate political discourse, that 'it was the working people of the towns that first instilled the spirit of nationality into the farmers.'<sup>94</sup> The initial mistrust was not reciprocated and the Limerick and Clare Farmers' Club regarded the Limerick artisans positively and they even donated generously towards the instruments fund for the Congregated Trades Band in 1871.<sup>95</sup> In return, the trades claimed in 1884 to have supported the infant Land League at a cost of one hundred and fifty pounds but there is no clear evidence to corroborate this assertion; in fact, there is much evidence that the trades were less than supportive of land reform and some individuals in the Mechanics' Institute in 1879 (a year that saw near-famine conditions in parts of the country) claimed that rural distress was exaggerated.<sup>96</sup>

Political jealousies regularly inspired the trades to attack farmers in relation to labour issues. The bakers were foremost in this regard, most likely due to their close alignment with Daly and extreme nationalism since the early 1870s.<sup>97</sup> Calls from the Guild of Bakers in 1884 for a general boycott of a new non-union bakery – Arnott's Bakery, Bedford Row – had little

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<sup>92</sup> *Celtic Times*, 26 Mar 1887.

<sup>93</sup> This mistrust was, of course, most evident in Limerick when John Daly led the attack on the Tenant Right meeting in 1869 and there were similar attacks by physical force proponents in that period around Ireland, Thornley, *Isaac Butt and Home Rule*, pp 191-93, 242-44, 269, 277-78; *Leinster Express*, 4 Dec 1869.

<sup>94</sup> *Munster News*, 29 Nov 1884.

<sup>95</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 28 July 1871.

<sup>96</sup> Donald E. Jordan Jr., *Land and popular politics in Ireland: County Mayo from the plantation to the Land War* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 204; *Munster News*, 15 Oct 1879, 29 Nov 1884.

<sup>97</sup> *Munster News*, 7 Oct 1874; 3 Nov 1880, 16 Aug, 17, 27 Sept, 29 Oct 1884.

effect and the guild members reported seventy-eight farmers' cars at one point outside the bakery on its opening day.<sup>98</sup> The building trades also regularly voiced their concerns that unqualified farmers regularly took on building contracts on rural housing schemes.<sup>99</sup> The criticism, and the timing of it, does raise the question – were farmers, and ‘country people’ in general, habitual opponents of trade unionism and the native manufacturing movement? Certainly rural dwellers generally showed no great interest in urban artisan values although the building trades did get assurances from small town labour leagues (eg. the Shanagolden United Trades Association) that only qualified workers would work in local building projects.<sup>100</sup> Why did criticism of farmers spike around 1874 and again in the 1880s? Why was there no such identification of farmers or ‘country people’ as a problematic class prior to this point? Certainly, 1874 marked the point when the physical force faction, allied to the trades, lost their influence upon the Home Rule movement and the 1880s saw the Irish Parliamentary Party set forth an agrarian-centred agenda.<sup>101</sup> The trades, fighting a losing battle for the hearts and minds of their political superiors, used National League meetings to malign farmers and castigate the prioritisation of the agrarian agenda at every opportunity.<sup>102</sup> This bitterness never truly dissipated and one particularly revealing National League meeting in 1893 featured a shouting match between a number of trade unionists, defending local carpenters who had worked on a boycotted farm, and senior League members, who dismissed the fact that many of them had bought bread from a non-union bakery (see Chapter Seven for some further discussion of the relationship between the trades and the local National League leaders).<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *Munster News*, 29 Nov 1884.

<sup>99</sup> *Munster News*, 16, 23 Jan 1886.

<sup>100</sup> *Munster News*, 6, 23 Jan, 11 Sept 1886.

<sup>101</sup> W. E. Vaughan, *A New History of Ireland: Ireland Under the Union, 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996), pp 14-16; Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism 1876–1906*, p. 190; Berresford Ellis, *A History of the Irish Working Class*, p. 165; *Munster News*, 4, 11, 18 Sept 1886.

<sup>102</sup> *Munster News*, 1 Jan 1881, 29 Nov 1884, 24 June 1885, 16 Jan 1886, 16 April 1890.

<sup>103</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 20, 23 June, 14, 17, 21 July 1893.

## The trades, economic nationalism and Irish nationalism

As mentioned, Fenianism did not spell the end of the trades' economic nationalism; in fact the cause was adopted by advanced nationalist allies of labour. At local level the promotion of native manufacturing was carried out by the trades and a number of IRB allies whilst on a national level the few politicians who favoured the cause, such as Congregated Trades favourite Charles Dawson, invariably had close ties to physical force nationalism.<sup>104</sup> Marginalised manufacturing groups, such as the chandlers, re-emerged as a visible force in early 1870s Home Rule rallies, mirroring the strong contribution to the 1840s Repeal debate of small and declining occupational groups such as the wool-combers.<sup>105</sup> Home manufacturing was given lip service by Butt, in the company of the Congregated Trades, but the Irish Working Man's Association went further and specifically endorsed the movement in a 1873 political rally which inspired the *Munster News* to comment on how

The life blood of Limerick is running out fast and although the wound might be staunched and the waste arrested, the infatuation of her own children accelerates the efflux. For gracious sake, when will Limerick consumers become fully conscious that they are wronging and impoverishing themselves.<sup>106</sup>

Significantly, the Congregated Trades held only a peripheral position in the meeting which was instead dominated by William Abraham and others aligned to physical force Home Rule.<sup>107</sup>

The trades had never had allies of this nature in their war on British imports; the relationship

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<sup>104</sup> Charles Dawson, Nationalist MP for Carlow (1880-85) and Lord Mayor of Dublin (1882-83). Dawson's family had business ties with Limerick and Godsell had attempted to nominate him as a parliamentary candidate in favour of the liberal Gabbett in 1879. He constituted part of the Fenian element of the Irish Parliamentary Party and was instrumental in setting up a major exhibition of native manufacturing in Dublin. *Munster News*, 14 May 1879, 30 Jan 1886; James H. Murphy, *Abject loyalty: Nationalism and monarchy in Ireland during the reign of Queen Victoria* (Washington D.C., 2001), pp 213-214.

<sup>105</sup> O'Connell, *Correspondence Vol. 6*, pp. 392-393, letters 2777-78, both letters dated 13 December 1840; *The Nation*, 27 May 1871; *Munster News*, 30 July 1873.

<sup>106</sup> *Munster News*, 14 June 1873.

<sup>107</sup> *Munster News*, 14 June 1873.

with the 1840s Board of Trade permitted no mention of Repeal whereas the local Repeal allies were deaf to the cause of home manufacturing. A home manufacturing meeting later in 1873 was so large (newspaper estimates ranged between ten and fifteen thousand) that some of the otherwise neglectful local political class were forced to attend but this enthusiasm at the Home Rule dawn was not built upon and the trades' desire for a political champion to link home manufacturing and legislative independence – the chandlers specifically linked the two causes after the rally – was not reciprocated by the Home Rule League.<sup>108</sup> Even though the Mayor and a few other local politicians attended, the trades remarked after the rally that many more local men of substance and influence were missing and this was to be a future trend for such events.

Whilst the 1870s marked the revival in the home manufacturing movement, the 1880s saw the movement truly bloom and align with national political agendas. The trades intensified their lobbying in 1881 and demanded that their political representatives, at the very least, discuss home manufacturing although local councillors generally felt that the movement was better off without politicians, citing the manner in which the 1840s Board of Trade suffered as a result of political involvement.<sup>109</sup> The trades continued despite the lack of local support, and endeavouring to organise a national industrial exhibition, corresponded with individuals throughout the United Kingdom before finding common cause with Charles Dawson and the Dublin trades. The combined result of their efforts, the 1882 National Industrial Exhibition in Dublin, was later claimed by the Limerick trades to be their brainchild.<sup>110</sup> Whatever the truth of this claim, the 1882 exhibition was seminal, decidedly 'greener' than any previous exhibition, with Charles Dawson (Dublin Lord Mayor at the time), Dwyer Gray and other

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<sup>108</sup> The Chandlers proclaimed that 'Irishmen, by helping Home Trade, will help the cause of Home Rule.' *Munster News*, 23, 30 July 1873.

<sup>109</sup> *Munster News*, 13, 20 Aug 1881.

<sup>110</sup> The input of the Limerick trades into the exhibition is not mentioned by any of the sources on the subject. They were undoubtedly looking to organise an exhibition in 1881 and later claimed that they had initiated the organisation of the exhibition before 'the Dublin people stepped in and took it out of their hands.' *Munster News*, 20 Aug 1881, 15, 22 Dec 1886.

leading nationalists linking home manufacturing to Irish nationalism in a way that delighted the trades.<sup>111</sup> National exhibitions of this sort were progressively more nationalistic in the post-Famine era. James H. Murphy has described the 1853 National Exhibition as being ‘about Victorian, utilitarian progress’; the 1865 exhibition ‘a celebration of aristocracy’; whereas the 1872 event ‘had seen the move change towards nationalism’ and ‘the 1882 exhibition was a full-bodied celebration of nationalist Ireland.’<sup>112</sup> Whilst linking home manufacturing to Irish nationalism seemed pragmatic, it may have lost the cause more allies than it gained; initial interest from Belfast delegates wilted when the overtly nationalistic nature of the exhibition became apparent as did Lord Powerscourt’s support (this included financial patronage as well as the use of Powercourt’s grounds as a venue).<sup>113</sup> This ‘greening’ of the home manufacturing movement coincided with the dawn of the Gaelic revival and the immense 1882 exhibition featured a three day Irish language congress and inspired Michael Cusack to include industrial revival as part of his ‘Gaelic’ agenda.<sup>114</sup> With Cusack, a Dublin based rural immigrant, urban artisans had a champion who positioned reports of the Irish Industrial League alongside the exploits of Fionn MacCool and laments on the decline of native shipbuilding. Irish economic nationalism was no longer a lonely lament of the declining urban artisan, a dry exercise in detached political economy, but rather an ultra-green and emotive part of a romantic revival.<sup>115</sup> Cusack was more than the simple belligerent that Joyce conjured with ‘the citizen’ caricature in *Ulysses*; his *Celtic Times* contained articles representing Christian Socialism and the interest he showed in women’s labour issues was precocious.<sup>116</sup> More than anything his decision to identify with and speak the language of the working class made him the most suitable outlet

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<sup>111</sup> Marcus De Búrca, *Michael Cusack and the GAA* (Dublin, 1989), pp 57-59.

<sup>112</sup> Murphy, *Abject loyalty*, p. 214.

<sup>113</sup> De Búrca, *Michael Cusack and the GAA*, pp 57-59; John Turpin, ‘Exhibitions of Art and Industries in Victorian Ireland: Part II: Dublin Exhibitions of Art and Industries 1865-1885’, *Dublin Historical Record*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Mar., 1982), p. 49.

<sup>114</sup> De Búrca, *Michael Cusack and the GAA*, pp 56-60.

<sup>115</sup> These three subjects appeared in article form alongside each other in *Celtic Times*, 22 Oct 1887.

<sup>116</sup> De Búrca, *Michael Cusack and the GAA*, pp 153-156.

for Irish urban artisan expression for the entire century and all that was remiss was that his journal and prominence within the GAA did not continue. Cusack favoured the ‘name and shame’ approach championed by the Limerick trades and his 1887 attack on a Dublin jeweller selling Sheffield made silverwork as ‘Irish made’ more closely matched the rhetoric of Limerick artisans than their less aggressive Dublin brethren who, being a more socially heterogeneous body, were less inclined to associate their industrial revival campaign with politics.<sup>117</sup>

Whilst Cusack accurately represented one strain of the 1880s native manufacturing debate, his arguments were absent of the cogent, detailed analysis that political economists such as Butt and Torrens had provided in the past and MacNeill provided in 1886. Significantly, the greening of the home manufacturing campaign coincided with the polarisation of the ‘Protestant north’ and the ‘Catholic south’ in response to the Home Rule crisis.<sup>118</sup> In one sense the ‘Orange’ element that had traditionally supported this cause – the sectarian Dublin Guild masters, the southern Protestant industrial leaders and the odd unorthodox, but sagacious, political economist – could no longer be counted upon to support the cause.<sup>119</sup> In truth, the trades were never entirely satisfied to see the native manufacturing campaign as a purely utilitarian exercise and there is little evidence that more erudite efforts to dismantle free trade arguments were anything more than an academic exercise carried out by Black’s ‘uninfluential minority.’<sup>120</sup>

There was, however, a home manufacturing movement that rivalled the embryonic urban-centred, politicised campaign championed by the Limerick trades, Charles Dawson and

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<sup>117</sup> Dublin Tinsmiths only saw the ‘name and shame’ route as a last alternative and criticism of specific Irish MPs was generally only implied in meetings of the Dublin United Trades Council with the secretary often halting discourse that was headed in this unwanted direction. *Celtic Times*, 26 Mar, 8 Oct 1887.

<sup>118</sup> Biagini commented that Parnell’s protectionism increasingly seen as objectionable by the Ulster Protestants. Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism 1876–1906*, pp 253-256.

<sup>119</sup> Biagini commented that Parnell’s protectionism was increasingly seen as objectionable by the Ulster Protestants. Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism 1876–1906*, pp 253-256.

<sup>120</sup> Black, *Economic thought and the Irish question*, pp 141-142.

Michael Cusack, one that provoked far more support from the wider Protestant community. This rival movement also sprang, in part, from the Gaelic revival movement and some prominent individuals such as Lady Aberdeen, the Marchioness of Londonderry, Alice Hart and Douglas Hyde could broadly be described as ‘Celticists’ or romantic reformers who generally lacked the working class identity of Cusack’s campaign.<sup>121</sup> Ostensibly, these revivalists were apolitical but in reality they were generally moderate Unionists with the Home Ruler Lady Aberdeen the most obvious exception to this. Catholic Mary Long Power, who sought to emphasise what she saw as the cultural and ethnic distinctiveness of Ireland and the Irish whilst supporting political union with Britain, very much exemplified the movement. The ‘Celtic’ emphasis on industrial revival highlighted everything about Ireland that was different to England and, with the vantage of social elevation, looked with some disfavour upon the smoky, grim, industrialised, ‘un-Irish’ cities of Britain. By way of contrast, the 1880s Limerick trades were fully immersed in their economic nationalism, had acknowledged their own luddite tendencies, identified what native industries to revive and, with extreme pragmatism, concluded a series of increasingly frank self-assessments by asserting that ‘the trades had to give toleration for machinery so as to keep out the foreigner.’<sup>122</sup> By way of further contrast, the link between legislative independence and the home manufacturing movement was so agreed upon that it was generally unspoken, with Godsell occasionally affirming the link to the national cause during home manufacturing meetings.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Lady Aberdeen helped establish the Irish Home Industries Association in 1886. Potter, quoting Cahill and Luddy, makes the point that the female philanthropists behind Limerick lace were extremely class conscious and saw their efforts as a reinforcement of class roles with the middle or upper-class patrons perpetually cast as educators and natural supervisors of the workers. Matthew Potter, *Amazing lace: A history of the Limerick lace industry* (Limerick, 2014), p. 17; Patrick Maume, ‘Gordon (Marjoribanks), Dame Ishbel Maria’, *Dictionary of Irish biography* <http://dib.cambridge.org.libraryproxy.mic.ul.ie/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a3527&searchClicked=clicked&q=ickadvsearch=yes> accessed 27 Nov 2015.

<sup>122</sup> *Munster News*, 22 Dec 1886.

<sup>123</sup> *Munster News*, 15 Jan 1887.

To the detriment of the Limerick trades' ambitions, middle and upper class Celticists successfully hijacked the home manufacturing cause in the 1885-1910 era before profoundly and seminally altered the concept of Irish economic nationalism. Irish industrial revivalists now focused on bespoke products, craftsmanship and a rejection of mass-production. Industrial exhibitions often showcased manufactured products alongside works of art and middle-class Celticists dreamt of rural based cottage industries with little thought for urban centres of mass-employment.<sup>124</sup> The 'model village' phenomenon perfectly encapsulated the difference in objectives as the new revivalists sought to equate Irishness with exotic primitivism, echoing some of the worst aspects of the 'noble savage' trope.<sup>125</sup> These 'model village' exhibitions, relatively common in the 1890s and 1900s, featured an Irish themed village conjuring a distinct, rural and idyllic image of Irish society (e.g. the carving of bog oak accompanied by the playing of the Irish harp) as a contrast to Britain's industrial powerhouse persona.<sup>126</sup> More than a few Irish MPs found the themed villages derogatory and the sentiment was at odds with the mind-set of the Limerick trades. As Janice Helland noted,

Certainly the "doing good" projects started by women like the Countess of Aberdeen and the Marchioness of Londonderry elicited criticism at the time and their interference in nineteenth-century domestic Ireland still evokes more suspicion than praise.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Aisling Molloy, 'Frederick Vodrey's ceramic designs for the 1880s Dublin exhibitions', *History Ireland*, Issue 2 (Mar/Apr 2005), Volume 13, <http://www.historyireland.com/18th-19th-century-history/frederick-vodreys-ceramic-designs-for-the-1880s-dublin-exhibitions/> accessed 10 December 2016.

<sup>125</sup> Janice Helland, "'A Delightful Change of Fashion": Fair Trade, Cottage Craft, and Tweed in Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Fall/Autumn 2010), p. 37.

<sup>126</sup> Andrew G. Newby, "'On their behalf no agitator raises his voice": the Irish Distressed Ladies Fund – gender, politics and urban philanthropy in Victorian Ireland', Krista Cowman, Asa Karlson Sjogren, Nina Javette Koefoed (eds), *Gender in urban Europe: sites of political activity and citizenship, 1750-1900* (New York, 2014), pp 183-187.

<sup>127</sup> Helland, "'A Delightful Change of Fashion'", p. 37.



Helland's citation of the *Irish Times*' commentary of the wool cleansing process perfectly captured the proscribed image: 'The cleansing of the wool was done in tubs: "the women jump on it as if they were wine-pressing" and the dyeing was done "in an ordinary cauldron."' <sup>128</sup>

Many wealthy benefactors of Irish manufacturing resumed a paternalistic early-Victorian approach in the 1890s as Irish nationalism atrophied in the wake of the Parnellite split. The upper-class input, generally considered essential to industrial revival, focused increasingly upon social improvement to the dismay of utilitarians who preached 'practical education', called for capital investment and envisaged urban centred industries employing the masses. <sup>129</sup> The reluctance to showcase Irish goods separately to British ones was perceived as a political decision and disappointed many Irish manufacturing revivalists. <sup>130</sup>

In hindsight, the 1882 exhibition was another false dawn for economic nationalism. Irish Parliamentary Party MP T. D. Sullivan's comment that the exhibition was 'not for the purposes of display, or idle festivity, but for the practical purposes of putting new life into the trades and industries of Ireland' was laudatory but this sentiment was not sustained and this message did not trickle down to the regional National League bodies. Indeed, the Limerick trades' ambitions were thwarted far more by the retailers and professionals in their own National League bodies than any other social group and although the National League manifesto included 'the encouragement of labour and industrial interests of Ireland', outside of the Sarsfield League where this agenda was *sometimes* accommodated, there was little recognition of this objective (see Chapter Seven). <sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Helland, "A Delightful Change of Fashion", p. 37.

<sup>129</sup> Turpin, in particular, contrasts the views of the Duke of Leinster and William Dargan. John Turpin, 'Exhibitions of Art and Industries in Victorian Ireland: Part II: Dublin Exhibitions of Art and Industries 1865-1885', *Dublin Historical Record*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Mar., 1982), p. 42.

<sup>130</sup> Turpin, 'Exhibitions of Art and Industries in Victorian Ireland: Part II', pp 43-44.

<sup>131</sup> Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism 1876-1906*, pp 146, 190; Berresford Ellis, *A History of the Irish Working Class*, p. 165; *Munster News*, 4, 11, 18 Sept 1886; De Búrca, *Michael Cusack and the GAA*, pp 58-60.

Somewhat encouragingly, Parnell often championed protectionism and industrial revival, but many in his party did not share his feelings on this matter, with Davitt – an economic nationalist but an anti-protectionist – describing Parnell’s stance as ‘absurd.’<sup>132</sup> Parnell confined his support to hypothetical rhetoric, however, whereas Davitt, always more an activist than a politician, was actually more relevant to the trades as he dealt in specifics and earnestly sought to put ideas into action. Davitt’s forthright 1887 talk in Limerick detailed precisely how home industries could be fostered or improved and elsewhere his rhetoric always stayed clear of ambiguous populism, asked frank questions of Irish industry’s failings and suggested tough remedies. He acted similarly to the Limerick trades, urging them to target specific industries which could potentially exploit opportunities without requiring much capital, inspiring them to correctly identify bag making as one such industry in 1886 whilst he advocated bottle-making in 1885.<sup>133</sup> In this sense Davitt was a more useful ally than Parnell or any other passive advocate and was superior to the majority of the IPP who neglected the National League’s ‘industrial charter.’<sup>134</sup> In identifying the potential of the export industry Davitt was far in advance of the Limerick trades although the failure of most of his own such business ventures does put his approach into perspective.<sup>135</sup> He differed somewhat from the trades on the macroeconomic reasons for industrial decline; as a doctrinarian liberal (or even libertarian) he declared that protectionism and tariffs would ‘interfere with the Irish people buying the necessities of life in the cheapest possible markets.’<sup>136</sup> He combined this with a slightly irrational notion that abolition of landlordism was a panacea which rendered

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<sup>132</sup> Biagini stated that Parnell ‘cherished’ the idea of native manufacturing and includes Charles Dawson as a protectionist. Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism 1876–1906*, p. 146; Marley, *Michael Davitt*, p. 150.

<sup>133</sup> Marley, *Michael Davitt*, pp 147-154; *Munster News*, 22 Dec 1886.

<sup>134</sup> Marley, *Michael Davitt*, p. 154.

<sup>135</sup> Marley, *Michael Davitt*, p. 157.

<sup>136</sup> Marley, *Michael Davitt*, p. 150.

protectionism irrelevant, confidently informing an 1887 Limerick audience that ‘protection from Irish landlordism would be all the “protection” which the country would need.’<sup>137</sup>

More than anything, Davitt’s bias towards rural industry and his relative neglect of urban revival prevented him from becoming an ideal national figure for the urban artisan. Ultimately, Davitt was an instigator of the pattern which saw rural Ireland adopted as one of the fundamental emblems of Irish nationalism and revivalists in general. Many influential commentators, such as Denny Lane (Young Irelander and later Home Ruler), argued that lack of coal stymied Ireland’s ability to compete with England and he reinforced the view that industrial England was, in any case, so aesthetically displeasing as to be undesirable. Contrasting industrial English cities Lane commented:

For these huge aggregations of smoky chimneys and overwrought hands, like the great towns of Yorkshire and Lancashire, I have no sympathy. What industries we can have must therefore be more or less dispersed, and it is these scattered industries that Lady Aberdeen and her colleagues wish to foster.<sup>138</sup>

By the early 1900s this view was dominant and in his aptly titled sub-chapter ‘the saving of country life’ McMahon described how the Gaelic industrial revivalists of the early twentieth century were somewhat removed from reality in their quest for the idyllic rural Ireland: ‘To be sure, many revivalists showed little more than a romanticised “big house” appreciation for the difficult living conditions in rural Ireland.’<sup>139</sup>

We cannot be uncritical of the trades’ notions of how to revive industry. They undoubtedly showed a remarkable canniness in the late 1880s, assessing how much capital was

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<sup>137</sup> *Munster News*, 12 Nov 1887.

<sup>138</sup> Denny Lane, ‘The Irish Industries Association’, *The Irish Monthly*, Vol. 21, No. 239 (May, 1893), pp. 237-241. See also Sarah J. Butler, *Britain and its empire in the shadow of Rome* (London, 2012), p. 127.

<sup>139</sup> Timothy G. McMahon, *Grand opportunity: The Gaelic revival and Irish society, 1893-1910* (New York, 2008), p. 150.

needed for each proposed industry and which of these were likely to succeed. Their principal weakness was their lack of capital, though they did convince many of the city's wealthy to buy shares in their projects but many of their efforts were fruitless, particularly the city brewery project which failed to materialise as many local clergy, repeating Lane's sentiment, objected to the noxious fumes that such heavy industry would create.<sup>140</sup>

One general conclusion shared by both the Limerick artisans and the wider revivalist movement was the identification of the biased mind-set of the Irish consumer as a problem. This problem was not new, Limerick master tailors in the 1810s were importing London tailors and advertising 'the latest London fashions' to accommodate the tastes of Limerick consumers and the trades identified this phenomenon in the 1840s.<sup>141</sup> Their opposition to this mentality in the 1880s is of relevance to this chapter as it dovetailed neatly with 1890s Douglas Hyde's views on the subject.<sup>142</sup> The rhetoric of the unofficial leader of the Limerick industrial revival campaign, Patrick Ryan (smith), provides the best evidence of an overlap with broader trends, particularly his contention that Limerick merchants were enthralled with certain British brands. His quotation of the Bard of Thomond – 'Everything Irish we despise, everything foreign we patronise' – resembled closely Hyde's 1892 observation, 'we are largely at present, a nation of imitators.'<sup>143</sup> Ryan's decision to campaign in the National League, of course, contrasted with the apolitical Hyde but the manner of his campaign was, if anything, a revolt against the institutions of Irish nationalism, a protest against the hollow language and false posturing of the middle-class Leaguers and his observation that 'he found that those who directed them in politics and supported Home Rule were the worst to aid in furthering Irish industries' mirrored

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<sup>140</sup> Collins, Labour, church and nationalism in Limerick, pp 69-74.

<sup>141</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 13 Nov 1840, 2 Feb 1841, 12 Nov 1844. As well as tailors, leather vendors were also anxious to advertise that their whips originated in London. *Limerick Gazette*, 19 May 1812.

<sup>142</sup> Douglas Hyde, 'The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland', talk delivered before the Irish National Literary Society in Dublin, 25 November 1892 <http://www.gaeilge.org/deanglicising.html> accessed 6 Dec 2015.

<sup>143</sup> The Bard of Thomond, Hogan, was a renowned Limerick poet. *Munster News*, 13 Jan, 21 April 1886; Douglas Hyde, 'The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland', talk delivered before the Irish National Literary Society in Dublin, 25 November 1892 <http://www.gaeilge.org/deanglicising.html> accessed 6 Dec 2015.

somewhat D.P. Moran's acerbic description of the Irish political 'snob' or '*shoneen*' whose vapid language contained all the requisite, clichéd references to Emmet and College Green but failed to hide his disconnect with the common Irish person.<sup>144</sup> Whilst much of the above portrays the trades as more practical and logical in their approach to nationalism and industrial revival than their political betters, there is no discounting the lack of scope to their approach and rationale. At best, the trades appeared to envisage an autarky with imports minimalised and everything made in Ireland staying in Ireland. Despite Davitt, they under-appreciated the potential of an export led economy – at one point they justifiably bemoaned how one local foundry (McNamara's foundry) was being overlooked by local interests due to anti-Irish bias and was relying on exports to sustain itself, one artisan commenting that 'It is a very singular thing that McNamara's work goes off to Glasgow and is not appreciated here.'<sup>145</sup>

The only remedy apparent to the artisans assembled was to encourage native consumers to support the foundry, and no artisan there – or at any other meeting – ever thought to copy Peter Tait's example and further exploit the British market.<sup>146</sup> Undoubtedly Patrick Ryan's 1880s 'vigilance committee' was useful, accurately detailing how many local retailers were selling local or Irish made goods and shaming all local businesses that did not cooperate.<sup>147</sup> At times, however, their world view was still the old guild, city-state model that the United Trades had championed in 1820 and one local artisan conveyed a sense of myopic localism after attending an Irish Manufacturing meeting: 'I fear I am mistaken in saying Irish [manufacture],

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<sup>144</sup> D.P. Moran, 'Politics, nationality and snobs', *The New Ireland review*, Vol. XII, November 1899, pp. 129-143; *Munster News*, 21 April 1886. There are a number of similar incidents where Limerick artisans and some of their Fenian colleagues in the Sarsfield League cast doubt upon the sincerity of the middle-class National Leaguers, see *Munster News*, 17 Dec 1884, 9, 13 Jan, 22 Dec 1886, 14 Mar 1888.

<sup>145</sup> *Munster News*, 22 Dec 1886.

<sup>146</sup> The success of Tait's business model is made apparent by the example of the Confederate Uniform contract of the 1860s, see Frederick R. Adolphus, *Imported Confederate Uniforms of Peter Tait & Co., Limerick, Ireland* (Los Angeles, 2010), pp 12-64.

<sup>147</sup> Part of Ryan's *modus operandi* in this regard was to simply send out teams of boys to buy items such as matches and to note which retailers were selling local made and which were selling imports. Specific homemade products that were new to the market were named and local businesses were directly contacted, sometimes by Ryan himself, and asked if they would consider replacing imports with local made products. *Munster News*, 13, 17 Dec 1884, 20 June 1885, 13 Jan, 21 April, 11, 15, 22 Dec 1886, 22 Jan, 19 Mar 1887.

because they all seemed to think of Limerick manufacture and no other.’<sup>148</sup> This was only a slight exaggeration; Ryan and his cohorts did indeed occasionally bemoan Cappoquin-made carriages or Derry-made pipes in Limerick, though only when there were Limerick made alternatives available and on other occasions they promoted Wexford-made scythes, Cork-made matches and Tipperary-made farm machinery.<sup>149</sup> The trades were conscious of this localism but unapologetic, claiming that it was ubiquitous in Ireland and shamelessly promoted Walker’s whiskey (manufactured in Thomondgate, Limerick) instead of Jameson’s, on the grounds that ‘if a Corkman came to Limerick he would search every public house to find porter or ale manufactured in Cork.’<sup>150</sup> Ultimately, despite the cringe-worthy faux-Irish themes, the middle and upper class revivalists showcasing Limerick Lace in Britain and North America as a luxury item exceeded any such schemes sponsored or fostered by the trades or their supporters in Limerick.<sup>151</sup>

### **Anti-clericalism and nationalism**

A potently anti-clerical environment dominated as the Limerick trades re-engaged with Irish nationalism in the late 1860s. As referred to above, the trades were not the principal anti-clerical agents in this case; rather it was the Irish Working Man’s Association that dominated

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<sup>148</sup> *Munster News*, 22 Jan 1887.

<sup>149</sup> *Munster News*, 13 Jan, 21 April, 22 Dec 1886.

<sup>150</sup> *Munster News*, 15 Dec 1886.

<sup>151</sup> Janice Helland, ‘Benevolence, revival and ‘fair trade’: a historical perspective’, Janice Helland, Beverley Lemire and Alena Buis (eds), *Craft, community and the material culture of place and politics, 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>* (Surrey, 2014), pp 134-137. The most notable meeting held in Limerick on the subject of Limerick lace was not attended by the trades but rather by Lord Monteaigle, Lady Inchiquin and local industrialists such as A.W. Shaw with Bishop O’Dwyer *in abstentia* but supportive, *Munster News*, 22 Dec 1888. Whilst Limerick Lace was marketed as a traditional Limerick industry, in truth there was a sharp divide between the factory system overseen by Charles Walker, amongst others, in the 1830s and 40s and the craft orientated system associated with the arts and crafts revival of the post 1880s period. Lace making in mid-nineteenth century Limerick was highly intensive and factory owners generally employed girls between the ages of eleven and fourteen with small quick fingers and subservient personalities. Many female workers absconded from such factories on account of depression and/or extreme physical fatigue, see Matthew Potter, *Amazing lace: A history of the Limerick lace industry* (Limerick, 2014), pp 26-29; *Limerick Star*, 14, 17 Feb 1834, 17 Feb 1835, 14 Feb, 19, 29 Sept 1837; *Limerick Reporter*, 6 Sep 1839.

such local political entities as the initial Isaac Butt Election Committee. Principal member of the IWMA, Charles O'Neill, boasted after the Butt election that 'Mr. Butt would not be elected today only for the message I sent to the clerical party here.'<sup>152</sup> The influence of the IWMA faction quickly dissipated, however, and the election of Richard O'Shaughnessy MP in 1874 saw the clerical faction take control of the Butt campaign. As the IWMA faded, the trades inherited their mantle, with the election of John Godsell as President of the Congregated Trades in 1874 marking an evolution from a passively aggressive body to becoming the bane of the politicised clergy. At times, however, Godsell's forthright political views and general anti-clericalism were unrepresentative of the general mood within the trades. Certainly his clashes with Fr. (later Bishop) Edward O'Dwyer and other pro-temperance clergy in the 1870s and 1880s over the issue of public house closing times divided opinion in the trades.<sup>153</sup> The watershed confrontation between the local clergy and the trades, in the context of national politics, occurred in 1890 in response to Bishop O'Dwyer's condemnation of the resumption of the Plan of Campaign on several Limerick estates.<sup>154</sup> Whilst the trades' internal political discourse was often poorly covered by the press, the 1890 meeting regarding Bishop O'Dwyer received thorough journalistic analysis, revealing much about the extent of their politicisation. The resolution put before the Congregated Trades expressing their 'unabated confidence in Mr. John Dillon and the Irish Parliamentary Party and [condemning] the language used towards Mr. Dillon and his colleagues in a recent letter by the Right Rev. Dr. O'Dwyer' was immediately seconded by Godsell but a cautious debate then followed.<sup>155</sup> Whilst extreme nationalists such as Godsell, Hogan and Kett constituted the core of the meeting, a mason

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<sup>152</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 23 Jan 1872.

<sup>153</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 21 April, 14 Nov 1877, 12 Feb 1878; *Munster News*, 28 April, 17, 24 Nov 1877, 19, 23, 26 April 1879; *Limerick Chronicle*, 19, 22, 26 April 1879.

<sup>154</sup> The significance of this dispute was because the Bishop, citing a papal decree, formally criticised the actions of leading Nationalists John Dillon and William O'Brien. O'Dwyer's first criticisms of the 'Plan' were issued in 1887 cementing his reputation as a castle Catholic or, at the very least, a 'shaky kind of patriot'. See Laurence M. Geary, *The Plan of Campaign* (Cork, 1886), pp 33, 129-31; 'Dr. O'Dwyer and the Plan of Campaign', Jim Kemmy (ed.), *The Limerick compendium* (Dublin, 1997), pp 286-88.

<sup>155</sup> *Munster News*, 9 Aug 1890.

named Bourke undoubtedly represented other artisans when he declared that ‘he as one would not say he was a nationalist in heart and soul, but he had the fullest confidence in John Dillon.’ A delegate from the painters took a diplomatic approach: ‘there was no doubt they all had confidence in John Dillon but if the trades wanted his Lordship to be with them....’ whilst another painter suggested sending a deputation to meet O’Dwyer, commenting:

If I am going now to abuse his Lordship, I cannot go to him tomorrow or after as a deputation. As his Lordship said to us he was fighting a cause – himself and John Dillon had a quarrel, and let them fight it out. It is enough for artisans to look after their own interests. We have all confidence in John Dillon and the Irish Party – he may be going right, but the abuse has nearly gone too far now, and ought to be stopped quickly.<sup>156</sup>

More than anything Godsell, sought to prevent division and his role in the debate – despite his history with O’Dwyer, his forceful personality and his strong pro-nationalist views – was a conciliatory one as he commented, ‘It would be better we should all agree. I don’t like dissensions’.<sup>157</sup> Mindful that the initial resolution had already been diluted, Godsell gently stressed that further dilution or omission of O’Dwyer’s name was impossible:

None of them wished to come into collision with the Bishops and priests of any denomination, but they came to the conclusion that the resolution could not go without having the name of the Bishop in it. They used it in a respectful manner.

Most significantly, Godsell’s acute awareness of his place in history was the greatest indication of the contrast between the politicised artisan and those content to focus on the present: ‘A

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<sup>156</sup> *Munster News*, 9 Aug 1890.

<sup>157</sup> *Munster News*, 9 Aug 1890.



person after twenty years may read a newspaper with this resolution in it, and if the Bishop's name were not in it he might ask what is the meaning of it?'<sup>158</sup>

With this the vote was cast and the resolution carried by one vote. Roughly two weeks later O'Dwyer issued a formal and forthright criticism of Dillon and William O'Brien's agenda, sparking a massive procession in the city, which included the trades supporting Dillon and O'Brien and featuring placards condemning the intrusion of religion into politics.<sup>159</sup> Undoubtedly, many cautious artisans were carried along by the political momentum and the highly decorated Mechanics' Institute, and Dillon's quip that 'it will take a greater man than the Bishop of Limerick to put me on my defence', suggested working class unanimity.<sup>160</sup> Clearly, public display of political homogeneity in this instance must be measured against the discourse of the meeting detailed above which, along with other instances of firm but polite refusal to follow clerical dictation, suggest an artisan body that still valued diplomatic relations with the clergy.<sup>161</sup>

The anti-O'Dwyer rancour of 1890 never developed into broad, consistent anti-clericalism as the Bishop and his clergy remained entirely aloof from politics during the turbulent 1890s.<sup>162</sup> There were rumblings of anti-clerical discontent from the organised labour bodies prior to the 1899 Municipal Election, but apart from one notable incident (a letter in red ink, apparently sent by someone in the Labour Party to the local Redemptorists warning them not to interfere in politics) there was little indication of animosity.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> *Munster News*, 9 Aug 1890.

<sup>159</sup> A very large green flag was draped over the O'Connell Monument with the words 'Religion from Rome, politics from home' written on it. *Munster News*, 27 Aug 1890.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> See in particular the exchange between the trades and Fr. Shanahan in 1868, *Munster News*, 18 Nov 1868.

<sup>162</sup> McGrath, 'Riots in Limerick, 1820-1900', pp 163-64.

<sup>163</sup> National Archives, CBS, SPO, 18315/S, 1899.

## Summary

Artisans featured strongly in all public displays of Nationalism in the 1880s and 1890s, dominating the local Amnesty movement. Whilst M.J. Kelly described Limerick as the ‘Spiritual home of the Amnesty movement’ in the 1890s he also detailed how Mark Ryan, the IRB London centre, described the Limerick IRB (mainly members of the same Amnesty movement, or artisans, or both simultaneously) as being ‘too constitutionally minded’ and ‘failing to differentiate themselves from Redmondism.’<sup>164</sup> This situation changed following John Daly’s 1895 prison release but the non-alignment of local extreme nationalists with Fenianism in general persisted. Daly was, as Kelly put it, a ‘law unto himself’ presiding over the Fenian core of the organised labour movement.<sup>165</sup>

The distinguishing features of the nationalism of the trades in the latter half of the century are worthy of further attention from mainstream historians. Their allegations, made in response to the rise of the land question in Irish politics, that they were the true carriers of Irish nationalism were somewhat fanciful yet contained a hint of truth. Certainly, in their eyes, their nationalism showed continuity with the early Repeal manifestos that their forbearers had issued in 1830 and 1834 whereas the Land Leaguers were cast as opportunists whose agenda was an unwanted distraction. They were fortunate, in one regard, that, in John Daly, they had a like-minded political activist who helped give some substance to what may be termed urban Irish nationalism. They were, however, victims of the urban malaise against which they rallied and the legacy of urban stagnation was a political party that followed the votes and focused on agrarian issues. Worse still, by the 1880s the landed and political classes equated urban industry with England and rustic primitiveness with Ireland. In the face of such political neglect, the rough and uncultured economic nationalism of the trades went almost unnoticed in a century

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<sup>164</sup> Kelly, *The Fenian ideal*, pp 77, 84, 102.

<sup>165</sup> Kelly, *The Fenian ideal*, pp 102. William Whelan, engineer, James Kett, Cooper, and John Godsell, baker, were the most prominent of this core artisan group.

that saw Ireland experience, in the European context, unique demographic change as the economy waned in the shadow of the world's first industrial powerhouse.<sup>166</sup> A case could be made that, though roughly expressed, the trades' rhetoric was sagacious: as Guinnane pointed out, rural depopulation was not a uniquely Irish phenomenon and much of Europe and North America was characterised by a rural to urban migration while, in the case of Scotland, population growth was confined to 'narrow areas around the cities of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen' and 'without rapid growth in these urbanised areas Scotland's overall population would have declined, just as in Ireland.'<sup>167</sup> In short, the nineteenth century Irish urban experience was far more unusual, in the demographic context, than the rural one and, following on from Guinnane's Scottish example, one might ask why Limerick's population declined slightly between 1821 and 1901 and yet Aberdeen (roughly the same size as Limerick in 1821) saw an almost fourfold increase in the same period; more pertinent still, why did the political elites not identify this as a problem, focussing instead on the less exceptional case of the Irish rural population?<sup>168</sup> When a national parliament did emerge in 1922 the trades' central message was forgotten; the exceptional urban stagnation of nineteenth century Ireland was not seen as a problem but rather as a defining and virtuous legacy in a country that proudly upheld its rural image.

The futility of the Limerick trades' political activism was, of course, unexceptional in the context of the nineteenth century urban Irish working class. What was exceptional about organised labour in Limerick was its degree of independence from centres of political power. Nineteenth century Limerick offers some of the best evidence of popular Irish urban politics

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<sup>166</sup> For an account of urbanisation in late nineteenth century western Europe, and the accompanying social problems, see Andrew Lees and Lynn Hollen Lees, *Cities and the Making of Modern Europe, 1750-1914* (New York, 2007), pp 131-158. For an indication of the uniqueness of Irish demographics see Hilary Tovey and Perry Share, *A Sociology of Ireland* (Dublin, 2003), pp 140-146; Timothy W. Guinnane, *The vanishing Irish: households, migration and the rural economy in Ireland* (Chicester, 1997), pp 4-33.

<sup>167</sup> Guinnane, *The vanishing Irish*, pp 4-33.

<sup>168</sup> Marvin B. Becker, *The emergence of civil society in the Eighteenth century* (Bloomington, 1994), p. 102.

that was opposed, but not directed, by local elites and was free of the faux-artisan political institutions intended to corral working class opinion in Dublin and Cork. The city was sufficient in size to support regular urban social dynamics and yet small enough and geographically removed enough to remain on the periphery of Irish political discourse. In short, the true significance of nineteenth century Limerick labour is its worth to scholars of history from below.

# **Chapter Six:**

**A study of interclass**

**dynamics in the**

**political context,**

**1810-1880**

Chapters Six and Seven identify the principal public men of the city of Limerick and the political relationship they had with the trades of the city over the course of the nineteenth century. The relationships between the trades and individuals such as William Smith O'Brien, Isaac Butt and Daniel O'Connell are touched upon here and more fully detailed in Chapters Four and Five. The period 1810-1880 was chosen as this marks the period in which the dominant inter-class political dynamics were formed. This situation changed in the 1880s when political power was centralised and the nature of the political dynamics changed (see Chapter Seven).

Whilst the trades and the city's liberal political class (defined in the thesis Introduction) generally supported the same political causes, they had clearly different considerations when choosing parliamentary candidates. The trades of the city never once referred to or showed awareness of the important monetary factors that concerned the local political class and instead concentrated on an individual's political principles and, when that did not interest the city artisans, political patronage. For example, Isaac Butt (Limerick city MP, 1871-79) was a more dynamic politician with principles that appealed more to the trades than the moderate liberals who dominated the Limerick constituency for much of the century and was therefore seen by the trades as a good parliamentary candidate (see Chapter Five). In the eyes of the local parliamentary election committees, however, the fact that Butt's law career was never quite lucrative enough to fund his parliamentary activities certainly presented a problem and, unsurprisingly, when he died in 1879 the local political class went to extra lengths to control the nomination process and ensure the return of Daniel Fitzgerald Gabbett who, as detailed in the Introduction, had the financial means to support a parliamentary career unassisted.<sup>1</sup> The exact credentials which the trades looked for in a candidate were most clearly detailed prior to

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Bull, 'Butt, Isaac', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009), <http://dib.cambridge.org> accessed 28 May 2014; *Munster News*, 14, 31 May 1879; Hoppen, *Ireland Since 1800*, p. 123.

the 1852 general election when Michael O'Regan, President of the Congregated Trades, produced a political manifesto which brazenly dictated what the political candidates had to demonstrate in order to receive the trades' backing – i.e. that they would support legislative independence through Independent opposition within parliament, Tenant Right, the promotion of civil and religious liberty (a vague term which was never fully explained), and the local interests of Limerick city.<sup>2</sup> At different times, a range of popular issues replaced that of Tenant Right but the other demands remained broadly the same and this 1852 manifesto acts as a template for the trades' view of the parliamentary process from the 1830s until the 1890s.

Despite the infringements on their right to vote as freeman, artisans and tradesmen still contributed over thirty-one per cent of the liberal/reform vote in 1817 although there is no indication of how many of these voters were members of organised labour groups.<sup>3</sup> The artisan share of the electorate plateaued after this point (fifteen percent of the voters listed in an 1837 electoral register appear to have been artisans) until the franchise reforms of the 1880s.<sup>4</sup> There is less evidence as to how many voters were journeymen or trade society members: the President of the Congregated Trades claimed in 1852 that 150 of his body (roughly one thousand strong at that stage) were on the electoral register, this figure accounting for perhaps eight percent of the city's voters.<sup>5</sup> By way of comparison, Cronin estimated that about ten percent of Cork city artisans were part of the parliamentary franchise in the 1830s.<sup>6</sup> Irrespective of the proportion of the electorate that consisted of trade society members, there was no strong, coherent labour movement to speak of among the politicised artisans of the city in the 1810s.

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<sup>2</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 2 April 1852.

<sup>3</sup> *A history of the proceedings at the particularly interesting election for a member to represent the city of Limerick in parliament : containing a full and impartial report of the speeches of the candidates & electors, their places of residence and the quality in which they voted : to which is annexed a copy of Mr. Tuthill's petition to parliament against the legality of the sheriff's return : interspersed with a variety of interesting matter and arranged, so as to give it not only a local, but general importance* (Limerick, 1817).

<sup>4</sup> These figures were extrapolated using the information in the 1837 electoral register, see <http://www.limerickcity.ie/Library/LocalStudies/1837ElectoralList/> accessed 22 May 2014.

<sup>5</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 2 April 1852.

<sup>6</sup> Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, p. 147.

There undoubtedly were periodic assemblages coinciding with electoral campaigns: in 1812 the ‘masters and wardens of different guilds and corporations of tradesmen’ were visibly supportive of the Independent reform campaign; in 1817 there was a large parade of ‘different tradesmen with cockades and favours, amounting to some thousands, their respective banners in front’ in support of the Independent candidate John Tuthill; and in 1820, as part of the celebrated ‘Chairing of Spring Rice,’ there was an extremely colourful parade of ‘fifteen Guilds of United Tradesmen attended by their Masters and Wardens.’<sup>7</sup> The sporadic and disorganised nature of the trades’ collective political presence changed in 1824 with the formation of the Congregated Trades, a body that was the culmination of the politicisation which the Independents, particularly Thomas Spring Rice, had inspired. Needless to say, O’Connellism and the popular Catholic Association also acted as a catalyst in the politicisation process and it is no coincidence that the Congregated Trades was formed a year after the Catholic Association was established.<sup>8</sup> Spring Rice became the darling of the trades and the liberal/reform supporters in general, thanks to his defeat of the Limerick Corporation candidate in 1820, his support of the fishermen of Limerick who were in conflict with weir owners along the Shannon in 1819, and his prominent role in 1820 in bringing John Scanlon (the notorious murderer of the ‘Colleen Bawn’) to justice.<sup>9</sup> These actions very much followed in the general assimilationist agenda of the Independents who sought to administer justice to the wider populace as opposed to the Corporation clique who insinuated that the local judicial system should not extend to those below the class of ‘gentleman.’ One such account, given during the 1817 general election campaign, alleged that a ‘poor man of the name of O’Flaherty’ sought to summon a ‘certain

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<sup>7</sup> In the case of the 1820 election Herbert mentions that the banners of the chandlers, coopers, masons, butchers, harness-makers, shoemakers, hatters, smiths, millers, tailors, cabinet-makers and weavers were all present. *A history of the proceedings at the particularly interesting election*, p. 141; Herbert, ‘Chairing of Thomas Spring Rice’, p. 134; *Limerick Gazette*, 13 Oct 1812; *Limerick Leader*, 20 Sept 1945 (article reprinted *Limerick Leader*, 4 July 2009).

<sup>8</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 13 Oct 1840.

<sup>9</sup> *Report from Select Committee on petitions relating to the local taxation of the city of Limerick*, pp 35-36, H.C. 1822 (617), vii, 235; Ridden, *Making good citizens*, p. 164.



gentleman' but upon giving the name of the individual to the Mayor-Sergeant the corporation official 'coolly laid aside his pen, and said "You can get no summons, that gentleman is a friend of the corporation"'. In another instance, a local brogue-maker was reputedly thrown in jail without reason and kept there till he produced money to 'pay the fees of the gaoler, bailiff and other numerous charges.'<sup>10</sup> In such instances the exact facts of the matter were uncertain but the manner in which the Corporation were generally perceived was plain and clear.

Though the Independent reformers successfully engaged with the trades and some of the wider Limerick public in constitutional politics, they were never as popular as the Repealers who followed. Thomas Spring Rice, in particular, helped raise the aspirations of the Limerick electorate, promoted a belief in democracy and generally engendered a sense of empowerment as opposed to the apathy which had characterised the bulk of the Limerick population's response to the 'old corruption' of the Vereker-Smyth family.<sup>11</sup> He supported tithe reform and Catholic Emancipation but ultimately looked at these issues differently to O'Connell. Spring Rice's politics showed continuity with the old 'Protestant nation' of the 1700s: his own approach was to not to follow a Catholic-led agenda but to expand this Protestant nation to include Catholics and, in doing so, create a more equitable and efficient society. Ridden has portrayed him as a member of the nascent Irish Whig party that was eventually replaced by O'Connellism.<sup>12</sup>

The political champions of the 1810s Independent era were never expected to represent the trades on national issues and were effectively single issue (i.e. local reform) candidates. Local parliamentary candidates gave little backing to the trades' anti-veto Catholic Emancipation campaign in the 1810s, and it was left to prominent artisan individuals such as

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<sup>10</sup> *A history of the proceedings at the particularly interesting election*, pp 21, 30.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew Potter, *Government of the people of Limerick*, pp 271-76; W. D. Rubinstein, 'The End of "Old Corruption" in Britain 1780-1860', *Past & Present*, No. 101, November 1983, pp. 55-8.

<sup>12</sup> Ridden, *Making Good Citizens*, pp 151-160.

Edmond Ryan – a prosperous master cooper – to support the efforts of Fr. Richard Hayes and other proponents of anti-veto Catholic Emancipation.<sup>13</sup> There was also little effort to correspond with Independent leaders such as Glentworth in reference to Emancipation. In fact, it was generally believed that Glentworth was opposed to Catholic Emancipation in any form at this point and his father, Lord Limerick, principal patron of the Limerick Independents, was positively opposed to the movement.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, whilst Spring Rice was in favour of Emancipation it was on his own terms (i.e. he supported the ‘wings’) and ensured at all times that he remained strictly independent of O’Connell.<sup>15</sup> The other local Independent reform leader, John Tuthill, was similarly independent as he proudly declared prior to the 1817 election:

Gentlemen – I know it has been insinuated, that I have come forth on the strength of a Catholic party, and that, in the event of my going into Parliament, I am compromised with them – I think it necessary to say, in the most unequivocal manner, that I am not – that I never was asked to give a pledge, directly or indirectly; that it was never sought from me, nor would I listen to it. I will never make a pledge or promise to any party.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 4 April 1818. Hayes was an Irish friar who unsuccessfully lobbied Rome to support the O’Connellite line on the Veto question, see Des Keenan, *1800-1850* (online book), chapter 6, <http://www.deskeenan.com/2irchap6.htm> accessed 17/10/2012.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew Potter, *William Monsell of Tervoe* (Dublin, 2009), p.11;

<sup>15</sup> Ridden, *Making Good Citizens*, pp 197-98. For more information in the ‘wings’, the ‘veto’ and the Catholic Emancipation campaign see G. I. T. Machin, ‘The Catholic Emancipation Crisis of 1825’, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 78, No. 308 (Jul., 1963), pp. 458-482; Denis Gwynn, ‘Henry Grattan and Catholic Emancipation’, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 18, No. 72 (Dec., 1929), pp. 576-592.

<sup>16</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 18 July 1817. As early as 1821 O’Connell was noting some displeasure with Spring Rice who had voted in favour with Parnell’s Catholic Emancipation Bill that included the controversial ‘veto’ which O’Connell, and the majority of the Irish Catholic clergy, found particularly offensive. Maurice R. O’Connell, *The Correspondence of Daniel O’Connell Vol II*, p. 313 letter 895, 8 April 1821. The Emancipation Bill would have allowed the monarchy a strong role in the appointment of the Catholic clergy. Glentworth’s opposition of Catholic Emancipation can be presumed due to the fact that his father, and patron, Lord Limerick, sat as an anti-Catholic Lord in support of Lord Liverpool’s administration, see Stephen Farrell, ‘Limerick Borough’, *History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1820-1832* (online edition), [http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/constituencies/limerick#footnote32\\_r4tjlku](http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/constituencies/limerick#footnote32_r4tjlku) accessed 17/10/2012

At this early stage the relationship between the artisans of Limerick and local parliamentary candidates was indicative of the tradition set in the 1760 to 1820 period as described by Jupp:

The vast majority of M.Ps did not consider their conduct in the House of Commons as predetermined by the wishes of their electors; they preferred to see themselves as elected as members of Parliament rather than as delegates to Parliament.<sup>17</sup>

In the 1810-1830 period the principal currency which the Limerick trades used to influence public men was not their parliamentary voting power but their civic legacy as guilds, or rather the vestiges and perceptions of such a legacy. The relationship with public men during this period generally featured the trades posing as a legitimate civic body and attempting to flatter prominent, rich and benevolent public men by bestowing guild privileges upon them, or by impressive musters featuring guild banners, regalia and pageantry in support of such public men. Very often such gestures were in honour of parliamentary candidates such as Thomas Spring Rice (1820 and 1826), Samuel Dickson (1826 and 1830), but also the occasional mayor as well as prominent supporters such as John Boyse, solicitor (1820) and Tom Steele, the ‘Chief Lieutenant’ of Daniel O’Connell (1828).<sup>18</sup> In the case of Boyse, the Guild of Coopers bestowed the freedom of their guild upon him after he helped their campaign to gain recognition of their civic rights, specifically the right to acquire freeman status by serving an apprenticeship.<sup>19</sup> Steele was honoured in the most impressive ceremony of all in 1828 which saw him anointed with wine, given freedom of all the guilds, and made *Honorary* President of the Congregated Trades.<sup>20</sup> The agenda of the trades at this point appears to have been to acquire powerful allies, but at times their bestowal of honours upon public men seemed either dishonest or naïve.

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<sup>17</sup> P. J. Jupp, ‘Irish Parliamentary Elections and the Influence of the Catholic Vote, 1801-20’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1967), p. 183.

<sup>18</sup> *Limerick Gazette*, 10 Oct 1820; *Limerick Chronicle*, 21, 25 February 1826; *Limerick Evening Post*, 24 Oct 1828.

<sup>19</sup> *Limerick Gazette*, 10 Oct 1820.

<sup>20</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 24 Oct 1828.

Specifically, the trades do not appear to have been aware or concerned that public men who were awarded honorary positions within the trades would expect the future support of, and even a degree of authority over, the trades, and there were occasional moments of conflict when their support was not forthcoming.

Samuel Dickson was perhaps the best example of such a problematic (from the vantage of the trades) public figure. Described as a man of ‘rank and fortune’ – two qualities which the trades used to further their own interests – he was a mill owner, a landlord in the city’s liberties, and a member of the aspiring middle-class (similar to but less successful than the Barringtons in terms of background) that was typically eager to use wealth to acquire land, titles and the respectability associated with the established local landed class.<sup>21</sup> In this regard, Dickson was particularly pleased to be made free of several of the guilds at various times in the 1820s, despite being a political opponent of Spring Rice who had been made free of all the guilds at the beginning of the decade.<sup>22</sup> Dickson was a noted local philanthropist and, though generally assumed to be a political ally of the ‘Orange’ Corporation, was recognised as a benefactor of many local Catholic places of worship, donating a cruxifix and altar to Monaleen Catholic Church in 1826 (shortly before the election that year).<sup>23</sup> He did not display any subtlety in the manner in which he dispensed his patronage and his greatest moments of generosity appear to have occurred shortly before an election that he was contesting.<sup>24</sup> His political astuteness was

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<sup>21</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 1 December 1829; *Limerick Chronicle*, 20 Oct 1850; *Freeman’s Journal*, 14 February 1826; Landed Estates database, Dickson (Kildimo) <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie/LandedEstates/jsp/estate-show.jsp?id=2153> accessed 25 May 2014. The Barringtons operated as pewter smiths in the 1790s in the Charlotte Quay area, by the 1830s the family had acquired land, a title and had built their own quay on the northern side of the Shannon. Dom Hubert Janssens de Varebeke, ‘The Barrington’s of Limerick’, *Old Limerick Journal*, No. 24, Winter, 1988, pp. 5-10; *Limerick Star*, 1 Nov 1836; Lenihan, *Limerick: Its history and antiquities*, p. 444.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Farrell, ‘Limerick Borough’, *History of Parliament*, <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/constituencies/limerick>, accessed 24 Oct 2014.

<sup>23</sup> *Freemans Journal*, 17 May 1826. Dickson financially contributed towards the repair of St. Mary’s Parish Church and the Church of the Dominican order in 1828, *Limerick Evening Post*, 27 May 1828.

<sup>24</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 21, 25 February 1826; 7, 14 Aug, 28 Feb, 21 Nov 1838; *Limerick Evening Post*, 6, 23, 27, 30 July, 3, 6, 10, 13, 17 Aug 1830, 30 Oct, 6, 13 Nov, 4, 7, 18 December 1832, 6 Aug 1833; *Limerick Herald*, 3, 6, 13, 20 December; *Limerick Star*, 23 Jan, 21 July 1835, 25 July, 1 Aug 1837; *Limerick Reporter*, 27

not highly regarded and he was caricatured as an ass by one local journal in an article, published shortly before the 1832 election, which he later declared to be libellous.<sup>25</sup> He spent a considerable amount of money contesting almost every Limerick city election from the late 1820s until the 1840s, often unsuccessfully attempting to pull out at the last minute when defeat became inevitable.<sup>26</sup> In 1826 his crude electioneering methods successfully enticed at least four organised labour groups (the Guild of Masons and Bricklayers, Guild of Cordwainers, Guild of Skinners and Guild of Nailors) to support him prior to the general election.<sup>27</sup> In this case, the related correspondence emphasised what each party was bringing to the table: in the case of the trades the supposed antiquity of their tradition implied that Dickson, as their local patron, was now aligned to several venerable civic institutions. In this way, Dickson now belonged to an 'old' tradition stretching back at least as far as the 1730s, in which the relationship between local politicians and guilds was close and mutually beneficial.<sup>28</sup> This was not a new phenomenon: as discussed in Chapter One, in 1817 Independent parliamentary candidate John Tuthill sought election as Master of the Guild of Brogue-Makers in the mistaken belief that he would then be able to gain entry to the common council of the city.<sup>29</sup>

The division amongst the artisan bodies prior to the 1826 election contrasts with the unity which generally preceded elections for the remainder of the century, apart from occasional dissensions that occurred in the 1850s and 1860s. It reflected the fact that the Congregated Trades was still in its infancy and Spring Rice, notwithstanding the fact that he

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Sept 1839, 18 Feb, 6 Mar 1840, 22, 29 Jan, 12 Feb, 2, 9 April, 29 Oct, 12 Nov 1841, 30 July, 3 Aug 1847, 1 June 1849, 25 Jan, 29 Oct 1850; *Limerick Standard*, 21, 24, 28 June 1841; *Nenagh Guardian*, 6 June 1849.

<sup>25</sup> *Limerick Herald*, 20 December 1832

<sup>26</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 21, 25 February 1826; 7, 14 Aug, 28 Feb, 21 Nov 1838; *Limerick Evening Post*, 6, 23, 27, 30 July, 3, 6, 10, 13, 17 Aug 1830, 30 Oct, 6, 13 Nov, 4, 7, 18 December 1832, 6 Aug 1833; *Limerick Herald*, 3, 6, 13, 20 December; *Limerick Star*, 23 Jan, 21 July 1835, 25 July, 1 Aug 1837; *Limerick Reporter*, 27 Sept 1839, 18 Feb, 6 Mar 1840, 22, 29 Jan, 12 Feb, 2, 9 April, 29 Oct, 12 Nov 1841, 30 July, 3 Aug 1847, 1 June 1849, 25 Jan, 29 Oct 1850; *Limerick Standard*, 21, 24, 28 June 1841; *Nenagh Guardian*, 6 June 1849.

<sup>27</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 21, 25 February 1826.

<sup>28</sup> National Library of Ireland, Limerick Papers, Ms. 41678/4.

<sup>29</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 11 Oct 1833.

was undoubtedly more popular than any previous parliamentary candidate for the city, was still not quite the unchallenged champion of popular causes that his O'Connellite successors from 1832 onwards were perceived to be.<sup>30</sup> As well as enticing the support of the skimmers, nailors, masons and cordwainers in 1826 – more than likely on account of his patronage – Samuel Dickson was also given freedom of the more prosperous Guild of Coopers after defending their reputation against charges of combination in 1828.<sup>31</sup> Dickson seems to have taken this gesture from the coopers quite seriously and expressed surprise when their guild pledged itself to support his opponent, Spring Rice, at the start of the 1830 election campaign.<sup>32</sup> Ridden stated that Spring Rice was unsure of the support of the city trades in 1828 and an 1830 election petition, signed by two men who had supported Dickson's candidacy, alleged that Spring Rice was only able to gain the support of the Congregated Trades by treating eighty of their officers to 'liquor, free of any expense to them' on the day of his arrival in the city.<sup>33</sup> Whatever the case, the coopers and the rest of the trades were steadfastly behind Spring Rice prior to the 1830 election – a relationship born of pragmatism with little emotional investment on their part.<sup>34</sup> The episode involving Dickson and the coopers was evidence that the trades had the resources to dupe a public man, availing of his standing and encouraging him to spread his wealth and influence liberally.

Whilst the politically naïve Dickson appears to have been used by the trades, they were not able to repeat this trick and their tendency to use their perceived guild legacy to secure the support of public men was, perhaps, taken a step too far in the case of Tom Steele when the Congregated Trades, in 1828, not only made him free of all the guilds, but also made him their

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<sup>30</sup> Spring Rice was never certain if he had the full support of the trades and Ridden commented that in 1828 he 'found it necessary to seek public reaffirmation that the Catholic tradesmen in Limerick still supported him.' Ridden, *Making good citizens*, p. 190.

<sup>31</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 22 December 1829, 5 Jan 1830.

<sup>32</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 22 December 1829.

<sup>33</sup> Ridden, *Making good citizens*, p. 190; *Journals of the House of Commons*, Volume 86, 22 Nov 1830, p. 125.

<sup>34</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 23, 27 July 1830.

Honorary President. Tom Steele filled the void created when Spring Rice refused to support the Repeal campaign at the request of the city artisans in the early 1830s. Ever the arch-dramatist, Steele frequently engaged in flamboyant public displays including confrontations with the local Brunswick Club in 1828 and the planting of a green flag on the Treaty Stone in 1843 at the head of a massive Repeal procession.<sup>35</sup> Steele encouraged the trades' political aspirations on an emotional level that Spring Rice could not (or would not) match no matter how strongly he promoted municipal reform and capital investment. Steele treated the role bestowed upon him by the trades extremely seriously and soon the addendum 'President of the Congregated Trades' began to accompany his signature on most of his correspondence concerning Limerick.<sup>36</sup> Steele used the title in a literal sense, dispensing with the 'Honorary' qualification and used the position – which was only one of many quasi-official positions that he filled – to establish himself as O'Connell's lieutenant in Limerick.<sup>37</sup> Steele was not reticent when it came to asserting himself as President and it was he who roused the trades in 1838 when, in response to the uninspiring Precursor Society, they appeared reluctant to welcome O'Connell with a traditional public parade.<sup>38</sup> His guiding hand was at all times felt whenever the trades were about to become involved in important political movements of the day, such as the Anti-Corn Law League in 1840 and the local Citizen's Club in 1841.<sup>39</sup> Parliamentary election nominations were also, at times, tightly controlled by Steele and he played a crucial

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<sup>35</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 7 Oct 1828; *Limerick Reporter*, 25 April 1843; Maura Cronin, "'Of One Mind?': O'Connellite Crowds in the 1830s and 1840s", in Peter Jupp and Eoin Magennis (eds), *Crowds in Ireland, c. 1720-1920* (London, 2000), p. 160.

<sup>36</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 24<sup>th</sup> July 1829.

<sup>37</sup> In addition to his role as the President of the Congregated Trades, Steele also acquired the title, 'Head Pacificator', which he treated with the same degree of intense reverence. Similarly, he was the President of the Limerick Branch of the Order of Liberators in the late 1820s. David Murphy, 'Steele, Thomas (Tom)', in James McGuire and James Quinn (ed), *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (Cambridge, 2009), <http://dib.cambridge.org> accessed 16 Jan 2013; *Limerick Evening Post*, 29 May 1829.

<sup>38</sup> The Precursor Society was founded by O'Connell in 1838 to win concessions for Ireland through parliamentary agitation. Repeal agitation was practically forgotten for this period before O'Connell took it up again in 1840. Patrick Geoghegan, *Liberator: the life and death of Daniel O'Connell, 1830-1847* (Dublin, 2010), p. 106. *Limerick Chronicle*, 14, 17 November 1838.

<sup>39</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 17, 20, 24 Nov 1840, 9 April 1841.

part in 1832 and 1841 in curbing the trades' natural proclivity to clash with the groups and individuals representing the local liberal political class – parochial clubs, parish priests, merchants and professionals.<sup>40</sup> It is uncertain how permanent the trades had intended Steele's honorary position to be when they appointed him in 1828 or whether they ever really regretted the appointment. Steele was not taken seriously by all his political contemporaries, but the trades seem to have respected him and appeared to be more tolerant (or even appreciative) of his emotionally volatile personality.<sup>41</sup> On the one hand, he did not merely dictate to the trades but also took on associated responsibilities and was extremely active in defending them against charges of conspiracy when a number of ships in the port were bored in 1844.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, towards the end of his tenure as President he clashed acrimoniously with several senior members of the trades and imposed his authority by informing them that he was the 'Permanent' President of the Congregated Trades.<sup>43</sup>

Steele's role in Limerick was, first and foremost to act as proxy for O'Connell. The trades were not the least bit critical of O'Connell and their relationship with him was one that was reverential, even obsequious; it was with O'Connellism as a political movement that they interacted rather than with the man himself. There were few cases of direct correspondence between members of the trades and O'Connell and in the instance of the crucial direct communication between the Congregated Trades Vice-President, James McGrath, and O'Connell prior to the 1841 election, the trades found little sympathy from the man as they desperately sought to nominate a Repealer instead of a Whig.<sup>44</sup> In contrast to the trades of Limerick, the Dublin trades developed a more personal relationship with O'Connell and they,

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<sup>40</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 30 Oct, 30 Nov, 4, 7 Dec 1832; *Freeman's Journal*, 16 Nov, 7 Dec 1832; *Limerick Reporter*, 9, 30 April 1841.

<sup>41</sup> David Murphy, 'Thomas Steele', <http://dib.cambridge.org/> accessed 28 May 2014.

<sup>42</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 4, 8, 11, 15, 18, 22 October 1844.

<sup>43</sup> Steele continued to use the title 'President of the Congregated Trades' after his clash with them in 1841. *Limerick Reporter*, 9, 13, 23, 30 April 1841, 27 Sept, 1 Dec 1843.

<sup>44</sup> *Limerick Standard*, 28 June 1841; *Limerick Reporter*, 2 July 1841.



along with the Cork trades, frequently and openly criticised him, particularly during the 1837-38 period whilst with the Limerick trades – for the same period – apathy seems apparent but opposition was not expressed.<sup>45</sup>

The Steele relationship proved an important template for the overall association between the trades and public men. The obedience the trades showed to Tom Steele – who was effectively avatar for the distant, godlike O’Connell – was not replicated again for the remainder of the century and they may have deliberately avoided a repetition. Charles Stuart Parnell, Isaac Butt, and the local public figures Peter Tait (the popular industrialist) and William Lane Joynt (Young Irelander and later Mayor of Limerick and Dublin in turn), amongst others, were all afforded the overwhelming support of the trades and were honoured with freedom of one or all the guilds but none of them were ever given a position of authority over the trades as Steele had been, and the honorary nature of the positions they held was more apparent.<sup>46</sup>

From the 1830s until the end of the century, the trades gradually subverted the hegemony of the political class as they sought to achieve political agency through assertive posturing. We must stress that this was a very gradual transition, at times dependent upon one or two politicised artisans who were bent on renegotiating the balance of power. By the 1890s the transition rapidly gained momentum and the trades were aided in their quest by public men

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<sup>45</sup> The main strife between the Dublin trades and O’Connell was in the 1837-38 period and in the case of Cork there was disagreement between local artisan bodies and the *Liberator* in 1833 in particular. D’Arcy, *Dublin artisan activity*, pp 34-52; Holohan, ‘Daniel O’Connell and the Dublin trades’, pp 1-17; Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, pp 182-83.

<sup>46</sup> There were some vague allegations that Peter Tait, the local industrialist, was once made President of the Congregated Trades but there seems to be little substance to this. William Lane Joynt was a local town councilor who was Mayor of Limerick in 1862 and later Lord Mayor of Dublin. He was, after Richard Baptist O’Brien, the most active supporter of the Trades Literary Society in the late 1840s and early 1850s. In 1854 he founded the Limerick Atheneum, a center for literary and scientific discourse. Fenton identified him as a ‘Young Irelander’ in 1848. Potter, *First citizen of the Treaty city*, pp 123-24; Laurence Fenton, *The Young Ireland Rebellion and Limerick* (Dublin, 2010), p. 181. *Freeman’s Journal*, 1 December 1862; *Munster News*, 3 Jan 1863, 9 Oct 1880; *Limerick Chronicle*, 16th April 1853; *Limerick Reporter*, 30 June 1871; Jim Kemmy Municipal Museum, ‘Illuminated address, copy of, presented to C.S. Parnell, by the Congregated Trades of Limerick, Oct. 28th 1880’, Identifier: 1989.0075.

of a more radical nature. William Field's (a Dublin Parnellite politician, self-described as a 'labour nationalist') 1894 address to them was a perfect example of this, as he warned a large assembly of Trades Council members (representing artisans and some other occupational groups such as the pork butchers) of the duplicitous nature of some politicians, cautioning them not to trust public men who appeared only at election time.<sup>47</sup> This was a recurring theme dominating the trades' relationship with public men throughout the period in question but this is not to say that the trades were not similarly duplicitous or equally as eager to coerce. Ultimately, they were seeking to assume the dominant position in the relationship with public men and there are a number of occasions where they appear to have achieved this.

The best examples of victories which the trades achieved over public men (specifically parliamentarians) was the manner in which they, along with local allies, succeeded in dissuading Thomas Spring Rice, William Roche and David Roche from contesting the 1832, 1841 and 1844 elections respectively.<sup>48</sup> The treatment of Spring Rice and the Roches was a consequence of the increased levels of scrutiny by the trades, and their allies, of public men's political beliefs. At times the trades were merciless and harsh in their attacks on these individuals, attacks which not always simply verbal in nature, and in 1831 one guild attempted to damage the monument recently constructed in honour of Spring Rice in Pery Square.<sup>49</sup> The removal of Spring Rice and the Roches, however, only represented empty victories, there is no evidence that the trades were actually better off without these men as parliamentary representatives and these episodes simply show that they were successful as dissenters; indeed

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<sup>47</sup> Field assured them that if they 'show that they were strong and the patrons would come in a hurry.' *Limerick Leader*, 7 Feb 1894; Patrick Maume, 'Field, William', James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009) <http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a3075> accessed 14 Mar 2016.

<sup>48</sup> William Roche was the recipient of a barrage of abuse towards the end of his parliamentary career from the Citizen's Club and the trades which formed part of the reason for his Decemberisation to not contest the 1841 election. Officially he cited health problems as his reason for not contesting. *Limerick Reporter*, 18 June 1841

<sup>49</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 26 Nov 1830.

the man who replaced William Roche, John O'Brien (a liberal Catholic unionist), was far more distasteful in their eyes than Roche himself.<sup>50</sup>

The written correspondence between some of the trades and Spring Rice prior to his departure from Limerick in 1832 – as well as published statements on the part of the former in the local press – illustrated perfectly what the trades now wanted from their political representatives and how this sentiment clashed with the traditionally detached attitude of the pre-1820 parliamentarians as described by Jupp (see above). The brogue makers were the clearest in expressing the standard they now desired from their MPs:

We are determined not to support any man who may offer himself at the ensuing election, as a candidate for the representation of our native City, unless he pledges himself to his constituents to advocate a repeal of the Act of Union and the Sub-letting Act.

The Guild of Cordwainers succeeded in prising a response from Spring Rice on the subject of Repeal but his answer was direct and unequivocal in its opposition to the cause:

It is with regret that I differ at any time from my constituents, or a portion of them. I value those constituents highly – and it is because I respect their independence, and their exercise of free judgement, that I claim an equal freedom for myself.<sup>51</sup>

As in the case of Tuthill, the notion of a 'pledge' was deemed distasteful by parliamentary candidates in 1817 and Spring Rice maintained this independent tradition. As with Cork – where 'most objected vehemently to the pledge as excessive electoral control' – there was a reluctance on the part of parliamentary candidates to bind themselves to the will of the

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<sup>50</sup> *Limerick Standard*, 28 June 1841; *Limerick Reporter*, 2 July 1841; *Limerick Chronicle*, 3 July 1841.

<sup>51</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 14 Jan 1831.

constituents and with William Roche (Limerick city MP 1832-1841), O’Connell publicly made a point of not asking him for a pledge.<sup>52</sup>

If the trades scored an occasional victory this was more than balanced out by the number of times that parliamentary candidates were forced upon them. In this sense, the trades experienced notable defeats prior to the 1841, 1852, 1854, 1868, 1879 and 1880 elections.<sup>53</sup> Although the trades appear to have meekly acceded to the wishes of their social superiors in 1852 and 1854, on other occasions they, or at least some from amongst their ranks, were prepared to act more assertively when presented with a wall of opposition from local political organisers. In 1841 the trades sent one of their officers, James McGrath, to traverse the country as an emissary and to sound out potential candidates – an undertaking which led him first to Dublin and then to Carlow where he intercepted O’Connell in a vain attempt to secure the nomination of a ‘true Repealer.’<sup>54</sup> In 1879 and 1880 Congregated Trades President John Godsell – a fiery-tempered man with a flair for the dramatic – insisted that a ‘true Home Rule’ candidate should be nominated but, after being isolated and frustrated by the local political organisers (middle-class merchants and professionals), opted (as will be discussed in Chapter Seven) to cut off his nose to spite his face and support James Spaight, the Conservative candidate.<sup>55</sup>

These two episodes demonstrated the limitations of the trades’ political influence. They were useful agitators but found it difficult to dictate policy and when it came to choosing

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<sup>52</sup> Maura Cronin, ‘Young Ireland in Cork, 1840-1849’, in Tom Dunne and Laurence M. Geary, *History and the Public Sphere: Essays in Honour of John A. Murphy* (Cork, 2005), p. 6; James Roche, *Critical and miscellaneous essays, by an octogenarian* (Cork, 1850), p. 120.

<sup>53</sup> *Limerick Standard*, 28 June 1841; *Limerick Reporter*, 2 July 1841, 12 December 1854, 17, 20, 24, 27 Nov; *Limerick Chronicle*, 3 July 1841, 7 April, 10, 14 July 1852, 13 December 1854, 10, 12, 14, 17 Nov 1868, 1, 6 April 1880; *Munster News*, 18, 21 Oct, 11 Nov, 13 December 1854, 14, 31 May 1879, 24, 27, 31 Mar, 3 April 1880; *The Nation*, 31 May 1879.

<sup>54</sup> *Limerick Standard*, 28 June 1841; *Limerick Reporter*, 2 July 1841; *Limerick Chronicle*, 3 July 1841.

<sup>55</sup> *Munster News*, 14 May 1879. *The Nation*, 31 May 1879, *Munster News*, 31 May 1879. The social composition of the 1879 election committee can generally be described as middle-class. One meeting which Godsell tried unsuccessfully to join in 1879 consisted of four solicitors, three priests, two owners of bootmaking establishments, two merchants, one land agent, one hotel owner and one pig buyer. See Appendix Three.

parliamentary candidates they lacked the necessary network of contacts and were either ignorant or dismissive of the essential machinations of the political process. Cork experienced a somewhat similar pattern of political evolution with the Colthurst-Hutchinson rivalry, where the Tory Protestant faction faced the pro-Catholic ‘Independent’ faction, of the 1800-1820 period – analogous to patterns seen in Limerick.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, as with Limerick, the landed pro-Catholic Cork family was usurped in the 1825-35 period by the ‘commercial interest’ faction.<sup>57</sup> In such a similar environment Cronin commented that artisans were often content at noble defeats as was the case with Baldwin’s defeat at the hands of the Cork Merchant’s Committee candidate, and Catholic clerical favourite, Daniel Callaghan.<sup>58</sup> By way of comparison, the Limerick trades were not willing to accept noble losses and a blissfully ignorant political class. There were undoubtedly occasions where they were shown respect by the 1840s Repeal hierarchy – respect that was not afforded to them prior to or after this period – and some months previous to the 1841 election the Limerick Citizen’s Club, of which the trades formed the bulk of the rank and file, managed to command the total attention of Thomas Reynolds, Repeal Warden for the Munster area, during a visit to the city.<sup>59</sup> Although individual artisans frequently used assertive language, this could be quickly followed by unquestioning obedience. During the Repeal party schism of 1847 – at which point the Young Irelanders within the trades had been alienated – the trades assumed a triumphant pose as they launched vitriolic attacks on the Irish Confederation and yet when called upon by John O’Connell to quash the political

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<sup>56</sup> Peter Jupp, ‘Cork Borough, 1790-1820’, *History of parliament online* <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/constituencies/cork> accessed 6 April 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Peter Jupp, ‘Cork Borough, 1820-1832’, *History of parliament online* <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/constituencies/cork> accessed 6 April 2016; Maura Murphy, ‘Cork commercial society 1850-1899: politics and problems’, Paul Butel and Louis Cullen (eds), *Cities and merchants* (Dublin, 1986), pp 233-44.

<sup>58</sup> Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, p. 172.

<sup>59</sup> *The Pilot*, 29 Mar 1841, *The Limerick Reporter*, 26 Mar 1841.

dispute they swallowed their pride and arrived meekly at Smith O'Brien's residence in George Street to try and effect a reconciliation.<sup>60</sup>

The manner in which the trades and the politicised middle class so often diverged when it came to election nominations can be explained by the fact that the trades, and the largely unfranchised working class in general, were not only unburdened by the costs associated with elections but were also generally not privy to the interpersonal dynamics associated with parliamentary campaigns. The compromises and diplomacy involved in choosing a parliamentary candidate were best exemplified by the choice of John O'Brien in 1841 to replace sitting MP William Roche, who unexpectedly chose not to contest the election that year. Written correspondence between David Roche (the presiding MP in the two-seat constituency) and O'Connell reveal that O'Brien was not held in high esteem by either man.<sup>61</sup> The Limerick Repeal party certainly appear to have been caught unawares by the 1841 election and, perhaps, by William Roche's decision to retire from politics as a result of the abusive treatment he received from the trades and their allies in the Citizen's Club.<sup>62</sup> Matters were compounded by the fact that David Roche's wife was terminally ill during the pre-election period and he was unable to spend time sounding out a new candidate.<sup>63</sup> The trades remained oblivious to these subtle but important details and were only concerned with O'Brien's relationship with the Repeal cause.<sup>64</sup> David Roche, judging by his correspondence with O'Connell, seems to have been hopeful of a friendly reception for O'Brien when they both

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<sup>60</sup> The residence on O'Connell Street was actually that of Smith O'Brien's father-in-law, Joseph Gabbett. Laurence Fenton, *The Young Ireland Rebellion in Limerick* (Dublin, 2010), p. 53. *Freeman's Journal*, 3, 10 Jan 1848; *The Limerick Reporter*, 7, 11 Jan 1848; *The Nation*, 8, 15 Jan 1848.

<sup>61</sup> O'Connell, *Correspondences Vol 7*, p. 97, letter 2895, 23 June 1841; pp 99 – 100, letter 2898, 1 July 1841. Biagini considered John O'Brien the perfect example of the Irish liberal MP, Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism 1876–1906*, p. 116.

<sup>62</sup> William Roche officially cited ill health as a reason for retiring. *Limerick Reporter*, 16 Oct, 20 Nov 1840, 12, 19 Feb, 9 April, 19 June 1841.

<sup>63</sup> O'Connell, *Correspondences Vol 7*, p. 40, letter 2836, 18 April 1841.

<sup>64</sup> They may have been aware of the illness of David Roche's wife and he did tell them publicly during the election campaign that he was 'labouring under a painful domestic affliction and was quite unprepared to canvass the club.' *Limerick Chronicle*, 26 June 1841.

canvassed the trades and the Citizens Club in a room ‘crowded to suffocation’ but O’Brien’s vague promise to demand ‘for Ireland equal rights and laws with England’ was cut short by the noisy crowd forcing him to leave the room ‘amidst hisses and shouts of “he’s no Repealer.”’<sup>65</sup> Despite being of the opinion that O’Brien was extremely vain, Roche seemed genuinely surprised that he was not more popular and expressed as much to O’Connell in a letter dated 1 July 1841, shortly after rancorous meeting with the trades and Citizen’s Club.<sup>66</sup>

Aside from illuminating the struggles for power between the trades and the local liberal political class these episodes also highlight the decentralised nature of the political predecessors of the Irish Parliamentary Party between the Repeal era of the 1840s and the emergence of the Home Rule League in the early 1870s. Appearances demanded that popular local Limerick candidates all appear to have the stamp of approval of the dominant leader of the day but frequently the electoral nominees were simply the least unsuitable candidates available. It is easy to sympathise with parliamentary election committees, even when they appeared to have run rough-shod over principled individuals’ attempts to exercise their democratic rights. Fr. John Kenyon was certainly such a principled individual in 1847 when he, as was his right, nominated an absent Richard O’Gorman in the Irish Confederation interest. O’Gorman’s campaign barely had a chance to succeed, and when Kenyon was asked to cover the expenses of the election he had forced, he was unable to meet the costs and a public collection was required.<sup>67</sup> In short, O’Gorman’s election nomination reflected the very worst possible scenario for the local political class.

Aside from the various periods immediately preceding elections, the trades were consistently more enthusiastically supportive of popular political causes than the social class

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<sup>65</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 26 June 1841.

<sup>66</sup> O’Connell, *Correspondences*, pp. 99 – 100, letter 2898, 1 July 1841.

<sup>67</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 6, 10, 17, 20 Aug 1847. Election expenses would have included the costs of hiring poll-booths and employing officials, see Whyte, *The Independent Irish Party, 1850-9*, pp 47-48.

from which the election committees were drawn – unsurprising given the aforementioned case regarding Kenyon’s nomination of Richard O’Gorman. In a sense, it is difficult to compare this inter-class dynamic with Britain where the artisans traditionally tended to flourish in political clubs intended solely to represent their class and/or radical views. As E. P. Thompson put it there were certain

features which help us, to define (in the context of 1790-1850) the nature of a ‘working-class organisation.’ There is the working man as Secretary. There is the low weekly subscription. There is the intermingling of economic and political themes- "the hardness of the times" and Parliamentary Reform.<sup>68</sup>

There was no such division between the liberally-minded, propertied class and the artisans in urban Ireland; both interest groups fought for possession of the same political entities and if Irish artisans occasionally gained dominance it is difficult to determine if this was exceptional relative to their British counterparts. The town councillors, politicised clergy, professionals and local businessmen were, somewhat understandably, more preoccupied with local matters and it was this local focus that occasionally allowed the local artisans – always more thoroughly captured by the larger issue of a national legislature – to assume control on a number of occasions in the 1840s (see Appendix Three). In particular, during the height of the Repeal campaign in 1843 the trades eclipsed their middle class co-Repealers in terms of their enthusiasm for the ‘cause’. There was some justification for Congregated Trades leader Richard Raleigh’s dismissal of the ‘respectable citizens’ of Limerick and the absence of many local notables from the campaign certainly backed up his contention that the Congregated Trades were the true carriers of the Repeal torch.<sup>69</sup> Raleigh, accompanied by a deputation from

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<sup>68</sup> Thompson, *The making of the English working-class*, p. 21.

<sup>69</sup> The preeminence of the trades in the local Repeal campaign is reflected by their attendance at many North Munster ‘Monster meetings’, by their level of input in local Repeal meetings and discussions (Raleigh featured particularly in this regard) and by the level of appreciation shown to them by O’Connell and T.M Ray. *Limerick Reporter*, 11 Nov, 13 Dec 1842, 7 Feb, 21 Mar, 21, 25 Apr, 2, 19, 26 May, 6, 16 Jun 1843; *Freeman’s Journal*, 24 Nov, 6 Dec 1842.



the trades, certainly attended more political meetings than his more affluent contemporaries in the local Repeal movement. One caveat is worth mentioning here: Raleigh at this point appears to have been a retailer rather than a wage-earning operative and was therefore better positioned to more actively participate in politics than the journeymen artisans who comprised the bulk of the trades.<sup>70</sup>

The trades' short period of dominance in the local political arena was not witnessed again and the 1850s saw a financially weakened artisan class at the mercy of the political class. Spirited efforts to maintain their independence were negated by the financial insecurity caused by the famine and the sterile political movements which failed to inspire as Repeal had. The trades liked a strong supra-local leader, or at least a strong island-wide political movement, whom they could respect and whose authority they could cite when reprimanding local public men. This may explain the relatively weak position of the trades in the 1850s when they were generally apathetic and rudderless in political terms and all attempts to assert themselves, particularly prior to the 1852 and 1854 general elections, ended ignominiously when the candidates they had decided upon failed to return their interest.<sup>71</sup> Another reason for the trades' political torpor was their financial insecurity. The trades continued to be involved in political discourse during the famine years of the later 1840s, giving the impression that their political influence was unaffected by the calamitous events befalling the country.<sup>72</sup> Despite their constant political activity, however, many of the trades were entirely bereft of funds at this point. The fundamental roles of the individual trade bodies – welfare provision, funeral support for deceased members and financial assistance for members seeking to emigrate – were now extremely difficult to fulfil and by 1847 many of the guilds had to appeal publicly for charitable

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<sup>70</sup> Slaters 1846 Trade Directory lists him as a Tobacconist in Broad Street.

<sup>71</sup> The trades looked for Stephen De Vere to contest the 1852 and 1854 elections but he never appeared in '52 and chose to represent the county in '54. *Limerick Reporter*, 26 Mar 1852, 12 December 1854; *Munster News*, 21 April 1852; *Limerick Chronicle*, 24 Mar 1852, 13 December 1854.

<sup>72</sup> *Nation*, 6 Sept, 8 Nov 1845.

donations to aid members wishing to emigrate.<sup>73</sup> D'Arcy also noted the calamitous effects of the famine on the artisan population in Dublin but, as artisans there had always occupied a politically subordinate position due to their proximity to centres of power, they had far less political capital to lose and it was solely their ability to negotiate with employers that was affected.<sup>74</sup> A number of the Limerick building trades suffered in this fashion, particularly the carpenters and masons who had experienced high levels of unemployment since 1842 when, at one point, there were reportedly only ten masons and twenty carpenters employed in the city, figures which represented only six per cent and five per cent of the 1841 census figures for these trades respectively.<sup>75</sup> The Guild of Coopers appears to have been the first during the famine period to publicly look for assisted emigration when it sent twenty members to America in June 1847. The masons were next to throw themselves at the mercy of the public in 1848 with the city corporation eventually donating thirty pounds towards their emigration expenses although the Guild later pleaded with the public at large for yet more funds.<sup>76</sup> A number of the manufacturing trades, notably the weavers and many of the textile trades, appear to have practically disappeared during the famine era and the last reference to the Guild of Weavers, a body which had nearly disappeared in 1830, was a plea for assistance from the Board of Guardians in 1848.<sup>77</sup> The monopoly which the carpenters and masons had always maintained over certain areas of work appears to have completely broken down during this period and unionised men were bypassed in favour of labourers for a number of projects and the consequent pay-scale depression saw wages for masons fall from four shillings and four pence per day, in 1847, to two shillings and six pence per day, in 1849 (by way of comparison masons'

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<sup>73</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 10 June 1847, 10 Oct 1848, 2 Jan, 23 Mar 1849.

<sup>74</sup> D'Arcy, *Dublin artisan activity*, pp 151-156.

<sup>75</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 11 April 1843. See Appendix for Census figures.

<sup>76</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 11 June 1847, 10 Oct 1848, 2 Jan, 23 Mar 1849.

<sup>77</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 7 May, 1, 4 June 1830; *Limerick Reporter*, 23 Feb 1849. The revolutionary, intensely industrialized new methods of the weaving in England rendered traditional forms of the trade redundant and in Britain the weekly wage for handloom weavers fell from 30s to 5s between 1800 and the 1830s; Mac Raild and Martin, *Labour in British society*, p. 7.

wages in Australia in 1848, according to local advertisements, were six to seven shillings a day).<sup>78</sup> Not all trade societies were bereft of funds; the ledgers for the housepainters, the only trade whose records survive from the 1840s, show regular contributions to the Mechanics' Institute (which served as the headquarters for city artisans) during the 1846-1860 period but it appears that not all trades bodies were able to contribute regularly and the institute began to flounder by the late 1840s.<sup>79</sup>

Lack of funds severely diminished the ability of organised labour to fulfil its customary roles – family burial support, strike relief, emigration support, unemployment support, sick relief ect – and consequently the trades had to rely heavily upon religious bodies and the City Corporation for financial aid. The power balance between the trades and the political class was now entirely lopsided and the trades had to suffer further ignominy as the city councillors sought to account for all the public money donated to the Mechanics' Institute (from 1845 the half-yearly rent of £12 10s was covered by the Corporation) and to trade societies in general.<sup>80</sup> Many councillors hinted at financial irregularities and in 1850 some within Limerick Corporation commented that the trades were unable to account for how they were spending the money (generally amounting to twenty-five pounds) that was being given to them annually by the Corporation.<sup>81</sup> During one heated meeting of the burgesses, John Hickey of the trades was informed by a town councillor that fears of the repetition of past financial indiscretions had forced the corporation to suspend financial support.<sup>82</sup> The Corporation continued to remunerate the Mechanics' Institute but by the 1860s this had evolved into ad-hoc payments, generally

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<sup>78</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 23 Feb 1847, 8 Sept, 22 December 1848, 6 Feb 1849. Labourers were used in late 1848 to erect a stone wall, a task which the Guild of Masons maintained could only be done by skilled masons.

<sup>79</sup> Mechanics' Institute, Ledger 117, Minute book of the Guild of Housepainters, 1845-48 Expenses. The Housepainters continued to pay a rent of ten shillings every three months (in addition to other miscellaneous payments) throughout the late 1845-48 period. There are no records of the Guild's expenses for the years 1849 and 1850.

<sup>80</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 19 December 1845.

<sup>81</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 24 Sept 1850.

<sup>82</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 24 Sept 1850.

from the mayor, but sometimes from other Corporation members on an individual basis. The remuneration was sometimes monetary but could equally be in the form of bags of coal during winter.<sup>83</sup> Outside such contributions to the Mechanics' Institute, the individual trade societies themselves were rarely given aid in this fashion. The trades-Mayor relationship generally saw the Mayor assume a paternal role, donating the coal and money from his own pocket as he offered moral guidance and instructed them in their role as citizens.<sup>84</sup> Patronage of the Mechanics' Institute allowed the Mayor to accentuate this paternal position given that the Institute was intended for the education and social betterment of the artisans of the city. Occasionally municipal patrons, eager to ensure that their charity have the desired effect, directed their funds towards the Mechanics' Institute library.<sup>85</sup> The concern about charitable donations being misused by the recipients was clearly an issue in these cases and it reflected concerns amongst middle class benefactors, throughout Britain and Ireland, that artisans were liable to drink any excess money they had and of the general link between workman and the public house.<sup>86</sup> The paternal role of the town councillors occasionally involved strong criticism of artisans as in the case of Ambrose Hall (Mayor in 1875) who expressed dismay at the Guild of Bakers' practice of advancing relatively large sums of money to members who were emigrating. The specific case he was referring to, in November 1882, involved a baker who had drunk the entire fifteen pounds forwarded to him by his guild, beaten his wife and ultimately did not emigrate at all.<sup>87</sup> What was perhaps most significant was the tolerance the

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<sup>83</sup> *Munster News*, 19 Mar 1864, 7 Dec 1878, 10 Dec 1881, 8 Nov, 13 Dec 1882; *Limerick Reporter*, 4 Jan 1870.

<sup>84</sup> The mayoral salary was increased in 1818 from £365 to £500. It was later fixed in the 1840s at £300 per annum and was £250 per annum by the 1890s see Lenihan, *Limerick: Its history and antiquities*, pp 447, 505; Potter, *First Citizen of the Treaty City*, p. 144.

<sup>85</sup> *Munster News*, July 13 1861.

<sup>86</sup> A number of Limerick employers interviewed in 1853 all agreed that 'the unions generally meet in public-houses, which is a cause of intemperance' T.E. Cliffe Leslie, 'Trades' unions and combinations in 1853', *Dublin: Dublin Statistical Society*, No. 74, 1853, pp 1-15. The Smiths admitted in 1842 that they generally held their meetings in public houses but stressed that they were seeking to change this, *Limerick Reporter*, 6 Dec 1842. In nineteenth century Britain middle-class benefactors sought to patronize workman clubs where a temperate culture predominated as oppose to drinking dens where radical doctrines circulated, see Prothero, *Radical artisans in England and France, 1830-1870*, pp 298-300.

<sup>87</sup> *Munster News*, 4 Nov 1882.

trades showed when the political class offered moral direction, indeed in Cork during the same period the approval of middle-class moralists was sought by the artisans seeking to establish a trades council.<sup>88</sup>

As Ridden and McNamara have shown, the urban middle-class in general felt duty bound to contribute publicly to charitable causes in Limerick city.<sup>89</sup> Potter's study of the mayors of Limerick illustrates numerous accounts of benevolent individuals and Garrard has commented that in the British context 'the distinction between philanthropic "duties" and the "duties and burdens of municipal life" was never very clear-cut.'<sup>90</sup> Patronage was not always direct nor as simple as a once-off donation of money: much of Thomas Spring Rice's popularity with the trades in the 1820s stemmed from the fact that he was responsible for, or was deemed to be responsible for, so many large building projects locally. Lenihan and Mulligan castigated the largesse associated with the costly bridge building projects of 1820s and 1830s and highlighted the neglect of the port during the same era.<sup>91</sup> Potter described the bridge projects in similar terms and described the 1823 Wellesley Bridge Act as a divisive development in the reform movement, turning the 'merchants and tradesmen' of the city against Spring Rice.<sup>92</sup> The bulk of the evidence uncovered by this study, however, suggests that the building of Wellesley Bridge was seen locally as a boon.<sup>93</sup> In fact, far from causing division in the reform movement, the building projects initiated during Spring Rice's tenure probably played a stronger role in maintaining his popularity than all the high-minded, liberal rhetoric he used. The majority of the men who received salaried positions as a Bridge Commissioners overseeing these projects

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<sup>88</sup> Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, p. 178.

<sup>89</sup> Ridden, *Making good citizens*, pp 9-10.

<sup>90</sup> Potter, *First Citizen of the Treaty City*, pp 107-153; Garrard, 'Urban Elites, 1850-1914: The Rule and Decline of a New Squirearchy?', p. 588.

<sup>91</sup> Mulligan, *The enemy within, the enemy without*, pp 46-54; Lenihan, *Limerick: Its history and antiquities*, pp 469-72.

<sup>92</sup> Potter, *The government and the people of Limerick*, pp 221-22, 275.

<sup>93</sup> A letter from Spring Rice to the president of the Limerick Chamber of Commerce pointed out plainly the benefits of the scheme to the local artisans and unemployed of the city. *Limerick News*, 9 May 1822; *Freeman's Journal*, 2 Feb 1824, *Limerick Evening Post*, 21 May, 8 June 1830.

were members of the local Independent movement and in this manner Spring Rice cemented alliances with the liberal political class of the city.<sup>94</sup> The projects were also intended to strengthen the relationship with the artisans of the city.<sup>95</sup> From the point of view of the trades, particularly the building trades, the projects were a huge benefit and during the 1832 election campaign this type of patronage was highlighted by many masons who appeared to be pining for Spring Rice and viewed Pierce Mahony – long-time friend of O’Connell who was estranged from the Liberator in the early part of the Repeal period and was castigated by O’Connell for running in the 1832 election – as the man most likely to carry on where Spring Rice left off in this regard. Mahony appeared most likely to attract the backing of the landed magnates who had supported Spring Rice and, along with that, the requisite local and parliamentary influence to secure the necessary funding for such building works.<sup>96</sup> The masons of the city were acutely aware of what each candidate brought to the table in the crucial 1832 election and, whilst they ultimately opted to back the O’Connellite candidates, they recognised the value of patronage, surmising that ‘if Mahony is not returned we will get no public works.’<sup>97</sup>

The two representatives who replaced Spring Rice (Limerick became a two-seat constituency in 1832) failed to bring a fraction of the government investment to Limerick that Spring Rice had attracted. The Congregated Trades were probably aware of this outcome when

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<sup>94</sup> Lenihan named all the initial Bridge Commissioners and Samuel Dickson detailed the relationship between Spring Rice and the commissioners prior to the 1830 parliamentary election; see Lenihan, *Limerick: Its history and antiquities*, pp 469-70; *Limerick Evening Post*, 10 Aug 1830. For details on role involved in being a commissioner and the associated salary see *Limerick Evening Post*, 4 Jan 1831.

<sup>95</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 21 May 1830.

<sup>96</sup> The principal patrons of Spring-Rice’s political career in Limerick were Edmund Pery, the Earl of Limerick, and Henry Petty Fitzmaurice, the Marquess of Lansdowne, both of whom possessed extensive land holdings in the Limerick constituency. Hoppen, *Governing Hibernia*, pp 63-65; Patrick M. Geoghegan, ‘Pery, Edmond Henry 1st earl of Limerick’, in James McGuire and James Quinn (ed), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009) (<http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a7292>) accessed 10 Dec 2016; National Library of Ireland, ‘The Limerick papers’, [http://www.nli.ie/pdfs/mss%20lists/121\\_Limerick.pdf](http://www.nli.ie/pdfs/mss%20lists/121_Limerick.pdf) accessed 10 Dec 2016; C. J. Wright, ‘Fitzmaurice, Henry Petty-, third marquess of Lansdowne (1780–1863)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2009) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22071>, accessed 28 April 2017; Landed Estate Database: Petty-Fitzmaurice (Marquess of Lansdowne) <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie/LandedEstates/jsp/estate-show.jsp?id=1872> accessed 28 June 2017.

<sup>97</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 4 December 1832.

they supported these MPs but were caught in a tide of O’Connellism with one mason decrying any potential supporters for non-O’Connellite candidates amongst his trade and swearing that ‘Our blood shall flow on the plains of our country, sooner than let O’Connell’s enemies into parliament.’<sup>98</sup> The episode does raise questions as to the foresight of the Congregated Trades with regard to the candidates they chose to support. There were many subsequent occasions when their opposition to candidates, particularly John O’Brien (1841), James O’Brien (1852) and Daniel Fitzgerald Gabbett (1879), was merited.<sup>99</sup> By the political standards set by the trades, both O’Brien brothers fell short of what was required: John’s political career was described as a failure by the trades when he retired from politics in 1852 and James’s decision to use his parliamentary role as a stepping stone to a salaried judicial position made him the epitome of the 1850s ‘place-hunter.’<sup>100</sup> However, when one examines some of the alternatives the trades suggested in place of these parliamentary candidates they were clearly not overly sagacious. Of the two main candidates they proposed in opposition to John O’Brien in 1841, namely John Waller and James Denis Lyons, Waller only appears to have been politically active during the Reform years of the mid 1830s and Lyons, for no apparent reason, refused to attend a Repeal meeting in Croom in the height of the Repeal Year of 1843, even after a deputation took the trouble to visit his nearby estate and invite his participation.<sup>101</sup> Undoubtedly the trades generally favoured the candidate who supported legislative independence over the

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Whyte, *The Independent Irish Party, 1850-9*, pp 167-69; *Limerick Chronicle*, 7 April 1852; *Limerick Reporter*, 13 April 1852; *Munster News*, 10, 17 April 1852.

<sup>100</sup> There were grave concerns about John O’Brien’s politics in the mid-1840s and the trades had concluded by 1851 that his political career was a failure. *Limerick Reporter*, 18 July 1843, 23 Feb 1844, 21, 28 Mar 1851, 27 Feb, 10, 17, 28 April 1852, 6 Feb 1855.

<sup>101</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 3 July 1841, 2 May 1843. Lyons was a landowner in the Croom area and owner of Croom House. He was Limerick County Sherriff in 1838, see Lenihan, *Limerick: Its history and antiquities*, p. 746. Waller was a lawyer, journalist and poet who was politically active in 1837. *Limerick Star*, 22 Aug, 3 Oct 1837; Bridget Hourican, 'Waller, John Francis', in James McGuire and James Quinn (ed), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009) (<http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a8863>) accessed 10 Dec 2016.

one who offered patronage but, when it came to choosing who would carry out their wishes, they were poor judges of character

Whilst the trades were undoubtedly appreciative of politicians who followed the party line, it is important to recognise the potential role for a local politician who could entice the support of local magnates and loosen government purse strings with a mind to promoting building projects and inward investment. Along with Mahony, a number of other potential parliamentary nominees from the same political tradition and social background as Spring Rice were rejected by the trades during the 1830s and 1840s. This coincided with the parting of ways between the popular political party in the city and the landed patrons of the Independent movement, principally Lord Limerick and the Marquis of Lansdowne. This bond between the popular politics and the landed patrons had been illustrated in 1812 when the trades greeted Lord Limerick during the election campaign at the city boundary with banners and regalia.<sup>102</sup> In 1832, however, the Earl's patronage was rejected by local Repealers and he instructed his tenants to vote for the Tory candidate, John Vereker – scion of the Vereker-Smyth family that Limerick reformers had opposed for so long.<sup>103</sup> It is worth examining the potential candidates that the trades, and the bulk of the liberal political class, chose to overlook in favour of O'Connellite candidates. The case was made to a local newspapers in 1847 by a correspondent, using the *nom de plume* 'Citizen', that Matthew Barrington was the only parliamentary candidate with the same social background, parliamentary capabilities and network of alliances as Spring Rice, who had been responsible for the restoration of the Court of D'Oyer Hundred, the disenfranchisement of the non-resident freemen, reform of the Corporation, the Wellesley Bridge project, the construction of the Lunatic Asylum, Athlunkard Bridge project, the erection of the Provincial Bank in George's Street, the re-building of Baal's Bridge, the removal of

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<sup>102</sup> *Limerick Gazette*, 13 Oct 1812.

<sup>103</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 11 December 1832.



unsightly houses in Quay Lane and the erection of The Savings Bank. Barrington, who had been the campaign manager of Spring Rice and whose family's patronage most notably included the construction of Barrington's Hospital in the 1820s, was heralded as the candidate who would bring a packet station to Limerick would ensure that 'we would have no poor artisans, no idle labourers.'<sup>104</sup> As in 1832 – when Barrington was a candidate early in the campaign – Barrington's nomination never transpired.

The extent to which the trades could be swayed or influenced by public men was subject to the popularity of the political movements of the day. During the 1832 election campaign Pierce Mahony and Samuel Dickson offered to donate large amounts of money to various popular causes, many of them worthy ones and many more that involved whiskey and public houses. Mahony offered £1,500 (a considerable sum for a solicitor such as Mahony, suggesting that he had wealthy backer) to be channelled through the priests of the city for charitable use, an offer which was refused, whereas Dickson found himself buying drink for half of the inhabitants of the rural parish of Ahane – and judging by accounts it was the vote-less half – with no net gain resulting.<sup>105</sup> Mahony targeted the masons of the city specifically and was able to use his influence amongst the Bridge Commissioners (yet more proof that he had inherited the mantle of Spring Rice since the Commissioners were largely Rice appointees) to gain audience with the masons working on a bridge project with a view to ascertaining their immediate needs and desires. Whilst many took offers of drink from him and a number accepted tickets to a play – with the specific instruction that they roar his support throughout the performance – there is no evidence that the Guild of Masons was converted, and the hierarchy and main body of the guild remained steadfastly O'Connellite, indicating that the Repeal movement in 1832 was sufficiently influential to entice the trades away from the

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<sup>104</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, July 20 1847.

<sup>105</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 4 December 1832.

patronage on offer. By way of contrast, during periods without such a strong, popular political movement the trades were far more susceptible to persuasion of various sorts. This can be shown in 1826 when a number of trade bodies appear to have been bought by Dickson and even more so in the three notorious election campaigns of 1858-1859, which culminated in a number of fatalities and an official inquiry.<sup>106</sup>

Whyte's study of the parliamentary campaigns of the 1850s showed that the pre-election speeches of parliamentary candidates focused far more on local interests in the 1857-59 period than in 1852, illustrating the general abandonment of political principle as an election tool.<sup>107</sup> Hoppen commented that the election campaigns of the late 1850s can be approached 'without constant reference to a handful of overriding "national" issues', and that the evidence presented here gives a fuller and clearer picture of the social dynamics of Irish society, and that it was the 'absence [of a strong political ideology] which allowed certain ever-present normalities to flourish with unfettered luxuriance.'<sup>108</sup> What can be said for certain is that in Limerick the trades and public men acted very differently during the elections of the late 1850s compared to any other period in the 1820-1900 period. The corruption that blighted these three elections (there were two by-elections in 1858 and a General Election in 1859) was low level, blatant and so widely distributed that it resembled eighteenth century patronage on some levels.<sup>109</sup> The bribery was mainly in the form of 'orders,' which translates best as 'expenses' in twenty-first century parlance, much of which was channelled through a number of city publicans – acting as vital social conduits in the ground war that accompanied these election

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<sup>106</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 21, 25 Feb 1826; *Munster News*, 12 May 1858, 22 Mar 1858, 10 Feb 1858; K. Theodore Hoppen, 'Tories, Catholics, and the General Election of 1859', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Mar., 1970), pp 59-62; *Limerick City Election Petition*, pp 9-60.

<sup>107</sup> Whyte, *The Independent Irish Party, 1850-9*, pp 180-181.

<sup>108</sup> Hoppen, *Ireland Since 1800*, p. 120; K. Theodore Hoppen, 'Landlords, society and electoral politics in mid-nineteenth-century Ireland', *Past & Present*, no. 75, May, 1977, pp. 62.

<sup>109</sup> T.C. Barnard, 'Considering the Inconsiderable: Electors, Patrons and Irish Elections, 1659-1761', D.W. Hayton (ed.), *The Irish Parliament in the Eighteenth Century: The Long Apprenticeship*, (Edinburgh, 2001); Patrick McNally, *Parties, patriots and undertakers: parliamentary politics in early Hanoverian Ireland* (Dublin, 1997), pp 89-93.

campaigns – who received cash from the campaign team and, in turn, offered free custom to potential electors who had announced their voting intentions, as well as to non-voters working as part of the campaign. The publicans were situated in working class areas of strategic importance where many of the local non-voters, male and female, were used as muscle – fuelled by drink – to win the street battles. Local tensions were exploited by campaign teams with rival localities pitted against each other and local ‘toughs’ were often hired directly by agents and given cash to spread amongst their mob as the election date drew closer.<sup>110</sup> Many individual artisans were caught up in these activities but there is also direct evidence that at least one trade body, the Guild of Bootmakers, was the recipient of ‘orders’ from George Gavin, parliamentary candidate, in return for support.<sup>111</sup> The testimony of another artisan, John Doherty, master stonecutter and publican, revealed minute details of the type of bribery that was prevalent. Doherty, who appeared to have voted against the candidate John Ball due to the fact that the latter’s brother had clashed with him during a work project on the Dunraven estate, exemplified perfectly the pattern of political alignment that was founded on personality clashes and other non-political factors. At the same time a group of blacksmiths admitted that they formed part of Ball’s mob in return for drink, while the Guild of Tin Plate Workers apparently let their society banners to John Ball in return for drink.<sup>112</sup> There is no evidence indicating that any of these trades suffered overly from depressed economic circumstances, beyond what was typical for the century. There were undoubtedly countless other instances analogous to that of the stonecutter Doherty but outside of the 1850s such instances do not appear as significant factors deciding whom artisans supported. These elections contrasted sharply with 1832: there was no resistance to patronage, and there was no call from the trades hierarchy to reject the benevolent,

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<sup>110</sup> *Limerick City Election Petition*, pp 9-60; *Munster News*, 19 May 1858.

<sup>111</sup> *Munster News*, 12, 22 May 1858.

<sup>112</sup> *Munster News*, 12 May 1858, 22 Mar 1858, 10 Feb 1858; Hoppen, ‘Tories, Catholics, and the General Election of 1859’, pp 59-62.

profligate interloper and support the candidate of the ‘national party’, mainly due to the fact that there was no strong distinct national party and no national cause worth mentioning.

Clerical authority and the benevolence of wealthy political candidates shaped the political direction of the trades between the Repeal years and the Home Rule era, which had an early dawn in Limerick in the shape of the pre-emptive 1868 election.<sup>113</sup> Francis Russell was one such wealthy candidate and his successful wooing of the Guild of Carpenters in 1852 marked a distinct break from the solidarity which characterised the Congregated Trades during the Repeal and Home Rule eras.<sup>114</sup> Along with the more vulgar type of direct bribery – patronage and clientelism also operated on a grander scale which helped transform Francis Russell from the object of public suspicion in 1852 to the poll topper in 1859.<sup>115</sup> He managed to maintain this popularity despite being Protestant at a time when the liberal political class was obsessed with the religious dimension of electoral politics.<sup>116</sup> His popularity was even more remarkable given that he gave little or no support to the cause of Independent Opposition and was a member of a family of large employers particularly opposed to organised labour.<sup>117</sup> The coopers were most conspicuous in this conversion to the Russell cause and offer clear evidence of acceptance of patronage from the trades at the expense of principle at the end of the 1850s, a phenomenon well covered by Whyte in the broader context.<sup>118</sup> Ultimately, artisans during these three elections were most concerned with what Russell, John Ball, James Spaight

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<sup>113</sup> The campaign of Peter Tait prior to the 1868 election drew on many of the themes that characterised the early Home Rule campaign and featured an alliance of disgruntled Conservatives, Nationalists and those opposed to the Liberal Party. *Limerick Chronicle*, 10, 12, 14, 17 Nov 1868.

<sup>114</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 July 1852. There was a lack of unity amongst the trades prior to the 1847 election, with the Young Ireland rump of the trades abstaining and leaving the Old Ireland body to control the election, however the actions of the Carpenters in 1852 involved a clear clash with the Congregated Trades and is something which was entirely absent during the 1840s and 1830s.

<sup>115</sup> *Select Committee on Parliamentary and Municipal Elections*, pp 292, 295; *Limerick City Election Petition*, p. 52, 118; *Limerick Chronicle*, 14, 17 July 1852.

<sup>116</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 16 July 1852.

<sup>117</sup> Whyte, *The Independent Irish Party*, pp 178-183. The bakers, in particular, cited a number of grievances (employment of non-society workmen) with the firm of Russell & Sons in 1842. *Limerick Reporter*, 22 April 1842.

<sup>118</sup> Whyte, *The Independent Irish party*, pp. 167-9.

and George Gavin could do to fill their pockets or wet their tongues.<sup>119</sup> Hoppen mentions Limerick more frequently than its relatively modest population warranted in an article focusing on the 1859 General Election in the United Kingdom, concluding that ‘the most vicious campaigns of the election were fought in the two Limerick constituencies.’<sup>120</sup> Elsewhere, Hoppen singled out the officers of the Congregated Trades who played the game of politics with patronage firmly in their minds and stated that, ‘the Congregated Trades of Limerick had turned themselves into electoral banditti prepared to manoeuvre deftly and rewardingly amidst the often corrupt world of local politics.’<sup>121</sup> There is little evidence to counter Hoppen’s contention that the artisans of Limerick were easily swayed by petty bribery at this time. While there was much to indicate that individual artisans and a few trade societies had their heads turned, there is little to implicate the Congregated Trades as a body directly, as it appeared less in the particularly volatile 1859 election than at any other pre-election campaign during the entire 1820-1885 period. During the first by-election in February 1858, trades president Michael O’Regan initially attempted to approach the election campaign as he had done in previous elections, with due attention to the political questions of the day. He argued that Gavin would be more reflective of the Independent Party, citing relatively obscure past parliamentary positions held by his rival, John Ball (who had previously sat as an MP for County Carlow).<sup>122</sup> Local loyalties were most important, however, and the most consistent reason that O’Regan gave for his support of Gavin was the fact that he was a local man whereas Ball was an outsider. O’Regan was supported by Congregated Trades Secretary, James Robinson, and was further backed by several unspecified trades who carried banners during a campaign meeting.<sup>123</sup> A sub-layer of political influence was apparent in certain cases here and it appeared that the

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<sup>119</sup> For details of the role that alcohol played in the 1859 election see *Limerick City Election Petition*, pp 32, 40, 45, 66, 74-75, 79-90; *Munster News*, 12, 22 May 1858.

<sup>120</sup> Hoppen, ‘Tories, Catholics, and the General Election of 1859’, pp.48-67.

<sup>121</sup> Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland*, p. 49.

<sup>122</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 19 Jan 1858. *Munster News*, 20 Jan 1858.

<sup>123</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 5, 19 Feb 1858.

shoemakers and tanners had sided with John Ball on account of the fact that two local political organisers – William Phayer, prominent coach builder, and Eugene O’Callaghan, leather merchant – had induced them to do so.<sup>124</sup> Loyalty to one’s employer was also a factor during this period and Congregated Trades Treasurer, Denis Grimes, maintained that that he had originally not intended on voting until he was sparked into action after his employer received a threatening letter purportedly from the Gavin camp. Significantly, at no point did Grimes mention anything regarding Ball’s political principles or parliamentary record.<sup>125</sup> O’Regan and Grimes continued their involvement in opposing political campaign teams in the second by-election where purely political arguments in favour of the respective candidates featured even less frequently than in the previous election, despite the fact that this election actually featured a Conservative, James Spaight, pitted against a Liberal, John Ball.<sup>126</sup> Both Congregated Trades Officers appeared to have been motivated by vengeance as Grimes’s house had been attacked in the first election by Gavin supporters whereas O’Regan had joined the rancorous mob intent on using Spaight as a stick to beat Ball without any concern as to his politics or potential as a parliamentary representative.<sup>127</sup> The local press often listed the number of guilds supporting a candidate or cause, but during the seventeen month period between the start of the first 1858 election campaign and the end of that of 1859, a muster of guilds was only mentioned once, when nine guilds were listed as supporting Gavin after he was unseated by petition.<sup>128</sup> The most infamous of this triad of elections was the 1859 general election, in which no attempt was made by any officer of the Congregated Trades to offer any informed commentary or assign any support on the part of the trades for any candidate. The only patterns that could be discerned

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<sup>124</sup> *Munster News*, 10 Feb 1858.

<sup>125</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 Feb 1858; *Limerick Reporter*, 9 12 Feb 1858.

<sup>126</sup> George Gavin won the first by-election but was unseated by petition after Ball argued that he illegally used bribery and intimidatory tactics to win. The second 1858 by-election was contested by John Ball and James Spaight. Ball was described as a ‘Liberal’ which was a common political description at this point although the Liberal Party was not officially founded until 1859.

<sup>127</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 Feb 1858; *Limerick Reporter*, 9 12 Feb 1858.

<sup>128</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 9 April 1858.

during these elections suggest that individual artisans had abandoned their notions of artisan class unity and were choosing to represent themselves according to their parish or locality whilst there was little or no mention of trade societies involving themselves alongside the politically dominant parochial clubs.<sup>129</sup>

Undoubtedly, the interplay between the trades and public men in the context of patronage and political identity illustrate well the world view and internal discourse of the city's artisan community. Examples of interactions between the trades and public men hailing from outside of the orthodox social, political and ethno-religious categories often best illustrate the dynamics of class in the context of political discourse. In these instances, subtle but important factors became obvious – popular rhetoric, class (specifically the language of class), and patronage (how it was dispensed and what provisos accompanied it). All these proved significant in the dynamic between the trades and two particular local personalities, Ambrose Hall, a Catholic land and house agent and mayor of Limerick city (1875), and Peter Tait, a boom-to-bust Protestant industrialist and mayor of Limerick city (1866-68), who played a vital role in the public lives of the trades from the 1860s till the 1890s.<sup>130</sup>

More than any of their contemporaries, Tait and Hall were multi-dimensional in terms of their political and social views. They were treated very differently by the trades, however, with Tait being generally idolised and Hall routinely castigated in a relationship that was volatile and tumultuous. Hall's distant relationship with the local liberal political class was a result of his forthright, idiosyncratic, controversial and confrontational personality: he was a

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<sup>129</sup> *Munster News*, 27 Jan, 12 May 1858.

<sup>130</sup> Tait was an industrialist factory owner whose business empire reached its zenith in the 1860s. He served as Mayor for three consecutive years, 1866-68. Hall dabbled in a number of business ventures in the 1850s, wholesale ironmonger and gun dealer, and by the 1880s had acquired a number of properties in the city at which point much of his income appears to have come from the rent from these properties. He also operated as a land and house agent. He served as a town councilor, 1861-76, 76-87, 92-98. See Potter, *First Citizen*, pp 125-128, 132-133; *Munster News*, 16 July 1862; John Cusack and Liam Hanley (compilers), David Lee and Debbie Jacobs (eds), *Limerick Municipal Elections, 1841-2009*, [www.limerickcity.ie/media/Elections%20final%20amend.pdf](http://www.limerickcity.ie/media/Elections%20final%20amend.pdf) accessed 1 June 2014, *Limerick Leader*, 18 Jan 1908.

Catholic Unionist who approached every social and political issue in an independent fashion, unconcerned with his position in the general political kaleidoscope.<sup>131</sup> Tait the industrialist was even more difficult to pigeon-hole given that he was a Shetland Islander of humble origins whose Limerick career began as a draper's assistant and a dockyard clothes vendor.<sup>132</sup> His religious background, he was a Congregationalist, was equally unconventional and could be used against him in both Ireland and his native Scotland.<sup>133</sup> What differentiated him most of all from his Limerick peers was 'rags to riches' life story and the consequential difficulty many had to assign him a class description, something which was quite unusual in nineteenth century Ireland.<sup>134</sup> The local liberal political class owed its origins largely to eighteenth century entrepreneurship and mercantile success. Sarah McNamara described the city as socially static by the 1830s stating, 'In the Limerick context class tended to reproduce itself from within its own ranks and social position was largely inherited.'<sup>135</sup> Tait's political career was not reliant on either the local liberal political class or the clergy and this was something which endeared him further to the trades who generally preferred local public men from the political periphery.

In the eyes of the trades the positive aspects of each man were substantial. Hall had family links with the Congregated trades, his father had been a member; he regularly

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<sup>131</sup> There are too many examples of Hall's colourful behavior, self-contradictions and eccentric personality to list here. He once claimed all the local press were bribed; he was a Unionist, but not in favour of sending an address to the Prince of Wales on behalf of the burgesses in 1872; he was opposed to the presence of Special magistrate Clifford Lloyd in 1882; he sought to prevent Charles Stuart Parnell receiving the freedom of the city in 1880 but simultaneously claimed he was a nationalist by his own definition; he labeled Fr. Edward O'Dwyer, popular priest and later Bishop of Limerick, the 'most unpopular priest in the city' in 1881; he was in favour of erecting a statue to Patrick Sarsfield (Nationalist icon) in 1889. *Munster News*, 16 Feb 1861, 23 June, 17 July 1880, 5, 12 Nov 1881, 21 June 1882; *Limerick Chronicle*, 1 Feb 1872.

<sup>132</sup> Peter Tait, Local studies Files, Limerick City Library <http://www.limerickcity.ie/Library/LocalStudies/LocalStudiesFiles/T/TaitPeter/> accessed 10 Dec 2016.

<sup>133</sup> Tait ran for parliamentary election in his native Shetland in 1872 and was vilified for his support of Disestablishment and the extremely vague political views expressed in his election manifesto: 'My political opinions are Liberal [his capitalisation]. I am for progress, and am an earnest worker to promote the material prosperity of our country.' John E. Waite, *Peter Tait: a remarkable story* (Stoke sub Hamdon, 2005), pp 196-97.

<sup>134</sup> The ascent from poor immigrant to prosperous public man was rare in nineteenth century Ireland. Charles Bianconi's life story is one of the few from nineteenth century Ireland that mirrored Tait's. Peter Butterfield and Martin McElroy, 'Bianconi, Charles', in James McGuire and James Quinn (ed), *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (Cambridge, 2009) <http://dib.cambridge.org/> accessed 30 May 2014.

<sup>135</sup> McNamara, 'Making the middle-class mind: middle-class culture in Limerick, 1830-40', p. 25.



contributed to the Mechanics' Institute, both as a lecturer and a philanthropist; and, most substantially of all, he played an important role alongside Congregated Trades President, John Godsell, in crafting a seminal 1875 labour settlement – agreed to by the employers and employees – which significantly improved the working conditions of the building trades and set out wage structures which were to stay in place for the rest of the century.<sup>136</sup> By comparison, Tait was an outsider, never a good thing according to the trades, but he was a noted philanthropist who spread his wealth liberally.<sup>137</sup> In addition, his business added an estimated £1,500 in wages to the city per week and there is some evidence that the trades viewed his contribution in a macroeconomic sense, praising him as the archetype entrepreneur whom the country as a whole needed to stem the morbid levels of emigration.<sup>138</sup>

The negative attributes of both men were also important. Hall was both a Catholic and a vocal and unapologetic Unionist, something that was deemed to be particularly distasteful by the trades, and wider public, in Limerick by the 1870s.<sup>139</sup> Tait's politics were indeterminable: he once dismissed Fenianism as a waste of labour and financial capital but generally was reluctant to offer any opinion on Irish politics and his closest allies included William Abraham (his brother-in-law), Larry Kelly, John Ellard and Richard Gamble who all could be broadly described as anti-clerical nationalists.<sup>140</sup> What was clear and obvious was Tait's adherence to labour rationalisation along with his intransigent opposition to some of the core tenets of the

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<sup>136</sup> The strike agreement granted the workers a three o'clock work stoppage on Saturdays and it ratified the 'closed shop', stipulating that employers could only get outside workers if all the city men were first employed. Many artisans later claimed that a wage rate of 32s an hour was established as a result of this labour agreement but this proviso was not printed at the time. *Munster News*, 18 Sept 1875.

<sup>137</sup> James McMahon & Seamus Flynn, *If walls could talk - The Limerick Athenaeum: The story of an Irish theatre since 1852* (Limerick, 1996), p. 52; Potter, *First citizen of the Treaty City*, pp 125-128. Tait's colleague, Larry Kelly, noted that in one month alone he witnessed Tait spend £1,000 in winter clothing for the poor and the following month he (Tait) gave Kelly another £100 to spend as he saw fit in aid of the poor, *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 Nov 1868.

<sup>138</sup> *Munster News*, 30 May 1863, 2 Nov 1872; *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 Nov 1868.

<sup>139</sup> When Fr. Edward O'Dwyer (later Bishop of Limerick) playfully discussed the subject of Catholic Unionists before a large pre-election crowd in 1880 there were constant shouts of 'Amby Hall' and 'Souper' from the crowd. *Munster News*, 3 April 1880.

<sup>140</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 10, 12, 14, 17 Nov 1868; *The Irish Law Times and Solicitors' Journal*, Volume 3, pp 103-4.

Congregated Trades which related to machinery, the employment of women in the workplace. Hall's approach to the strike of the building trades in 1875 contrasts with that of Tait who refused to assist the tailors, or even act as arbitrator, during an equally significant strike during his mayoralty in 1866.<sup>141</sup> The Guild of Tailors remained estranged from Tait from this period onwards.<sup>142</sup>

These bare details do not explain why Tait was the one so beloved by the Congregated Trades. No other public man had so many unfavourable traits overlooked by the Congregated Trades and it is significant that they were prepared to countenance alienating one of their constituent societies, the Guild of Tailors, in order to maintain a relationship with Tait. In contrast, Hall's mayoralty – noticeable for the seminal building trade wage settlement – was preceded by an extremely noisy election where the trades had loudly and boisterously supported his opponent John Francis Walker. Hall was thanked and honoured by the trades with an ornate illuminated address for the role he played as Mayor in crafting the strike settlement.<sup>143</sup> The expression of affection for the man, however, bore the mark of formality and was not enduring whilst the praise for Tait bordered on hagiography. By 1880 Congregated Trades President, John Godsell, was voicing his strong disapproval of Hall's political rhetoric and by 1884 the relationship deteriorated as the trades and Hall traded insults in the pages of the *Limerick Chronicle*.<sup>144</sup> The trades in this instance supported Hall's political opponent, Jerome Counihan, despite Hall's regular patronage of the Mechanics' Institute.

The answer to why Tait and Hall were assessed so differently by the trades appears to lie with the wide difference in the two men's personal character, mannerisms, language and

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<sup>141</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, May 4 1866

<sup>142</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, Jan 1 1867.

<sup>143</sup> *Munster news*, 26, 30 June, 7, 10 July, 4 Aug, 4 Sept, 6, 10, 17 Nov 1875. The massive building strike centred around the hours that workmen were required to work on a Saturday.

<sup>144</sup> *Munster News*, 17 July 1880; *Limerick Chronicle*, 27 Nov 1883. *Munster News*, 28 Nov 1883.

general approach to class interaction. This is, of course, something that should be appreciated when investigating the interaction between artisans and public men throughout Ireland, Britain and beyond. In Cork, a deputation of the Cork United trades in 1891 were particularly incensed when a local priest, who regularly employed workers from outside of Cork for church repairs or construction, facetiously told them that they were too well dressed to be in need of work.<sup>145</sup> Similarly, Dublin artisans in 1824 were particularly opposed to one master cabinet-maker who castigated their trade and class and condescendingly informed them ‘I will never rear a son of mine to the business [of cabinet-making].’<sup>146</sup> Local newspapers, our main sources for the trades-public men relationship, generally did not report verbatim what people said and, needless to say, personal attributes such as accent or tone are completely lost but some of these details occasionally shine through or are implied by newspaper coverage. Hall was best described having a fastidious, bothersome personality. He once employed a carpenter for some house repairs but then proceeded to stand over him and point out what he saw as imperfections in his work and during most of his confrontations with the trades he made use of statistics, often laughing and facetiously poking fun of those who chose to debate with him.<sup>147</sup> In short, he often behaved in a rude, condescending and patronising manner, as evidenced by the high handed manner in which he often reprimanded the trades.<sup>148</sup> By contrast, Tait appears to have acquired great wealth but no off-putting social graces: the basket he used to sell wares from on the docks as a poor teenager was kept and proudly displayed by him in his residence, Southill House. His ‘ordinary man’ persona was stressed by Congregated Trades Secretary, Charles Carrick, who stated that Tait was neither an ‘autocrat’ nor an ‘aristocrat’ before concluding, ‘I

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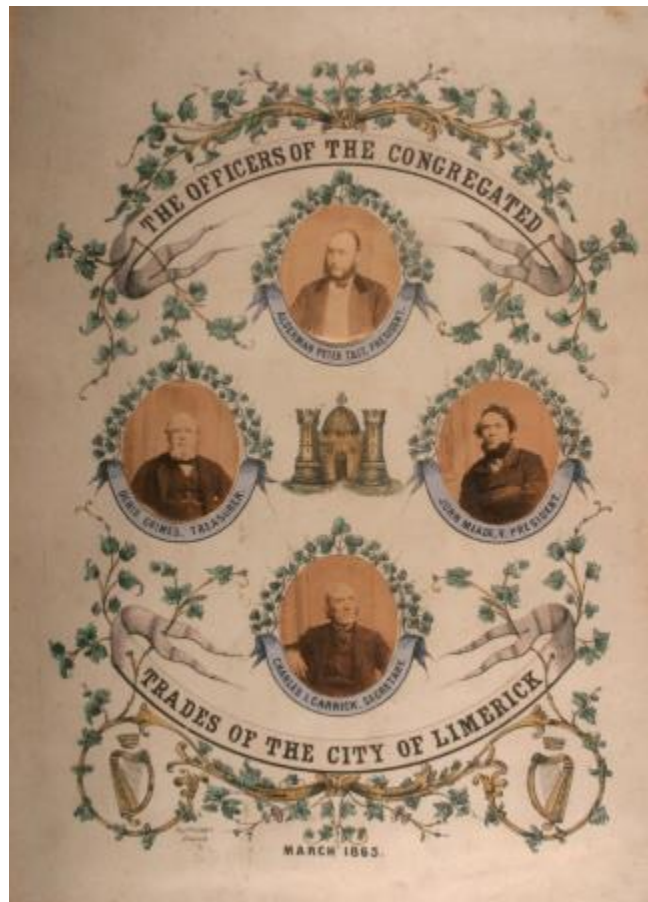
<sup>145</sup> Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, p. 181.

<sup>146</sup> *First report from Select Committee on Artizans and Machinery*, p. 471.

<sup>147</sup> *Munster News*, 17, 27, 31 Aug 1887.

<sup>148</sup> *Munster News*, 4 Nov 1882.

think I can fairly say he is no snob, but a real gentleman, and a working man, and tradesman too, without no pride [sic].'<sup>149</sup>



**Figure 8 Peter Tait and the Officers of the Congregated Trades of the City of Limerick (Charles Carrick, bottom, John Meade, right and Denis Grimes, left), March 1865. Jim Kemmy Municipal Museum, Identifier: 0000.1824**

### **The trades, local political clubs and artisans as public men**

For the local artisans, local political clubs and local branches of political parties generally acted as a catalyst of politicisation. On occasion, they offered an opportunity to politically active artisans to become important players in the local political scene. This latter phenomenon was the exception rather than the rule and artisans rarely had a part to play in establishing local

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<sup>149</sup> On another occasion, in 1863, Carrick stressed that Tait was ‘the unostentatious working employer who is not ashamed to stand behind the counter and do his own work.’ *Munster News*, 30 May 1863, Sept 30 1865.

clubs, political organisations or party branches and, although they often infiltrated these entities, it was never the design of the founders to have men of the artisan class setting the agenda or guiding the political discourse. In this regard the politically active Thomas Ahern – smith, Repeal Warden and Young Irelander – was the exception that proved the rule.<sup>150</sup> Although Ahern succeeded in 1844 in founding and directing his own political club, the Richmond-Place Ward Independent Repeal and Registry Club, which was extremely active during a period of turbulent political transition (see Chapter Four), Ahern and his colleague Charles O’Neill, smith, became peripheral figures the very moment the club was converted into the first branch of the Irish Confederation in the city in 1847.<sup>151</sup>

The general pattern of artisan involvement in local politics was set by the Limerick Political Club (local branch of the O’Connellite National Political Union) of the 1830s when Denis O’Keeffe, mason, speaking on behalf of his guild, was allowed to address the club from the ‘strangers room’ where a meeting was being held. As O’Keeffe promised to support O’Connell and to root out any recalcitrant members of this trade his coarse and colourful language evoked laughter from the club members who later made him an honorary member.<sup>152</sup> O’Keeffe remained a member of the Political Union, representing the Congregated Trades, and played a limited part in the 1837 election committee whilst a number of other members of the Congregated Trades played their part in pre-election street battles and public parades that year.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 6 Sept, 29 Nov 1844, 1 July 1845, 11, 15 June 1847; *The Nation*, 22 Feb, 25 July 1846, 8 Nov 1845; Fenton, *The Young Ireland Rebellion in Limerick*, pp 40-41, 75-76.

<sup>151</sup> The manifesto of the Richmond-Place Club, described by Fenton as a ‘tradesman’s club’, promised to return ‘true independent Repealers’ to local and parliamentary government. It was converted into the Sarsfield Branch of the Irish Confederation in September 1847. Fenton, *The Young Ireland Rebellion in Limerick*, pp 40-41; *Limerick Reporter*, 3 Sept 1844, 10, 14, 21 Sept, Oct 1, 22 1847.

<sup>152</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 4, 7 Dec 1832.

<sup>153</sup> *Limerick Star*, 21 July, 1, 4, 8 Aug 1837.

By and large, this role – token representation in the local political club coupled with a noisy and visible street presence – appears to have been the one that the local liberal political class intended for the trades. The trades were not content with this scenario and, often through the use of such political clubs, they tended to ally themselves with rogue local agitators and political zealots as a way of establishing their own political power structure. The Citizen’s Club of the early 1840s and the Irish Working Man’s Association of the early 1870s offered the trades the perfect opportunities in this regard, and the Irish National League of the 1880s perfectly illustrated the manner in which organised labour groups could infiltrate and temporarily commandeer local political entities. The Citizen’s Club, founded in 1840, was intended to re-launch the Repeal movement in the city after the disappearance of the Limerick Political Union during the Precursor period.<sup>154</sup> By early 1841, however, the liberal, middle-class leadership were ejected and in their stead senior artisans and a number of Repeal extremists, particularly the journalist and soda-water manufacturer Patrick Lynch, set about purging the local Repeal party of moderates.<sup>155</sup> This quickly put them at odds with the dominant local liberal/Repeal newspaper, the *Limerick Reporter*, whose owner and editorial team first sought to separate the trades from the Citizen’s Club and, this proving impossible, then began to attack the trades and Citizen’s Club alike, portraying the officers of the Congregated Trades as drunkards acting with ‘barefaced impudence’ and the aforementioned journalist Lynch as a semi-literate buffoon.<sup>156</sup> As the Citizen’s Club focused its attention upon the two sitting MPs, David and William Roche, on account of their political character and activity, they drew down

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<sup>154</sup> The Precursor Society was founded by O’Connell in 1838 to win concessions for Ireland through parliamentary agitation. Repeal agitation was practically forgotten for this period before O’Connell took it up again in 1840. Patrick Geoghegan, *Liberator: the life and death of Daniel O’Connell, 1830-1847* (Dublin, 2010), p. 106; *Limerick Reporter*, 10, 14 April 1840.

<sup>155</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 12, 19 Feb, 9 April 1841; *The Times*, 18 Feb 1841. Lynch worked for the *Limerick Reporter*, the *Limerick and Clare Examiner* and later the American newspaper, *Irish American*, which was described by Ernst as ‘without a doubt the most influential Irish newspaper in New York [in the 1850s].’ Ernst, *Immigrant Life in New York City*, p. 151; *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 June 1857.

<sup>156</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 5, 9, 12, 16 Mar 1841.

the wrath of Tom Steele (still Honorary President of the Congregated Trades at this point) and O'Connell, who had both been alerted of the danger by the local clergy and political class.<sup>157</sup> At this point moderate sections of the Congregated Trades, led by Benjamin Forrest, cooper, called for a truce with the city's liberals (see Chapter Four), particularly the 'liberal press', stating that they should not 'mix themselves with the political movements of any club.'<sup>158</sup> After this the Citizen's Club slowly faded into obscurity.

When William Roche MP, David Roche MP, and Robert Potter (solicitor and later MP for Limerick city) first founded the Citizen's Club it was apparently intended to fulfil a role similar to that of the Trades Political Union in 1830s Dublin or the Mechanics' Hall of 1870s Cork, which both tightly controlled the political activity of the local artisans under the guidance of middle-class groups.<sup>159</sup> The editor of the *Limerick Reporter* (whose owner was one of the ousted original members of the Citizen's club) did not try to hide the role that had been intended for the trades stating, 'the trades as had been originally admitted were but honorary members [of the Citizen's Club] and could neither vote nor speak.'<sup>160</sup> Instead, the editor alleged, the trades had 'trampled upon' and dictated to the local press in a bid to undermine the two politically moderate sitting MPs, eventually resorting to Dublin papers such as the *Pilot* as a canvass for their invective when the local press denied them.<sup>161</sup> Similar methods of attack – involving rogue members of the liberal political class – upon local election committees were repeated in 1852 and 1868. In the former case the trades arrived uninvited to the parliamentary election committee behind Fr. Bourke, Parish Priest of St. John's, who roared his approval as

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<sup>157</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 23 April 1841. Tom Steele remarked to O'Connell that the clergy felt left out of the Citizen's Club and were deemed somewhat uninvited, see Maurice R. O'Connell, *The Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell Vol 6*, p. 371-2, letter 2756, dated 16 Oct 1840. The *Limerick Reporter* also levelled this charge against the club, see *Limerick Reporter*, 12 Mar 1841.

<sup>158</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 16 Mar 1841.

<sup>159</sup> Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, pp 220-222; Keenan, *Ireland 1800-1850*, p. 248.

<sup>160</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 16 Mar 1841.

<sup>161</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 16 Mar, 9 April 1841; *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 April 1841.

he sought in vain to nominate P. N. Fitzgerald for parliament.<sup>162</sup> In 1868 the trades loosely aligned themselves with a core group of agitators consisting of middle-class anti-clerical nationalists and Fenians in a bid to return Peter Tait to parliament.<sup>163</sup> These alliances existed during occasions of high levels of popular voter unrest where there was no cohesive political cohort to coalesce around.

There were occasions when the trades, or at least individual artisans representing the trades, were prepared to confront the liberal election committees by themselves. Richard Raleigh, tobacconist, managed to first infiltrate and then, for a short while, dominate the local Repeal movement in the mid-1840s. When a by-election was called in 1844 he was the dominant Repeal Warden in the city and ensured that the parliamentary candidate, James Kelly, attended an election committee meeting which consisted solely of the Congregated Trades and a very small number of the regular clergy – generally seen as less politically intrusive than the parochial clergy.<sup>164</sup> This election committee, presided over by Raleigh, was the only one of significance on this occasion, and the unusually unprepared and disorganised liberal political class could only watch passively and approve as Raleigh nominated James Kelly whilst barely acknowledging their presence.<sup>165</sup> John Godsell, acting as President of the Congregated Trades, was similarly determined to set the agenda without the aid of any middle-class allies prior to the 1879 and 1880 elections. The social composition of the 1879 election committee – five solicitors, three priests, two merchants, two boot and shoemaker establishments, one hotel owner, one pig buyer – bore a striking similarity to previous committees as did the socioeconomic profile of parliamentary candidate Daniel Fitzgerald Gabbett (see

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<sup>162</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 7, 10 April 1852.

<sup>163</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 10, 12, 14, 17 Nov 1868; *Munster News*, 18 Nov 1868; *Limerick Reporter*, 17 Nov 1868.

<sup>164</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 7 Oct, 15 Nov 1842, 7 Feb, 6 Jun 1843. Political individuals in the 1860s and 70s who opposed the politicized clergy notably favoured divine service in the Franciscans' or Dominicans' churches, see *Munster News*, 9 Nov 1887; *Report from the Select Committee on Parliamentary and Municipal Elections; together with the proceedings of the committee, minutes of evidence, and appendix*, p. 232.

<sup>165</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 28 June 1844.



Introduction).<sup>166</sup> John Godsell, as President of the Congregated Trades, approached the committee uninvited, demanding to know why the Congregated Trades were not consulted about the choice of candidate, only to be told that while his participation would not be necessary, his support was very welcome.<sup>167</sup> Godsell – almost certainly a sworn Fenian at this point – was probably the most dogmatic artisan leader of nineteenth century Limerick and, unable to replicate the example set by Richard Raleigh in 1844, opted to take drastic measures and, still acting as President of the Congregated Trades, switched his support to Conservative candidate, James Spaight, providing his own house as a campaign headquarters. His actions should not be seen as ideologically significant, however, as they had little to do with the Home Rule movement and everything to do with the battle for political power that had been fought between the trades and the political class in the city since the 1830s.<sup>168</sup> It was not the first time that the trades had changed alliances to suit their own ends – they had previously urged Lord Gort (generally classed as a Tory opportunist) to contest the 1832 election in the hope that he was as opposed to the Union then as he had being in 1800 – nor were they the only group from below to act in this faction: an alliance between Conservatives and the lowest social strata was formed in Derry in 1852 where Conservatives noted that Tenant Right did nothing for the labourers and men of no property.<sup>169</sup> Essentially, Godsell was emphasising the importance of the trades and showing the parliamentary nominees that he was prepared to sink the ship if he were not allowed to steer.

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<sup>166</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 May 1879; *Munster News*, 17 May 1879.

<sup>167</sup> The committee, with the backing of the Bishop, agreed upon Gabbett's candidacy during their first meeting in 1879 which was not attended by Godsell as he had not been informed. The committee made no mention of Parnell – who disapproved of Gabbett – and barely any mention of Home Rule itself. William Abraham was the sole member of the committee to offer support to Godsell. *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 May 1879; *Munster News*, 17 May 1879; *The Nation*, 17 May 1879.

<sup>168</sup> Spaight's support during the election including Ambrose Hall T.C., Catholic Unionist, and Larry Kelly T.C., Fenian butcher, and formerly a member of the Limerick Working Man's Association, see *The Nation*, 31 May 1879, *Munster News*, 31 May 1879.

<sup>169</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 28 Jan 1831; K. Theodore Hoppen, 'Landlords, Society and Electoral Politics in Mid-Nineteenth Century Ireland,' Charles H. E. Philpin (ed.), *Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 286-87.

Considering their actions, both Godsell and Raleigh, despite their relatively humble origins, could both be classed as public men. Certainly, they were individuals who were politically assertive and wielded a degree of political influence which set them apart from their artisan peers in nineteenth century Limerick. Before presenting these men as public men *and* artisans, however, we need to investigate their relationship to contemporaneous trade societies. A number of public men throughout nineteenth century Ireland closely aligned themselves with, and spoke on behalf of, the artisan class, including Thomas Sheahan, active in Cork in the 1820s and 30s; Benjamin Pemberton in Dublin (1810s to 1840s); and George Kerr, in Belfast and Derry (1830s and 40s). Their actual relationship with the artisan class varied, however: Sheahan was from an artisan family but was himself a journalist; Pemberton was a member of the old Dublin guild master class (generally estranged from the working artisans of the city), which complicates his relationship with the operative societies of Dublin; whilst Kerr genuinely appears to have been a working operative cabinet maker.<sup>170</sup> In the Limerick context, Godsell seems to have been a wage-earning baker throughout his life, first coming to public prominence in the 1860s when he was charged with assaulting a ‘colt’ baker, implying that he was certainly of the operative class.<sup>171</sup> He appears to have been a publican as well as a baker for a period in the 1870s but continued to earn a wage as a baker into the 1890s.<sup>172</sup> Raleigh is likely to have been an employer as early as 1833 when he was listed as the Master of the Guild of Tobacconists.<sup>173</sup> The extent of his political activity in the 1840s – he attended a very large number of ‘monster’ repeal meetings including those held in Croom, Charleville, Nenagh, Murroe and Ennis – would have been difficult for a wage earning journeyman to negotiate.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Lane, *In search of Thomas Sheahan*, pp 4-12; Hogan, *From guild to union*, pp 24, 35-38, 41; Mel Doyle, ‘Belfast and Tolpuddle: Attempts at strengthening a Trade Union Presence, 1833/4’, *Saothar: Journal of the Irish Labour History Society*, vol. 2, 1976, pp 2-11; Berresford Ellis, *A History of the Irish Working Class*, p. 177.

<sup>171</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 17, 21 Sept 1869.

<sup>172</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 22 May 1895, 16 Dec 1896.

<sup>173</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 15 Oct 1833.

<sup>174</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 25 April, 2, 19, 26 May, 16 June 1843.

It is not clear how much Raleigh, the spokesman for the trades 1842-44, identified with the trades at this point and there is some evidence that his ascent of the social ladder may have signalled the end of his association with the mainly wage-earning class of men in the trade societies.<sup>175</sup> His self-description in 1847 indicated that he was not a ‘working man’ but ‘at least sprung from the working classes’, he described himself in 1869 as a ‘merchant and a tobacco manufacturer’ and that same year he was elected to the town council – for which one needed to possess property worth one thousand pounds over and above debts or to be in occupation of a house rated at twenty-five pounds or more per year. He died the following year with his eulogy emphasising the considerable fortune he had made in life.<sup>176</sup> By the 1850s his political allegiances corresponded more with those of the liberal political class of the city than with the trades. His strong support for John O’Connell MP and Henry Granville Fitzalan-Howard MP in 1851 contrasted with the indifference or mild opposition to the same two representatives on the part of the trades and Raleigh’s position on the 1852 parliamentary election committee, in support of James O’Brien and against the wishes of the trades, clearly indicates that he no longer shared the political ambitions of the ordinary workmen.<sup>177</sup> By 1854 his relationship with the trades was that of the conscientiously concerned patron and his letter to the President of the Congregated Trades in 1854, accompanied by a donation of ten shillings, contained advice as to the type of literature the young artisans should be reading in the Mechanics’ Institute.<sup>178</sup> He clashed with the trades in the late 1860s by opposing Peter Tait as mayor and parliamentary candidate and his description, before a parliamentary committee, of the Tait

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<sup>175</sup> The language used in a letter to the President of the Congregated Trades in 1854 suggested he was a supporter but not a colleague. *Limerick Reporter*, 31 Mar 1854.

<sup>176</sup> Raleigh moved his business and residence from Broad Street, in the old town, to Patrick Street, the city commercial centre, in the 1860s. Limerick trade directories, <http://www.limerickcity.ie/webapps/tradesreg/RegisterEntry.aspx?ID=27908> accessed 25 May 2014; *Limerick Reporter*, 3 Aug 1847, 7 Jan 1870; Cusack and Hanley *Limerick Municipal Elections, 1841-2009; Report from the Select Committee on Parliamentary and Municipal Elections*, p. 238.

<sup>177</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 14, 28 Jan 1851; *The Times*, 7 Jan 1851; *Freeman’s Journal*, 16 Jan 1851; *Limerick Chronicle*, 8 May 1852.

<sup>178</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 31 Mar 1854.

supporters as a hired mob illustrated how far he had travelled socially and politically.<sup>179</sup> The total absence of the trades from his funeral in 1870 certainly indicates that their relationship with him was cold at this stage but there is no evidence of any rancour; instead it seems that Raleigh simply drifted from the trades when his socio-economic status made him unlikely to share the same goals and concerns as the common artisans in the city.<sup>180</sup> His story, whilst it is only one example, perhaps gives some indication as to the extent which a man's notion of class, his craft or his socioeconomic circumstances all influenced his political outlook.

## Summary

The Congregated Trades entered the local political arena in the late 1820s and immediately sought to establish themselves as essential components of the local political process. Armed with faux-guild regalia and impressive public pageantry, they beguiled public men and convinced enough of them that they were an essential accompaniment for any parliamentary candidate courting popular support. In this respect, they were merely continuing a long tradition: assemblages of relatively disunited, voiceless artisans had accompanied political candidates for many years but with the formation of the Congregated Trades the artisan class became more clearly defined and its collective political mind more clearly expressed.

The political dimension to the phenomenon of interclass dynamics in Limerick was not one with obvious British analogies as both the artisans and their middle-class counterparts were nominally supporting the same cause and were seeking control of the same political clubs and election committees.<sup>181</sup> One theory, applied in the British context, which can be explored in the Limerick context is the notion of labour aristocracy, which implies that said labour

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<sup>179</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on Parliamentary and Municipal Elections*, p. 238.

<sup>180</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 7 Jan 1870.

<sup>181</sup> Thompson, *The making of the English working-class*, p. 21.

‘aristocrats’ were bought off with higher wages.<sup>182</sup> The theory, debunked in any case by a number of scholars, is difficult to apply in the Limerick case.<sup>183</sup> It is difficult to see how the likes of Raleigh and Godsell could have been bought off by the political class; undoubtedly these two individuals tended to be politically dominant but this can be explained by personality and personal circumstances – Raleigh could afford to attend Repeal rallies whereas regular artisans could not and Godsell, as a publican, was perfectly positioned as a political conduit. Rather than hint at any notion of a ‘labour aristocracy’ the Limerick evidence suggests that the dominant wage-earning portion of the trades only suffered working employers to a degree and the manner in which Raleigh and the trades were entirely estranged by the 1850s is significant.

Instead of looking for British analogies, we can instead focus on the rather unorthodox situation in Limerick, where the artisans and the middle-class fought for possession of the same political clubs and committees, and see what it can tell us about interclass dynamics. Undoubtedly, the Limerick artisans appear to have been unusually willing to ignore the limits defined by social status and there was a certain brazenness to how they spoke their minds. Certainly, they initially appeared willing to assume a subservient position in the O’Connellite political clubs of the 1830s but the manner in which they communicated directly with Spring Rice (a politically ascendant landed gentleman, joint Secretary to the Treasury, close confidant of the Marquess of Lansdowne and principal player in the Bowood set) in the early 1830s and frankly put the Repeal question to him was evidence of an artisan class that was bloody-minded enough to ignore social graces and speak boldly to men far removed from them in terms of class.<sup>184</sup> By the 1840s the trades had gained enough confidence to confront the Catholic/liberal

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<sup>182</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, ‘Lenin and the aristocracy of labour’, *Marxism Today* (July 1970), pp 207-210; H. F. Moorhouse, ‘The Marxist Theory of the Labour Aristocracy’, *Social History*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Jan., 1978), pp. 61-82.

<sup>183</sup> MacRaild and Martin, *Labour in British society*, pp 23-24.

<sup>184</sup> Hoppen, *Governing Hibernia*, pp 63-65; *Limerick Post*, 14 Jan 1831. The correspondence between the Limerick trades and Spring Rice was deemed by William Cobbett to be important enough to warrant inclusion in his *Weekly Register*, see *Cobbett’s Weekly Register*, 22 Jan 1831. It also elicited a long editorial response (spanning three columns on one page) from the *Freemen’s Journal* which was sharply critical of Spring-Rice,

political class of the city and the exertions of Richard Raleigh in 1844 represent a significant triumph for an artisan group. The actions of Godsell, who appeared apoplectic that the 1879 Limerick Parliamentary Election committee could even countenance choosing a candidate without consulting the trades, also appeared far removed from the inherently deferential English worker as characterised by Engels.<sup>185</sup>

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see *Freeman's Journal*, 25 Jan 1831. There was similar activity between the Cork Trades Association and their parliamentary representatives but Cronin (nee Murphy) identified this group as a being 'not as an artisan organization but as a movement dominated by small businessmen.' Maura Murphy, *The role of organized labour in the political and economic life of cork city 1820-1899*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 1979, p. 35

<sup>185</sup> MacRaild and Martin, *Labour in British society*, pp 22-24.

**Chapter Seven:**

**The trades of**

**Limerick and public**

**men in the 1880s and**

**1890s**

## 1880s franchise reform: new beginnings or repetition of old social dynamics?

The dynamics of local parliamentary nominations changed irrevocably in the 1880s as a result of, firstly, the centralisation of power by Parnell and the Irish Parliamentary Party and, secondly, the massive expansion of the parliamentary electoral franchise in 1884.<sup>1</sup> The Conservative party had continued to maintain an interest in parliamentary elections in Limerick city up to this point with perennial election candidate, James Spaight, contesting most elections from the 1850s until 1885.<sup>2</sup> As long as Spaight remained a threat – he was within 202 votes of Gabbett in the 1879 by-election – a strong alliance of liberal voters and supporters (led by local merchants, traders and professionals) was required in the city.<sup>3</sup> The 1883 by-election candidate saw Edward McMahon – nominated directly by Parnell and his Dublin associates rather than by the local political class – defeat Spaight more resoundingly, the latter receiving 449 less votes than McMahon.<sup>4</sup> The extent of Spaight's defeat at the 1885 general election (the constituency was reduced to one seat from this point onwards) shocked him – he polled 635 votes to Henry J. Gill's 3098 – and prompted him to retire from parliamentary politics.<sup>5</sup> The trades' loyalty to the local political class (now nominally nationalist where it had been liberal), which had never been strong, was now unnecessary and the power struggle between the trades and the political class proceeded with added vigour.

Godsell's dramatic opposition of the local political class in the 1879 election coincided with Parnell's vocal opposition to the candidacy of Gabbett. Indeed, Godsell probably regarded Parnell's condemnation of Gabbett as a call to arms although his actions were also inspired by

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<sup>1</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: War, Peace and Beyond* (Oxford, 2010), pp 122-123; Doherty, 'Limerick in the general election 1885', pp 19-23.

<sup>2</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1800-1922*, p. 293.

<sup>3</sup> In 1879 Spaight polled 658 votes to Gabbett's 860 and in 1880 620 votes to Gabbett's 989 and O'Shaughnessy's 1109. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1800-1922*, p. 293.

<sup>4</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1800-1922*, p. 293.

<sup>5</sup> Spaight was particularly dismayed at the manner in which democratisation had utterly changed the political landscape and stated 'Although few in numbers, if the Loyalist vote in Limerick could be weighed instead of counted, it would be found that it included the vast bulk of the property, and almost all the education and culture of the city.' *Limerick Chronicle*, 3 Dec 1885.



sheer frustration with the autocratic nature of the election committee.<sup>6</sup> The local liberal middle-class had respectfully but pointedly ignored Parnell in 1879 but his political ascendancy made him impossible to ignore the following year. He was acknowledged by the 1880 general election committee who, nevertheless, proceeded to back Richard O'Shaughnessy, who was somewhat reluctantly prepared to work with Parnell and Gabbett.<sup>7</sup> Gabbett quickly proved himself a poor choice, aligning himself with Parnell's party rival, William Shaw, and O'Shaughnessy, never entirely comfortable with Parnell, accepted a government position in 1883 – something that was never approved of by constituents.<sup>8</sup> In short, the 1879 and 1880 election committees appeared extremely foolish in light of their actions. Godsell and the trades, by way of contrast, appeared vindicated and they were especially visible in welcoming Parnell to the city in November 1880 as he accepted the freedom of the city and they added to this by bestowing the freedom of the guilds upon him as well.<sup>9</sup>

Clearly unimpressed with the ability of the Limerick political class to nominate the right candidate, Parnell and the leadership of the Irish Parliamentary Party decided to take appropriate action at the next election. The usual collection of town councillors, Catholic clergy and politicised business men assembled to nominate the candidate for the 1883 by-election and 1885 general election but they were carefully shepherded by Parnell who effectively forced them, on both occasions, to choose an outsider with the right political principles rather than a local with the right property credentials.<sup>10</sup> Parnell had watched the local election committee decide upon Gabbett in 1879, despite his strong disapproval of the man at the time, and appears

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<sup>6</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 May 1879; *Munster News*, 17 May 1879; *Munster News*, 3 April 1880.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland, 1858-82* (Dublin, 1978), pp 138-39.

<sup>8</sup> *Munster News*, 2, 5, 16 June 1880, 1, 26 Sept 1883. Thornley emphasises that O'Shaughnessy never enjoyed the support of 'the advanced party' in Limerick and was politically at odds with Parnell and the direction of the Home Rule movement after 1879, David Thornley, *Isaac Butt and Home Rule* (London, 1976), pp 188-9.

<sup>9</sup> *The Nation*, 6 Nov 1880; *Munster News*, 3, 6 Nov 1880.

<sup>10</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 20 Oct 1883; *Limerick Chronicle*, 26 Nov 1885; *Munster News*, 22, 26 Sept 1883, 21, 25, 28 Nov 1885; Tadhg Moloney, *Limerick Constitutional Nationalism, 1898-1918: Change and Continuity* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2010), p. 7; Cronin, 'Parnellism and workers', pp 145-47.

to have reacted in an overly autocratic way with the constituency although Lyons suggests that Parnell and an ‘inner caucus consisting of ten or a dozen MPs’ were effectively deciding candidates for *all* constituencies and local nomination processes.<sup>11</sup> Doherty’s study of the 1885 election and the Limerick constituencies comes to a similar conclusion, and details the considerable activity of the local committees but reduces their effective role to that of window dressing.<sup>12</sup>

The usurpation of the local liberal political class in Limerick in 1883 and 1885 was unprecedented. Undoubtedly, O’Connell and Steele had ignored local interests in nominating William and David Roche in 1832 – the two men formed part of the Repeal party that was dubbed ‘O’Connell’s tail’ – but, notwithstanding this, the two men were locals and O’Connell and Steele allowed the local political class to nominate whoever they saw fit in subsequent elections.<sup>13</sup> The trades were undoubtedly content to see their local middle-class political rivals rendered impotent by Parnell. This dramatic process of democratisation – the electorate rose from 1,934 in 1880 to 6,010 in 1885 – meant that the majority of the city’s artisans were now voters but there was no opportunity to further influence the political process due to the island-wide centralisation of political power. Frustratingly, their calls to have William Abraham, to

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<sup>11</sup> One can’t escape the fact that Gabbett was liked by many Irish MPs, remembered as a raconteur and a man of charisma and wit. His principles were vague and moderate, however, and Parnell described him in 1879 as a man who ‘never identified himself with the movement [Home Rule]’ and later summed him up by saying he was ‘a good dancer but politically an ass.’ *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 May 1879; *Munster News*, 17 May 1879; F. S. L. (Francis Stewart Leland) Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell* (London, 1977), pp 256-57; Robert Kee, *The laurel and the ivy* (London, 1993), p 184, 198; *The Independent* (New York) 1 Sep 1898.

<sup>12</sup> Doherty, ‘Limerick in the general election 1885’, pp 19-23.

<sup>13</sup> William Cooke Taylor, amongst others, saw the 1832 Repealers as been featureless nominees of O’Connell: ‘These received the name of “O’Connell’s Tail”, they were, for the most part, destitute of wealth, rank, or social position’, he also dismissed their personal qualities, ‘few had any talent, and some were objectionable on the score of character.’ William Cooke Taylor, *Reminiscences of Daniel O’Connell* (Dublin, 2005), p. 79. They were also described as O’Connell’s ‘fingers and toes’, see J. H. Whyte, ‘Daniel O’Connell and the Repeal Party’, *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 44 (Sep., 1959), p. 297. In other cases, British parliamentarians deemed the post-1829 Irish MPs as incompetent, coarse drunkards, see Hoppen, *Governing Hibernia*, pp 88-89.

whom they were particularly close, as the city representative were ignored by Parnell and the Irish Parliamentary Party.<sup>14</sup>

Whilst the trades were rendered even more politically impotent, the formation of the National League branches in the city did give them a platform for political expression, if nothing else. Their political ambitions, however, continued to be disrupted by the same class of men in the city (ie. Retailers, publicans, professionals and industrialists) who had quickly adapted to new politics in an effort to remain relevant. The land question and Home Rule were now the issues of the day though, as pointed out by Clark, land had little immediate relevance to the urban middle-class.<sup>15</sup> This ability to adjust one's politics accordingly was nothing new to the local political class: Thomas Kane, physician and Mayor of Limerick (1852 & 1857), was one of a small number of Limerick city residents who had signed an anti-Repeal declaration in 1830 and yet, as mayor and town councillor, he played a very active part in the 1850s in the campaign to erect a city centre monument to Daniel O'Connell rather than to the Crimean War hero, Viscount Fitzgibbon.<sup>16</sup> The urban middle-class of Limerick remained relevant largely because they still dominated the meeting rooms and public spaces of the city and it was in the cities and towns that men such as William Bolster, President of the Limerick and Clare Farmers Club, met for political purposes.<sup>17</sup>

In Cork it appears that the proliferation of political organisations in the 1880s and 90s enabled politicised artisans in that city to express themselves more on an individual basis and

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<sup>14</sup> Cronin, 'Parnellism and workers' p. 145. Abraham and the trades had been political allies since Peter Tait's political campaign in 1868. He had been a member of the 1879 parliamentary election committee but had left it when John Godsell was refused entry. *Munster News*, 17 April 1875, 14 May, 22 Oct 1879, 9 Oct 1880, 12 Mar, 20 Aug 1881, 4, 7, 11 and 25 Nov 1885.

<sup>15</sup> Clark, 'The Social Composition of the Land League', p 448.

<sup>16</sup> P. Beryl Phair, "'Declaration" against the Repeal of the Union, 1830', *Irish Ancestor*, vol. xiii, No. 1, 1981, p. 31. Tadhg Moloney has also uses the example of James Francis Barry, horse dealer and Town Councillor in the 1900s, to show the political flexibility of certain public men. Tadhg Moloney, *Limerick Constitutional Nationalism, 1898-1918: Change and Continuity* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2010), p. 191; Potter, *First Citizen of the Treaty City*, pp 113-115.

<sup>17</sup> Bolster was very focused on the land question and sought to have it settled first in preference to Home Rule. Paul Bew, *Enigma: A New life of Charles Stewart Parnell* (Dublin, 2011), p. 43.

less as members of a trade society.<sup>18</sup> In Limerick, the similar politicisation of the working classes occurred but the artisans, as opposed to the organised non-artisan workforce (eg. the Pork Butchers' Society and the Dock Labourers' Society), still preferred to infiltrate rather than be infiltrated and their artisan identity remained relatively undiluted.<sup>19</sup> Initially the local National League, founded by Mayor Jerome Counihan in November 1882, consisted of the same class of men who had dominated the 1879 electoral committee (primarily town councillors with the support of various retailers, publicans and professionals) and even a few of the same names appear.<sup>20</sup>

National League membership grew quickly, however, and by 1885 there were four branches in the city – the City Branch, Sarsfield, Garryowen and Treaty Stone Branches – and members of the organised labour societies of the city, which by now included strong non-artisan groups such as the Pork Butchers' Society and the Labourers Society (aka Dock Labourers' Society), soon made their home in the Sarsfield Branch of the National League.<sup>21</sup> Attempts were made to discuss issues such as trade unionism, urban housing, home manufacturing and urban rackrenting in all of the local National League branches but it was only in the Sarsfield Branch that such motions were ever heard and even here such issues were frequently objected to whenever non-trade unionists attended.<sup>22</sup> In contrast, the Garryowen, City and Smith O'Brien Branches of the National League were absolutely intolerant of any trade society members who sought to discuss trade matters, which they deemed 'outside the

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<sup>18</sup> Maura Murphy, 'Fenianism, Parnellism and the Cork trades, 1860-1900', *Saothar*, vol. 5, 1979, p. 27.

<sup>19</sup> The politicization of the local trade unionists reached its zenith in 1897 as the 1798 Centenary Commemoration Committees were forming but, if we take one prominent meeting in particular, it is significant that not a single prominent trade unionist is listed as being a member of anything other than a trade society apart from one or two members of the musical bands. *Limerick Leader*, 11 June 1897.

<sup>20</sup> In particular, John Dundon, solicitor, who had championed Gabbett's candidacy in 1879, was a member of the National League in 1882. *The Nation*, 25 Nov, 16 Dec 1882.

<sup>21</sup> *Munster News*, 21 Nov 1885.

<sup>22</sup> *Munster News*, 13, 17 Dec 1884, 9, 13 Jan, 10, 20, 23 Feb 1885, Sept 9, 25 1886.

province of the National League’ – despite the fact the League’s stated objectives included ‘the encouragement of labour and industrial interests of Ireland.’<sup>23</sup>

The Congregated Trades were more than capable of responding in kind and on one occasion they refused to allow the Manchester Martyrs Parade Committee, which consisted of a number of local National League members, hold a meeting in the Mechanics’ Institute as a member of the committee was a manager in a non-union bakery.<sup>24</sup> The Congregated Trades continued to keep their own counsel whilst the more aggressive artisans – Thomas Prendergast and John Godsell (bakers) and Patrick Ryan (smith) – infiltrated the Sarsfield Branch of the National League, waged war on the more middle-class branches, named and shamed objectionable local ‘house lords’ and listed all local nationalists who were hiring non-locals or importing ‘foreign’ items.<sup>25</sup> In this, they were able to avail of Fenian networks to secure the help of trade unionists outside the ranks of the Congregated Trades, especially Tom Gough, Secretary of the Pork Butchers Society, and William Whelan, engine fitter.<sup>26</sup>

We can cautiously state that a particular form of class identity was at play during this period, one that was shared by the Congregated Trades and the agitators of the Sarsfield National League was defined by organised labour: workers in trade or labour societies, artisan or non-artisan, belonged to this class but, as events in 1898-99 were to show, the sections of the working class that were unaffiliated with organised labour bodies were entirely

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<sup>23</sup> Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism 1876–1906*, p. 190; Berresford Ellis, *A History of the Irish Working Class*, p. 165; *Munster News*, 4, 11, 18 Sept 1886.

<sup>24</sup> *Munster News*, 16 Jan 1886.

<sup>25</sup> *Munster News*, 17 Dec 1884, 25 Sept 1886, 25 Feb, 18 July 1888, 5 Feb 1890.

<sup>26</sup> Gough, Godsell, Whelan and Prendergast were all described as ‘IRB’ by the detectives of the Crime Branch Special in 1898 as was Michael Murphy, tailor and President of the Congregated Trades in the mid-1880s, who often attended Sarsfield Branch meetings as a representative of the trades. There are some doubts about whether Gough actually was a pork butcher and he appears in the 1901 census as a ‘book-keeper’, but there is no doubt that he was affiliated with the Pork Butchers Society and served as their secretary. He later became the secretary of the Carmen’s Society. McKay, ‘Limerick Municipal Elections, January 1899’, pp 7-8. Members of the Labourers Society (Dock Labourers), also aided the artisans in this regard, *Munster News*, 17 Dec 1884; *Irish Independent*, 1 Jan 1907; Arthur Ivor Marsh and Victoria Ryan, *Historical Directory of Trade Unions, Volume 5* (Aldershot, 2006), p. 205.

unrepresented in the political sphere during this period.<sup>27</sup> Nationalist politics did not hamper this class formation; in fact, in the Limerick context at least, it was used to buttress class identity. Members of this organised labour class viewed themselves as genuine Irish Nationalists and those above this class were generally deemed to be politically suspect. This identity, peculiarly strong in Limerick, was formed in the noisy National League meetings of the 1880s and perfected by the released felon and reputed dynamiter, John Daly, in the late 1890s when he mixed together hard-line Fenian rhetoric, antipathy to the land question and the language of class in its bluntest form.<sup>28</sup> Daly, who was ever grateful for the strong role the trades had played in seeking his release from Portland prison, persistently linked middle-class respectability with fair-weather nationalism.<sup>29</sup> His attack on ‘JPships’ (by which he meant those who sought a position of Justice of the Peace) in 1897 and regular use of the word ‘Shoneen’, which he used in a number of different contexts to describe the pre-1899 town councillors, was all part of an approach that was largely a more confident application of the class-politics articulated by the trades in the 1880s.<sup>30</sup>

Constant arguments and confrontations bedevilled the local National League branches in the 1883-1895 period. The senior members of the League always blamed such disagreements on members who deviated from the League’s official political programme but one cannot escape the manner in which class and trade union values played a part in all such disputes. As Murphy commented in relation to Cork:

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<sup>27</sup> McGrath, *Sociability and socioeconomic conditions in St. Mary’s parish, Limerick*, pp 193-198; McGrath, ‘Riots in Limerick, 1820-1900’, pp 153-170; McGrath, ‘An Urban Community: St Mary’s Parish, Limerick and the Social Role of Sporting and Musical Clubs’, pp 127-140.

<sup>28</sup> John Daly was a veteran of the 1867 Fenian rising in Kilmallock. He was jailed in 1881 after he was implicated as being part of a Fenian dynamite plot. He was confined to Portland prison and released in 1895. Recent historical research of this incident has strongly suggested that Daly was innocent and that planted evidence and an *agent provocateur* were used to incriminate Daly, see Joseph McKenna, *The Irish-American dynamite campaign: a history, 1881-1896* (Jefferson, North Carolina, 2012), pp 148-156; Collins, *Labour Church and nationalism in Limerick*, pp 160, 169-178.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*; *Limerick Leader*; 30 July 1897; McKay, ‘Limerick Municipal Elections, January 1899’, pp. 7-8.

<sup>30</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 30 July 1897.

There was a certain class element in the trades' hostility towards the Land League. When the trades denounced the local Land League branch they generally had in mind the branch's leaders.....merchants, manufacturers, master tradesmen, shopkeepers and vintners.<sup>31</sup>

Few, if any, trade unionists supported the land agitation whereas meetings consisting of traders, grocers and professionals, when not discussing national politics, gave their full attention to evictions, boycotts and land disputes in the rural hinterland.<sup>32</sup> Rather than obey the political directives of the League, trade unionists adapted these directives to suit their own interests and so they concentrated on urban evictees, "houselords" and urban rackrenting.<sup>33</sup> As O'Day points out, there were problems with applying the land question to the urban setting, 'because urban housing was controlled by middle-class landlords who were often members of the National League' or as one local House League member simply put it 'it was all the more regrettable that these places [urban slums] were owned by some of their legislators – some of those who made their municipal laws.'<sup>34</sup> Ambrose Hall appeared to have been perceived as the worst 'houselord' in the city, or certainly one of the worst of the town councillors, and he was particularly targeted by members of the Sarsfield League but was more than capable of launching a vicious counterattack and he brought his case to the City Branch of the National League, which was generally composed of merchants and his fellow town councillors, where his grievances were heard.<sup>35</sup> Tom Gough, who led the attack on Hall, was a competent debater who served as Secretary of the Pork Butchers' Society, but his efforts to confront Hall at a meeting of the City Branch were futile as Hall met him with a barrage of housing statistics and condescending dismissals and was given tacit support by the City Branch members. Gough

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<sup>31</sup> Murphy, 'Fenianism, Parnellism and the Cork trades, 1860-1900', p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> *Munster News*, 24 June 1885, 16 April 1890; *Limerick Leader*, 21 July 1893.

<sup>33</sup> *Munster News*, 21 April 1886.

<sup>34</sup> Alan O'Day, *Irish Home Rule, 1867-1921* (Manchester, 1988), p. 104; *Munster News*, 23 June 1886.

<sup>35</sup> *Munster News*, 9, 13 Jan 1886.

retreated to the Sarsfield Branch informing his colleagues there that the City Branch was controlled by a ‘nest of local landlords’ and questioned the nationalism of the members by highlighting the fact that Hall, a Catholic Unionist, was receiving such favourable treatment there.<sup>36</sup> Despite the general agreement reached in the Sarsfield Branch meeting that ‘Ambrose Hall was a city despot of the rack renting kind’ there was little the agitators there were able to do. Hall, by contrast, used his position as a Town Councillor and Poor Law Guardian to launch a series of stinging attacks upon the ‘lazy’ workmen of Limerick. Mixing statistics, anecdotes and facetious humour Hall informed a meeting of the Poor Law Guardians that the laziness of the building trades was the primary cause of the depressed housing market and poked fun at the ‘unpurchasable trades of Limerick’ (as O’Connell had dubbed them during the Repeal era) who had ‘so often been bought and sold.’<sup>37</sup> Despite being cautioned by fellow guardians Hall continued, adding that the local artisans made constant use of charity, frequently sending their wives out to beg, even when they were in full employment and that the building trades went to great lengths to ensure that their members worked as slowly as possible on every project.<sup>38</sup> Whilst the Congregated Trades considered a libel action, Hall – the man responsible for the seminal 1875 building trades agreement – merely laughed and stated he had proof to back his argument.<sup>39</sup>

Many of the disputes within local nationalist bodies appeared to have been clashes of personality, with Moloney best describing the trend:

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> *Munster News*, 31 Aug 1887.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Hall had made similar insinuations when confronted about house building and his role as a ‘houselord’ in 1886. *Munster News*, 13 Jan, 1886, 17, 27, 31 Aug, 10, 14 Sept 1887.



In a small place - Limerick was a city of less than forty thousand people - politics were often based on personal likes and dislikes rather than any fundamental ideological issues.<sup>40</sup>

These personality clashes, however, were overlaid with class animosities since they were almost always between a wage earner and a business owner or professional. The first meeting of the short-lived Limerick House League in 1886 was beset by constant bickering between a grocer/publican and a mason regarding what should be on the agenda and there were constant arguments in the local National League branches between trade unionists and the local political class which appear at first to be agenda-related but on closer inspection appear to have more to do with class.<sup>41</sup> The one clear trend one can glean from these incidents indicates that the middle class patrons of the National League were not prepared to allow the nationalist body to be hijacked by class politics and even middle-class individuals with little sympathy for nationalism, such as Ambrose Hall, were favoured over working class interests.

### **1890s: Daly, the Labour Party and new interclass dynamics**

The confrontations in Limerick between trade unionists and public men during the years 1880-99 certainly illustrate the changing dynamics of social deference and inter-class relations. MacRaild and Martin examined a similar trend in the British context, referring to Engels 1889 observation that the social deference was 'bred into the bones of the workers.'<sup>42</sup> Few trade unionists were confident speaking to an assembly of middle-class public men unless accompanied by their peers, and Godsell appears to be the only one to consistently demonstrate that he could walk into a room of town councillors or middle class public men and speak his mind assertively. In contrast, whilst in 1887 Tom Gough was vitriolic in his condemnation of

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<sup>40</sup> Moloney, *Limerick Constitutional Nationalism, 1898-1918*, p. 191

<sup>41</sup> *Munster News*, 9 June 1886.

<sup>42</sup> MacRaild and Martin, *Labour in British society*, pp 22-24.

Ambrose Hall in the company of his peers in the Sarsfield Branch, he was quiet and unable to get his point across when he, Secretary of the Pork Butchers' Society, was confronted by Hall in the City Branch under the gaze of the presiding Stephen O'Mara – mayor, bacon merchant and employer of a large number of pork butchers – and a number of other middle-class individuals.<sup>43</sup>

Trade unionists were, however, undoubtedly becoming less deferential in the latter part of the century and their relationship with their social betters certainly contrasted with what was evident in 1832 when (as outlined in Chapter Six) Denis O'Keeffe, mason, addressed the Limerick Political Union from the 'strangers room' promising full support from his guild and showing gratitude that he was allowed to speak at all.<sup>44</sup> There certainly seems to be a case for suggesting that the most confident of the trade unionists were Fenians and there is a possibility that Fenianism acted as an agent for social levelling and Jackson's reference to a 'Fenian type' evidenced by a 'confident demeanour and gait, and a quiet defiance of everyday authority figures such as the priest or constable' was certainly borne out in Limerick.<sup>45</sup> Certainly, in the case of post-famine agricultural labourers, Lane implied that Ribbonism and Fenianism acted as a catalyst for social confidence and mobility.<sup>46</sup> In Limerick city, we can rule out any idea that Fenianism created fraternal links that *entirely* broke down social barriers: Stephen O'Mara, bacon merchant, had been a Fenian since 1862 but this did not make him any more accommodating to Fenian trade unionists.<sup>47</sup> The meritocratic nature of organised sport also played a part in changing attitudes, providing working men with a level playing field in relation to the middle class. This is not to say that class created no divisions in sport in Limerick, but

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<sup>43</sup> *Munster News*, 9 Jan 1886.

<sup>44</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 4, 7 Dec 1832.

<sup>45</sup> Patrick Steward, Bryan P. McGovern, *The Fenians: Irish Rebellion in the North Atlantic World, 1858–1876* (Knoxville, 2013), xiii; Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998*, p. 94.

<sup>46</sup> Fintan Lane, 'Rural labourers, social change and politics in late nineteenth century Ireland', Fintan Lane and Donal Ó Drisceoil (eds), *Politics and the Irish working class* (London, 2005), pp 115.

<sup>47</sup> O'Mara was sworn in at the age of 16 by David Murphy, the Head Centre for Limerick. Lavelle, *James O'Mara: A staunch Sinn Feiner*, p. 12; Moloney, *Limerick Constitutional Nationalism*, pp 49-50.

the fact that a man such as Tom Prendergast – baker, Fenian, Gaelic footballer and rugby player – was given the opportunity to batter men of every class with his robust frame (see Fig. 9 middle row, third from right) certainly explains, in part, why he was also extremely confident in addressing town councillors on issues relating to housing and trade.<sup>48</sup> The exploits of Patrick ‘Twenty’ O’Brien, pork butcher and Fenian, who, in the late 1880s, brazenly wrested control of the local GAA from the clergy and their middle class allies, including Stephen O’Mara, also certainly served as an example to his working class peers.<sup>49</sup> It is clear, though, that the erosion of social deference was slow and when the Congregated Trades met in 1890 to discuss Bishop O’Dwyer’s condemnation of the Plan of Campaign, many were aghast at suggestions that they, as artisans, should officially censure a bishop.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Prendergast was an extremely physical player in both Gaelic and rugby (he played both in spite of ‘the Ban’). He was a physically imposing man as we can see from Fig. 9 where he is sitting to Mayor John Daly’s left. For details of his exploits on the field see *Munster News*, 1 Dec 1886, 20, 27 July 1887.

<sup>49</sup> *Munster News*, 19 Nov 1887.

<sup>50</sup> *Munster News*, 9 Aug 1890.



discussed and on other occasions they attended in an individual capacity and joined the general discussion. This distinction was important and allowed the city artisans to influence, or at least attempt to influence, local politics without immersing the whole body therein. Trade ledgers of individual societies during this period also show the desire to have a presence at large political meetings but no trade body became engrossed in local politics as was the case with the Cork tailors, many of whom joined the local Land League branch *en masse* in the 1880s.<sup>52</sup>

Keeping politics at arm's length protected the Congregated Trades from the turmoil caused by the Parnellite split. Certainly, John McKnight, Congregated Trades President, took an active part in local Parnellite political bodies, so much so that his house was wrecked by an election mob in 1895, but whenever he attended trade society meetings there was no discussion of politics.<sup>53</sup> There was a weakness in their approach, however, and whilst a number of trade unionists allied to the Congregated Trades had controlled the Sarsfield Branch in the 1880s, many middle-class Leaguers migrated to the Sarsfield Branch when their own branches disappeared during the split. Consequently, by 1893 the Sarsfield Branch was controlled by traders, retailers and merchants hostile to the trades and the alliance which the Congregated Trades had taken for granted in the 1880s disappeared. The social profile of the Sarsfield League at this point proved once again that no matter what issue was under discussion, the local businessmen and trade unionists found it difficult to work harmoniously and arguments quickly broke out between the two groups. Local trade unionists claimed that the new Sarsfield League leadership regularly bought bread in the local non-union Croom Mills Bakery but were told this was 'simply a wage dispute' and of no relevance to the National League.<sup>54</sup> The

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<sup>52</sup> The Guild of Bakers disliked farmers and the Land Question more than any other occupational group in Limerick but still felt a need to attend League meetings in rural areas such as Crecora, in 1886, and the Guild officers informed the whole body, apprentices included, that the guild would pay the train fare for any baker who wished to attend the funeral of Stephen J Meany, Young Irelander and journalist, in Ennis in 1888. UCD Archives, TUI/1, Minute book of the Guild of Bakers, 14 Oct 1886, 7 Mar 1888; Murphy, 'Fenianism, Parnellism and the Cork trades, 1860-1900', pp 30-33.

<sup>53</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 23 Sept 1895, 7 Feb 1896.

<sup>54</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 20 June 1893.

Sarsfield League leadership then took issue with the fact that some local carpenters had worked on a boycotted farm, a point which the trades' secretary, John Hogan, admitted during a particularly bitter argument. Tom Gough, Secretary to the Pork Butchers Society, does not appear to have attended the Sarsfield Branch after this argument and regular attender Richard Gleeson, master carpenter/builder and member of the Ancient Guild of Carpenters, was soon expelled when he continued to defend the actions of the carpenters on the boycotted farm.<sup>55</sup> William Whelan, fitter, drifted away from the Sarsfield Branch as well at this point and by November, 1893, the chairman of the branch, William Richardson (provision dealer), was cautioning the members against trade unionists, singling out Whelan in particular as someone who would support 'every crank who comes over from England to spout about trade unionism.'<sup>56</sup> The initial argument continued in the pages of the *Limerick Leader* after this with Hogan completely ignoring the boycott issue and instead going to great lengths to show that one of the new Sarsfield Branch leaders, Patrick Darcy, had previously been expelled from the Amalgamated Society of Engineers for passing a picket line. Similarly, the Sarsfield Branch ignored the trade union issues and simply focused on the carpenters working on the boycotted farm.<sup>57</sup> The first meeting of the Sarsfield League following the withdrawal of the trade unionists centred on evictions in east Clare and local trade matters were forgotten.<sup>58</sup>

Independence from political bodies inevitably meant estrangement from the political class and, whilst this had its benefits, it rendered the trades somewhat naïve in matters relating to political culture, specifically the workings of local government and the rules regulating the political organisations they infrequently visited. They were often frustrated by middle-class or petit-bourgeois opponents during National League or House League meetings who lectured

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<sup>55</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 20, 23 June, 14, 17, 21 July 1893.

<sup>56</sup> Collins, Labour, church and nationalism in Limerick, p. 151.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* Hogan corresponded with the secretary of the Amalgamated of Engineers and printed his description of Darcy in the *Leader*.

<sup>58</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 21 July 1893.

them on protocol when they tried to set the agenda. Their naivety was particularly apparent on three occasions in the 1880s and 1890s when the trades sought to nominate a town council candidate only to find that their chosen candidate was ineligible.<sup>59</sup> On one notable occasion the trades canvassed a National League meeting in favour of Patrick Kenna, builder and hotel owner, for municipal office, only for James O'Mara, bacon merchant, to witheringly and condescendingly inform them that Kenna had not paid his rates in time and therefore was not eligible.<sup>60</sup>

The issue of who to support for local government positions was one that very much concerned the trade societies in the 1880s and 90s and yet it was an area which very much illustrated their impotence. This was not simply part of the larger power struggle between the trades and the local political class: there were very practical issues that related to who was in control in local government. The bakers were able to expand their society membership in the mid-1880s simply because they had successfully lobbied the Poor Law Guardians to employ only unionised bakers men in the workhouse and when the owner of Troy's bakery, a non-union shop, sought election as a Poor Law Guardian in 1891 the bakers frantically sought to 'tell the electors his true character as an employer.'<sup>61</sup> Similarly, bootmakers insisted that local boots were used in the workhouse and the building trades required local government bodies to employ their men on building projects.<sup>62</sup> The main problem underlying these cases, of course, was the fact that the municipal franchise was so exclusive that very few trade unionists were qualified to vote.<sup>63</sup> Even fewer qualified to stand for municipal office as, prior to 1898, one

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<sup>59</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 22 Nov 1884, 4 June 1894, 11 Aug 1897.

<sup>60</sup> *Munster News*, 22 Nov 1884.

<sup>61</sup> UCD Archives, TUI/1, Minute book of the Guild of Bakers, 2 Sept, 17 Dec 1885, 17 April 1886, 14 Mar 1891.

<sup>62</sup> *Munster News*, 14 Mar 1888.

<sup>63</sup> The number of burgesses in the city was extremely low, partly due to the associated property qualifications and partly because many people did not pay their rates on time. In 1888 the burgess role was estimated to be 350 in number compared to the overall 1891 city population of almost thirty-eight thousand. In some less prosperous wards, such as the Irishtown ward, there were as few as thirty-two burgesses in 1883 and only twenty-eight were likely to vote. The total number entitled to vote in local elections was 709 in 1897 and this rose to 5521 in 1898,

needed to possess property worth £1,000 over and above debts or were in occupation of a house rated at £25 or more per year although Richard Gleeson, master carpenter/builder and member of the Ancient Guild of Carpenters, was successfully returned for the Customhouse Ward in 1893.<sup>64</sup> Apart from Gleeson, however, few working trade unionists who stood and many local government candidates who were supported by local trade unionists were fair weather friends or outright opportunists.<sup>65</sup> Many were frustrated by the perpetual political impotence and one plasterer, in 1888, refused to endorse a candidate stating that,

the Congregated Trades should not support either of the candidates. He [the plasterer in question] thought it was too long they were the cat's paw of both sections in [the] William Street [Ward] and of other parties. An independent stand should be taken for no matter whom they supported the very instant he got into position he would totally ignore them.<sup>66</sup>

The formation of the Limerick Trades Council in 1893 – this body sought to represent all unionised workers in the city whilst the Congregated Trades continued to represent the traditional craft unions – temporarily invigorated the trade unionists' relationship with public men.<sup>67</sup> There was a degree of cross pollination between the Congregated Trades –increasingly referred to as the 'Mechanics' Institute' after this point – and the Trades Council and for a

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as a result of the 1898 Local Government Act. *Munster News*, 30 May 1883, 18 Aug 1888; Moloney, *Limerick Constitutional Nationalism, 1898-1918*, pp 38-39.

<sup>64</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 15, 17 Nov 1893. Cusack and Hanley *Limerick Municipal Elections, 1841-2009*, [www.limerickcity.ie/media/Elections%20final%20amend.pdf](http://www.limerickcity.ie/media/Elections%20final%20amend.pdf) accessed 1 June 2014.

<sup>65</sup> Successful nominations for local government included Patrick McSweeney, grocer, for the Castle Ward, in 1883; Patrick Kenna, builder, for the Glentworth Ward, in 1887; Patrick McDonnell, grocer, for the Castle Ward, in 1893; James Gilligan, pig-buyer, Abbey Ward; Richard Gleeson, master carpenter, for the Customhouse Ward, in 1893. Unsuccessful nominations include Patrick Kenna for the Shannon ward and then Market Ward in May and November 1884 respectively; Francis Gleeson McMahon, as Poor Law Guardian for the Custom House Ward in 1888; JP McNamara, Sec Licensed Grocers and Vintners Association, for Castle Ward, in 1893; Michael Scanlan, flour dealer, for the Irishtown Ward, in 1893; William Townsell, Cork cutter, for the Custom House Ward in 1894. *Munster News*, 21, 28 Nov 1883, 7, 21 May, 15 Nov 1884, 24 Mar 1888; *Limerick Leader*, 25 Aug, 1 Sept 1893, 5 Nov 1894, 22 Feb 1895.

<sup>66</sup> *Munster News*, 14 Mar 1888.

<sup>67</sup> The Trades Council was sometimes referred to as the Limerick Trades and Labour Council.



period they shared the same secretary, James Hennessy (carpenter), but many of the old agitators such as Godsell and John Hogan were not very involved with the new body which was consequently able to approach local politics with a clean slate.<sup>68</sup> They used the same non-political language as the Congregated Trades (ie. they were officially neither Parnellite nor anti-Parnellite) and were even able to have an amicable relationship with Ambrose Hall, who appeared to have burnt all ties with the Congregated Trades after his 1887 outburst.<sup>69</sup> Their initial enthusiasm – they claimed that ‘in years gone by the workingmen of Limerick were held up to ridicule and scorn by the men who are now soliciting their influence and aid’ – was quickly curbed as they began to encounter a similar set of problems to those previously faced by the Congregated Trades.<sup>70</sup> On one occasion over one hundred members of the Trades Council enthusiastically attended a corporation meeting only for the local councillors to describe the assemblage as intimidatory. In this instance, the Trades Council spokesmen, a mason and a carpenter, sought to assure the councillors that they were simply trying to illustrate the strength and unity of their body, adding that the Trades Council represented over five thousand workers in the city. This was dismissed by the Town Council, however, with one councillor snapping: ‘How many of these five thousand are rate payers?’ and the one hundred trade unionists were then forced to sit silently as the motion they had proposed was defeated by two votes.<sup>71</sup>

Whilst the Trades Council was unsuccessful in steering local politics, it was able to claim one very significant victory when, after constant lobbying throughout 1894, the town council and poor law guardians agreed to a Fair Wages policy whereby local workers and local

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<sup>68</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 8 Aug 1894, 28 Jan 1895.

<sup>69</sup> In keeping with his paternal philanthropic spirit, Hall agreed to pay for several local apprentices to attend the Limerick Athenaeum, a center for literary and scientific discourse, and won high praise from the Limerick Trades Council. *Limerick Leader*, 4 Dec 1894.

<sup>70</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 3 Nov 1893.

<sup>71</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 15 June 1894.

contractors, using as much locally made material as possible, would be given preferential treatment in relation to all building projects sanctioned by local government.<sup>72</sup> This victory fulfilled some of the trades' core objectives in the context of local government, which were set out in 1893, and they also called upon the town council to provide 'proper' housing at reasonable rents, to petition parliament for the expansion of the municipal franchise and to hold town council meetings at six in the evening so that workmen could attend.<sup>73</sup> It was a standard set of objectives and one expressed similarly by the Trade Councils of Cork and Belfast – the former less ambitiously than the Limerick men and the latter more assertively.<sup>74</sup>

Whilst local town councillors were occasionally willing to appease trade unionists, as shown by the Fair Wages agreement, there was no indication that they were overly active in seeking to expand the municipal franchise although local government reform which had been enacted in England and Wales in 1888 was increasingly capturing the attention of the local trade unionists.<sup>75</sup> As was the case with the National League directive relating to 'the encouragement of Labour and Industrial Interests of Ireland,' the National League's original support for the 'extension of the municipal franchises' was not evident in any of the Limerick branches, which were notably quiet on the matter in the mid-1890s when such reform was anticipated.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, since the mid-1880s the reform of local government had been viewed by the Irish Parliamentary Party as a secondary goal and a potential distraction from the question

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<sup>72</sup> The Fair Wages policy appears to have been first agreed to in 1894 and was fully in force by 1895. *Limerick Leader*, 2, 4, 6, 9 April 1894; Collins, Labour, church and nationalism in Limerick, p. 149.

<sup>73</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 15 Nov 1893.

<sup>74</sup> Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, pp 192-194; Boyle *The Irish labor movement in the nineteenth century*, pp 161-67.

<sup>75</sup> The Trades Council were more animated on the subject than the Congregated Trades although it must be noted that the Trades Council's spokesman on the subject in 1894 was secretary of both trades bodies. The Tory government's half-hearted attempt to extend local government reform to Ireland in 1892 seems to have sparked local trade union interest in the subject and they were particularly aware of the debate surrounding the 1895 Parliamentary Bill. Virginia Crossman, *Politics, Pauperism and Power in Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Manchester, 2006), p. 220; *Limerick Leader*, 8 Aug 1894, 20 Mar 1895.

<sup>76</sup> Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism 1876–1906*, p. 190; Berresford Ellis, *A History of the Irish Working Class*, p. 165.

of Home Rule.<sup>77</sup> Kelly identified the 1898 Act as solving the problem of unionist dominated ‘local government in constituencies with a Nationalist M.P.’, but Limerick had no such need of reform from this perspective as prior to the 1898 Act it already had a (constitutional) Nationalist Corporation.<sup>78</sup>

Perhaps in anticipation of the imminent local government reform, the rate-payers of the city formed their own association as early as November 1896 in opposition to the Trades Council.<sup>79</sup> This move was also prompted, in part, by the weakness of the nationalist political organisations and many of the traders, merchants and publicans who had previously buttressed such bodies were now abandoning them. By comparison, labour throughout the country but particularly in Limerick, was given more scope to forge its own campaign on the matter of municipal reform, and meetings of the local Trades Council did not bother to suggest soliciting the aid of the National League or even of local parliamentary representatives. Instead they were content to put their trust in the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Congress which had delegates, principally from Dublin and Belfast, working on the issue of local government reform.<sup>80</sup> For much of the 1890s local public men – bereft of a strong local political organisation – ceased to be as relevant to the trades. Looking at the issue from the point of view of the unskilled labourers of Waterford city, Dooley credited the 1898 Local Government Act with giving ‘the urban underprivileged an opportunity to create a political culture free of Redmond, the IPP and a nationalist tradition which took little account of labourer’s interests.’<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Catherine B. Shannon, ‘The Ulster liberal unionists and local government reform’, 1885-1898, Alan O’Day (ed.) *Reactions to Irish Nationalism* (London, 1987), p. 349; Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998* (Oxford, 2010), p. 126; Richard Shannon, *Gladstone: 1865-1898* (London, 1999), p. 358. O’Day describes Parnell’s enthusiasm for local government reform as ‘limited’ and quotes him as saying, ‘We do not propose this local self-government plank as a substitute for the restitution of our Irish Parliament but solely as an improvement of the present system of local government in Ireland.’ O’Day, *Irish Home Rule, 1867-1921*, p. 94.

<sup>78</sup> Kelly, *The Fenian Ideal and Irish Nationalism*, p. 144.

<sup>79</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 16 Nov 1896.

<sup>80</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 22 Jan 1897.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas Dooley, *Irishmen or English Soldiers?: the times and world of a southern Catholic Irish man (1876-1916) enlisting in the British army during the First World War* (Liverpool, 1995), p. 87.

On previous occasions, the trades had aligned themselves with a local, middle-class political misfit in the hope of circumventing the local political class and achieving political agency: the charismatic Patrick Lynch, in 1841, and the deep-pocketed Peter Tait, in 1868, were the two obvious examples here. The next political nonconformist to form a relationship with the local trade unions was John Daly, Fenian convict, and together they established the Limerick Labour Party in 1898.<sup>82</sup> Daly had a mixed relationship with the Congregated Trades in the 1860s and 70s: frequently proving himself a nuisance as he constantly sought to infiltrate their meetings and set a nationalist rather than a labour agenda until it appears he was eventually asked by John Godsell, fellow Fenian and political ally, to leave.<sup>83</sup> His anti-farmer ramblings had generally proved popular with sections of the trades, particularly the bakers, during this period but in his more extreme guise he was frequently at cross purposes with the trades and they took issue in 1871 with his overly aggressive verbal attack upon Fr. Richard Baptist O'Brien, despite their mutual reservations regarding O'Brien's attempts to control local politics, and the majority of the city's artisans were bewildered, to say the least, by his violent disruption of a massive political parade in support of Isaac Butt and Home Rule in 1876.<sup>84</sup> Once imprisoned, however, Daly's popularity steadily rose and he became a local *cause célèbre*. From 1893 onwards, the Trades Council became extremely prominent in the amnesty campaign and Daly's popularity spiked in 1895 in response to the widespread sympathy he received in

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<sup>82</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 16, 30 Sept 1898.

<sup>83</sup> Daly spent the much of his adult life employed as a Fenian recruiter. He served an apprenticeship as a lath-splitter in his teenage years before his first and briefest stint in prison (following the 1867 Fenian rising) but he never practiced the trade for very long and the artisan community never viewed him as 'one of their own' in this sense. Desmond McCabe and Owen McGee, 'Daly, John', in James McGuire and James Quinn (ed), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009) <http://dib.cambridge.org/> accessed 16 June 2014; Ciarán Ó Griofa, 'John Daly, The Fenian Mayor of Limerick', David Lee (ed.), *Remembering Limerick: Historical essays celebrating the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Limerick's first charter granted in 1197* (Limerick, 1997), p. 197–204. He attended a number of meetings in the Mechanics' Institute in 1874, regularly leading discussions off in an unrelated tangent. He was not a member of the Mechanics' Institute and the trades ensured that he cease attending with Godsell announcing, in November 1874, that only members could attend from that point onwards. *Munster News*, 8 Aug, 7 Oct, 14 Nov 1874.

<sup>84</sup> *Munster News*, 7 Oct 1874; *Limerick Chronicle*, 3 Oct 1871.

relation to his prison conditions, which were increasingly brought to public attention.<sup>85</sup> Whilst still in prison he was returned unopposed in the 1895 General Election with neither the Parnellites nor anti-Parnellites daring to run against him. As a convicted felon, he was unable to take his seat but on the wave of public sympathy he was released the following year and returned to a rapturous reception in his native city.<sup>86</sup>

At a time when many Fenians throughout the country were following the example set by the constitutionalist John O'Connor Power, Daly refused to countenance any form of alliance with constitutional nationalism and, upon being released, he continued to rail against parliamentary politics decrying both the local Parnellites and anti-Parnellites, very much endearing himself to the trades who, as we have seen, had a problematic relationship with the local nationalists on either side of the divide.<sup>87</sup> The local trade unionists were swept along by Daly's rapid but ephemeral political ascent and in the process briefly became the dominant political group in the city with the Labour Party winning around twenty-five of the forty town council seats in the 1899 municipal election.<sup>88</sup> The detectives of the special branch felt that Daly orchestrated the whole affair but publicly he conceded power to the 'Mechanics' Institute' stating that the Labour Party electoral committee should only have 'working men' on it.<sup>89</sup>

The political success of Daly and the Labour Party was due to a confluence of circumstances. The fact that all the trade societies had maintained unity throughout the split, whilst the retailers and middle class of the city did not, was crucial as was the popularity of the

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<sup>85</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 13, 20 July 1894, 24 May, 15 July 1895.

<sup>86</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 14 Aug, 14, 16 Sept 1896.

<sup>87</sup> Donald Jordan, 'John O'Connor Power, Charles Stuart Parnell and the centralization of popular politics in Ireland', *Irish historical studies*, vol. 25, no. 97, May 1986, pp 56-57; James McConnell, "'Fenians at Westminster": The Edwardian Irish Parliamentary Party and the legacy of the New Departure', *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 34, no. 133, May 2004, pp 44-46.

<sup>88</sup> McKay, 'Limerick municipal election 1899', pp 7-9.

<sup>89</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 16 Sept 1898; National Archives, Crime Branch Special, 17676/S 1898.

1798 centenary celebration which effectively acted as a Dalyite political campaign.<sup>90</sup> The expansion of the municipal franchise was, of course, what changed Daly and the Labour Party from being just another motley crew of agitators into the leaders of the Limerick Corporation with Daly as Mayor. The triumph was short lived, however, and in their quest for power the trades upset a number of groups, many of them from within their own ranks and from within the greater working class community. The response of general labourers (in the 1901 census returns, this was the most common occupational term used by males in the Limerick city area and referred to non-union, unskilled workers) of the city was the most fascinating of all, many of whom were entirely without a union of any sort and some relied upon musical marching bands to achieve political agency.<sup>91</sup>

The Labour Party operated according to a very centralised form of representative democracy whereby the party committee was elected by ballot but, once elected, this committee acted quite autocratically. This was the manner in which all trade societies in nineteenth century Limerick operated but this form of political organisation was to make them victims of their own success and their approach to politics was as repressive as any of the middle class committees and political clubs they had faced over the century. Concerns were raised at the inception of the Labour Party Committee in September 1898 over the potentially unrepresentative nature of the proposed committee. William Whelan – fitter, IRB, previous Trades Council President and Town Councillor (elected in August 1897) – was particularly concerned that unorganised labourers were completely ignored and he proposed using the ‘[17]98 Brigades’ which he described as ‘mostly unorganised workers, but which had great influence’ – yet more evidence of the potential of local advanced nationalist bodies to achieve

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<sup>90</sup> The 1798 Centenary Celebrations galvanised Irish Nationalism. Kelly, *The Fenian Ideal*, pp 124-26; Senia Paseta, ‘1798 in 1898: The politics of commemoration’, *Irish Studies*, 22, 1998, pp 46-53; H. T. Dickinson, ‘The Irish Rebellion of 1798: History and memory’, Ulrich Broich, H. T. Dickinson, Eckhart Hellmuth, Martin Schmidt (eds), *Reactions to revolutions: The 1790s and their aftermath* (Berlin, 2007), pp 31-60.

<sup>91</sup> McGrath, ‘Music and politics: Marching bands in late nineteenth-century Limerick’, pp.97–106.

political agency – to involve the unskilled in politics.<sup>92</sup> Daly, who was the dominant personality at the meeting despite his repeated claims to the contrary, assured all in attendance that ‘the workers did not propose to assume the attitude of political despots’ and made vague assertions that unorganised workers would also be involved.<sup>93</sup> The result of the important but badly planned meeting was the election of a committee of eleven: seven of them from the traditional Congregated Trades occupational groups, two pork butchers, one plumber (a skilled occupational group which became fully unionised in the 1890s) and one corporation employee (a carter).<sup>94</sup> The trade unionism of the Limerick Trades Council, inclusive of all organised labour bodies, was not very much in evidence here and the Labour Party Committee was a continuation of the old artisan hegemony rather than a new departure.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, apart from Daly the most active Labour Party campaigners included old warhorses such as James Kett and John Godsell, aged fifty-seven and sixty respectively, who had both acted as officers of the Congregated Trades since the 1870s.<sup>96</sup>

Within a month of formation, the Labour Party had assumed a dominant position in local politics and the only question left was to define who they represented and what their objectives were. Whereas the Waterford city trade societies had allied themselves with the local

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<sup>92</sup> The 1798 Brigades were local political clubs formed in 1897 in anticipation of the 1798 Centenary. *Limerick Leader*, 29 Oct, 29 Nov 1897, 16 Sept 1898.

<sup>93</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 16 Sept 1898.

<sup>94</sup> The full committee read as follows: John McCormack, pork butcher, Pres of Trades Council; Michael Murphy, tailor; Patrick Barrett, mason; Michael O’Connor, corporation employee (carter); Thomas Moloney, housepainter; John Prendergast, baker; James Kett, cooper; John Moroney, carpenter; William Cullen, plumber; Patrick Nash, pork Butcher; and Thomas Savage, cabinet-maker. *Limerick Leader*, 16 Sept 1898.

<sup>95</sup> Tailors, masons, housepainters, bakers, coopers, carpenters and cabinet-makers were all typical craft guild occupations and had formed the core of the Congregated Trades since its inception and only the pork butchers, corporation employees and plumbers represented something different and even then, plumbers were very much a skilled trade and only differed from the typical craft guilds as they lacked a strong history.

<sup>96</sup> Kett perfectly fitted the profile of the ‘labour aristocracy.’ He was the ‘head cooper’ for the Limerick Market Trustees since the early 1870s and appears to have acted as his own boss in many ways. His main role involved inspecting butter firkins on behalf of the Trustees and his judgement was final. He was Secretary of the Congregated Trades in the late 1870s. *Limerick Chronicle*, 4 Nov 1871; *Munster News*, 7 Dec 1878, 1 June 1892. Godsell was President of the Congregated Trades in the mid-1870s (see above) and was actually President again in 1898. *Limerick Leader*, 8 Aug, 16 Sept 1898; McKay, *Limerick Municipal Elections, January 1899*, pp 9-10.

Ratepayers' Association against the 'merchants and gentry', the Limerick Labour Party was very much against the local Ratepayers' Association and established a very low social threshold in establishing their opposition as was evident from James Kett's description of the 'the publican, the pawnbroker and the landlord' as the men who took money from the worker and constituted the core of the Town Council.<sup>97</sup> It was undoubtedly true that Kett's description closely matched the social profile of the typical local opponent in the National League but there were allies from this class as well, particularly Michael Donnelly, Fenian and publican, who had done much to secure the Fair Wages Agreement in the mid-1890s.<sup>98</sup> The local trade unions had repaid Donnelly's support by opposing, albeit hesitantly, his mayoral campaign late in 1897 in favour of John Daly's vain attempt to become 'First Citizen' in 1898.<sup>99</sup> Kett was ostensibly a little more cautious as he attended a public meeting, alongside Donnelly in October 1898, and he expressed modest objectives stating that he only wanted 'fair representation' and 'better homes and better wages' and not for the 'Mechanics' Institute' to monopolise the Town Council.<sup>100</sup> Matters became even more confused when the Sarsfield Independent National League announced that it, too was opposed to the Ratepayers' Association and at this stage the artisans who formed the core of the Labour Party appeared to be unsure who they were allied to or whether they should act alone. Attempts to draw parallels with the municipal elections which were occurring simultaneously in other cities is further confused by the fact that, by the time of the 1899 Municipal Election campaign, the Limerick Ratepayers' Party represented not small retailers but large merchants and industrialists, and on the day of the election most local papers had begun describing this party as the 'Merchant Party.'<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Dooley, *Irishmen or English soldiers*, pp 91-92; McKay, *Limerick Municipal Elections, January 1899*, p. 4.

<sup>98</sup> Donnelly was identified by the Trades Council in 1893 as one of their few friends in the Town Council. *Limerick Leader*, 6 Oct 1893, 4 Oct 1897.

<sup>99</sup> Daly was not qualified to stand for municipal election as he was not a burgess at the time of the election. *Limerick Leader*, 4, 6, 9, 11, 13 Aug 1897. Donnelly was very bitter about the lack of support from the trades and reminded them of what he had done for them in the past. *Limerick Leader*, 4 Oct 1897.

<sup>100</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 10 Oct 1898.

<sup>101</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 18 Jan 1899.



At this point, on the eve of the 1899 municipal election, it is essential to describe the political alliances in greater detail. Without question, the various factions at this point are best explained using the general class-based approach that forms the basis of this chapter, although this method requires some degree of qualification. Whilst the language of class which was used during the campaign suggested that the political parties were clearly demarcated along traditional occupational and socioeconomic lines, the reality was more complex. Using the 1901 census returns we can derive the amount of household living space of candidates and supporters involved in the election and, in this manner, ascertain a reliable impression of the *actual* socioeconomic background of individuals involved in the election and how this fitted with the campaign rhetoric (see Fig. 10). Whilst there was clear differentiation between the Merchant/Rate-Payers Party and others, the difference between the unaligned town councillors seeking re-election and the Labour Party candidates was clear but not as great. Kett's contention that the Corporation was composed of the publicans and pawnbrokers is not apparent here and amongst the unaligned town councillors seeking re-election were three solicitors, three merchants/manufacturers, two grocer/publicans, one carpenter/builder, one painter/decorator, one house agent, one victualler and one farmer.<sup>102</sup>

<b>Party</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>No. of roo</b>	<b>No. in far</b>	<b>Density per room</b>
Labour	Total	4.9	6.4	1.31
Labour	Candidate	6.08	6.77	1.11
Labour	Supporter	3.88	6.13	1.635
Re-elect	Total	8.26	5.53	0.67
Merchant	Total	14.56	8.3	0.57
Merchant	Candidate	15.47	8.44	0.55
Merchant	Supporter	13.9	8.2	0.59
Sarsfield	Total	4.4	5.4	1.22
Sarsfield	Candidate	8	7	0.875
Sarsfield	Supporter	3.5	5	1.42
Builder	Candidate	8.5	3.5	0.411

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<sup>102</sup> See Appendix three. Many individuals require two occupational descriptions, particularly publicans who are often grocers as well.

**Figure 10. Average living space according to party affiliation. 'Re-elect' refers to non-aligned sitting town councillors who were seeking reelection.<sup>103</sup>**

The labour party, in general, lived up to its name although it was composed overwhelmingly of artisans.<sup>104</sup> Membership of the Sarsfield Independent National League defied any class analysis and it would appear that politics alone was the defining factor rather than occupational or socioeconomic background (See Appendix Four).

Despite apprehensions and uncertainty prior to the election the Labour Party swept to power winning twenty-five of the forty Town Council seats; far more than the number won by the Labour Parties in other Irish cities.<sup>105</sup> This electoral success was not, however, a platform from which to advance the interests of organised labour in the city and it was followed by division and internal rancour. By 1900 the Limerick Trades Council had disappeared and the Labour Party, plagued by in-fighting, was being attacked by many sections of the working class in the city. What had happened? The *Limerick Leader*, by far the best source for the activities and makeup of the Limerick Labour Party, asserted that the party had an unchallenged political hegemony among the city's working class voters which makes the collapse which followed even more difficult to explain. Moloney's in-depth study of the party and the 1899 campaign, however, lays bare many of the cracks that were evident in the Labour Party, cracks that the *Leader* chose to gloss over. Whilst acknowledging the power of the class conscious rhetoric, Moloney correctly pointed out that the 'leadership of the campaign was decidedly lower middle and upper working class' – a description which mirrors Cronin's summation of the Cork

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<sup>103</sup> The list of supporters was garnered from the descriptions of candidate nominations in January 1899. *Limerick Leader*, 4 and 18 Jan 1899.

<sup>104</sup> The party consisted of six bakers, one blacksmith, one cabinet-maker, two carpenters, two carters (a father and son pair), two coopers, one cycle maker, one docker, one fisherman, one fitter, three general labourers, one green grocer, two horse dealers, one house painter, one law clerk, one miller, one photographer, one pig buyer, two plasterers, one printer, one river pilot, one saddler, one sand merchant, one sawyer, one shipping agent, one shop porter, one shopman, one solicitor, four tailors, one tinsmith and one van man. See Appendix Four.

<sup>105</sup> The Cork Labour party won nine of the fifty-six town council seats and Nationalist parties won four times as much. Dublin the Labour Party won eight seats out of sixty whilst Nationalists won forty-five and Unionists seven. Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, p. 242; Joseph V. O'Brien, *Dear, dirty Dublin: A city in distress* (Dublin, 1982), pp 92-93.

Labour party as a group that were anxious not to lose their ‘position as part of a plebeian elite’ – although it is necessary to qualify Moloney’s statement that ‘there was relatively little interest shown by those lower down the socio-economic scale.’<sup>106</sup> Judging by the rhetoric used in many of the campaign meetings in late 1898, the interest and support of every social stratum of the local working class was vital, indeed the Labour Party would not have been able to achieve its success if it had only relied on the support of respectable artisans. One Labour Party campaign meeting was held in the Dock Ward in December 1898 was attended by many dock labourers; indeed much of John Daly’s speech contained direct references to the problems of non-union dockers and employers who sought to circumvent the Limerick Dock Labourers’ Society.<sup>107</sup> The services of John O’Brien, the only dock labourer nominated by the Labour Party, were also used in this instance and he addressed the crowd despite the fact that he was actually standing in the Abbey Ward.<sup>108</sup> Similarly, in the Irishtown Ward Michael O’Connor, President of the Carters’ Society, was asked to address the crowd and highlight issues which affected the unskilled and semi-skilled of the city.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, issues which closely affected the poorest in the city, such as bad housing and congested laneways, were continuously addressed during the campaign.<sup>110</sup> Careful examination of the campaign, however, highlights the contradictions in the attempts to elicit the support of the unskilled and semi-skilled, for although Daly’s words appealed to the hearts and minds of the dock labourers in the Dock Ward, he concluded his speech by introducing an additional nominee, Richard P. O’Connor, a printer from relatively salubrious Richmond Street whose six-room house was, according to the 1901 census, shared by himself, his wife and a single boarder.<sup>111</sup> In contrast, the average dock labourer household accommodated 6.03 people in 2.47 rooms (an average of 2.44 people per room). William

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<sup>106</sup> Moloney, *Limerick constitutional nationalism*, p. 50; Cronin, *County, class or craft*, p. 241.

<sup>107</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 9 Dec 1898.

<sup>108</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 9 Dec 1898.

<sup>109</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 17 Oct 1898.

<sup>110</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 17 Oct, 16 Dec 1898.

<sup>111</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 9 Dec 1898.

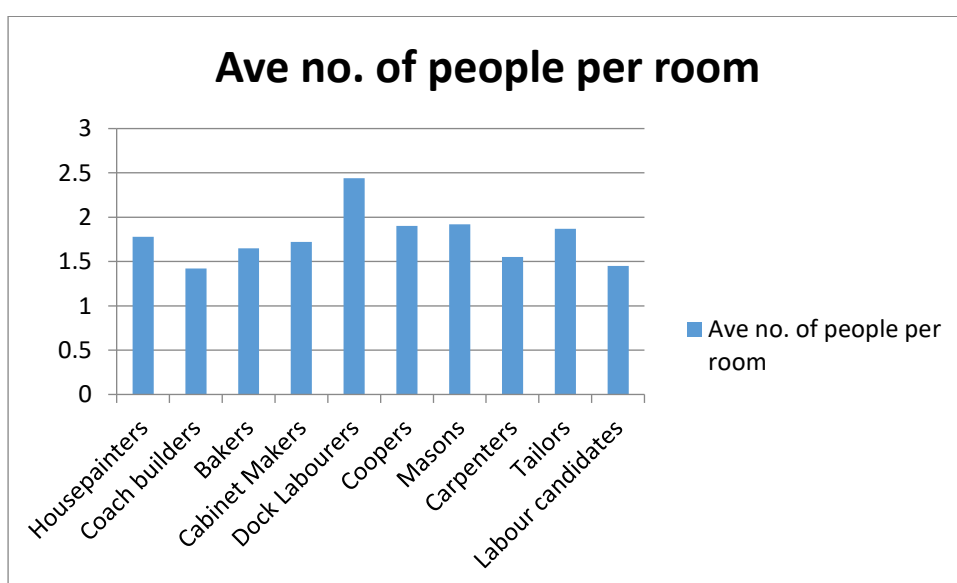
Whelan, the other Labour candidate for the Dock Ward whose details can be found on the 1901 Census of Population, lived with his family of nine in a five bedroom house.<sup>112</sup> The most obvious division here was the one between skilled workers and traditional craft guildsmen on the hand and, on the other, newly organised groups such as the dock labourers and carters. There were also divisions which related purely to socio-economic status rather than any hierarchy based upon occupation. For example, the three baker candidates who can be found on the 1901 census had, on average, 6.67 rooms as living space and an average household size of 8.67 ( a density of roughly 1.3 people per room). By way of contrast, the average baker had 3.86 rooms as living space and, although the average household size was slightly smaller, the level of congestion was higher (see below). We can see a similar trend with other groups and in total of the fifteen Labour candidates whose details could be found and who belonged to the traditional city artisan trades, the average number of rooms as living space was 4.6, the average household size was 6.67 and the room density was 1.45 people per room. Comparing this data with the figures for the nine prominent trades involved in the Labour party we can conclude that the Labour Party candidates certainly belonged to the strongest socioeconomic section of the artisan class although they were certainly not completely outside the general profile.

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<sup>112</sup> Analysis based upon 1901 census returns, see Appendix Four.

	No. of workers	Ave no. of rooms	Ave Family size	Ave no. of people per room
Housepainters	117	3.58	6.41	1.78
Coach builders	72	4.02	5.72	1.42
Bakers	151	3.86	6.37	1.65
Cabinet Makers	53	4.11	7.07	1.72
Dock Labourers	326	2.47	6.03	2.44
Coopers	101	2.91	5.52	1.9
Masons	106	3.55	6.84	1.92
Carpenters	312	4.28	6.62	1.55
Tailors	181	3.63	6.78	1.87
Labour Party candidates	15	4.6	6.67	1.45

**Figure 11 Living space of different occupational groups**



## Summary

Events in the 1880s played a crucial part in developing the world view of the organised workers and their relationship with national politics. Whilst the last chapter dealt with the struggle between the local political class and the trades in the parliamentary election setting, that aspect of the interclass political battle was removed. The threat of the Conservative Unionist parliamentary candidate was removed thoroughly, the participation of the trades in pre-election

campaigns was welcome but unnecessary and, with this, one aspect of the Congregated Trades original *raison d'être* disappeared. Whereas before they had hurled vitriolic abuse at local parliamentary committees who nominated liberals over Repealers/Home Rulers, the local political class were now thoroughly redundant and the organised workers of the city began to explore issues that were specific to their class. As before they continued to focus on economic nationalism and protectionism, doctrines which could be roughly fitted within the broad sphere of nationalism, but their attempts to form a House League and their calls for the expansion of the municipal franchise were a much more class specific. Whilst they showed increasing disdain for local proponents of nationalism – the National League leaders and vaguely nationalist town councillors – they never turned away from nationalism itself and maintained an incredible sense of ownership over the doctrine and generally felt entitled to define nationalism in a way that incorporated their class sensibilities.

Again, this chapter shows evidence that the Limerick artisan class was remarkably efficient in reaffirming its parameters by identifying its opponents using a very low social threshold (best expressed by Kett's 'the publican, the pawnbroker and the landlord' comment, see above).<sup>113</sup> Significantly, the trades also appear to have parted ways with Richard Gleeson, a working employer whom they tolerated for a while but grew apart from by the end of the 1890s when, as had happened previously with Richard Raleigh, his social elevation lessened the common causes he had with the wage-earning artisans.<sup>114</sup> Clearly they were more than

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<sup>113</sup> Dooley, *Irishmen or English soldiers*, pp 91-92; McKay, *Limerick Municipal Elections, January 1899*, p. 4.

<sup>114</sup> Gleeson was a sitting TC by the time the Labour Party was founded but was not adopted by the party despite being a member of the Ancient Guild of Carpenters. Even in this regard, Gleeson appears to have regularly defended carpenters (See Chapter Three) in the 1890s but eventually his status as an employer rendered him as the 'other' and in 1899 a deputation from the Carpenters Guild visited Gleeson in a formal fashion to stiffly instruct him to fire one of his men. There were many cases of small masters, who employed a very limited number of men, in the trades but whenever the respective trade society deemed their actions to be in violation of the rules they dealt with the matter internally. The fact that Gleeson was met on the building site rather than in a trades meeting room implies that he was no longer a small master who could be incorporated by the society. *Limerick Leader*, 8, 15, 17 Nov Nov, 13 Dec 1893, 8 June, 11 July 1898; Cusack and Hanley *Limerick Municipal Elections, 1841-2009*, [www.limerickcity.ie/media/Elections%20final%20amend.pdf](http://www.limerickcity.ie/media/Elections%20final%20amend.pdf) accessed 1 June 2014.

adequate at maintaining the purity of the Congregated Trades but this came at a cost in the 1890s when organised labour in the city was seeking to incorporate groups below the rank of artisan.

It is not enough to simply explore the socioeconomic distinctions between the different parties and different occupational groups quantitatively. Amidst the multitude of personality clashes sparked by the 1899 municipal elections, the evidence points overwhelmingly to divisions along occupational lines. The prospect of working class unity heralded by the establishment of the Trades Council in 1893 and reinforced by the ‘them and us’ rhetoric of the 1899 municipal election campaign failed to establish itself fully. As the old core of the Congregated Trades came to prominence in the late 1890s, the Trades Council appeared to be subsumed by the former, older body.<sup>115</sup> Increasingly both bodies were referred to as the ‘Mechanics’ Institute’ which was, by this stage, no longer an educational centre but almost exclusively a headquarters for organised labour.<sup>116</sup> Whilst the clearest division within the Labour Party was the skilled/unskilled split, discord also stemmed from the fact that the Labour Party committee was an overly powerful, hegemonic and exclusive entity, in many ways mirroring the middle-class election committees of previous years. Whilst this mode of representation worked reasonably well for societies representing a single occupation – generally consisting of fifty to one hundred and fifty individuals – it was unable to adequately represent the entire working class populace of the Limerick city.

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<sup>115</sup> *Trade unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on trade unions in 1899 with comparative statistics for 1892-1898*, pp 292-93, H.C. 1900 [Cd.422], lxxxiii, 601.

<sup>116</sup> Discussion of the Mechanics’ Institute in the late 1890s invariably implied that it was the headquarters of a trades council of sorts or, indeed, that the actual term ‘Mechanics’ Institute’ signified an artisan trades council. *Limerick Leader*, 8 Aug 1894, 28 Jan 1895, 30 Aug 1897, 22 Mar 1899.

# Conclusion



## **The 1899 Municipal Election, political ambitions, class consciousness and legacy.**

### **Assessing the progress of Limerick's organised labour in the nineteenth century**

The form of organised labour detailed here was overwhelmingly defensive in nature. Beginning in 1819-21 in the face of worsening economic conditions and static growth, the tone of language of organised workers remained consistent for the remainder of the century. Ultimately the world view which served organised labour in Limerick city well for much of the century failed the city's trade unionists at a critical juncture in 1899. Inability to appreciate the needs of the broader working class left the Limerick Labour Party vulnerable to attack from within, and their approach illustrated that they were unable to imagine a novel political method that would prevent them from becoming mirror images of the public men they sought to replace. We should not conclude that this situations was inevitable: Black, referring to the British context, contended that 'modern labour organisations – at least those that have arisen spontaneously – tend to be more democratic than modern states' but it is likely that high expectations proved deleterious.<sup>1</sup> This world view only failed in a political sense, however, and the idea of protecting the craft from below was still deemed essential to the survival of Limerick's artisan class well into the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup>

There are obvious analogies between Limerick Labour's efficient, yet unrepresentative, political organisation and the exclusive election committees which artisans had railed against in the past. Indeed, the manner in which they gained power impressed some of the opponents of the Labour Party during the 1899 Election campaign and one sitting corporation member, David Nelson, seed merchant, complained bitterly about the manner in which the Labour Party had grabbed the spotlight and controlled the election campaign with its centralised power

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<sup>1</sup> Black, *Guild and state*, p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> *The Kerryman*, 5 Jan 1935; *Irish Press*, 14 Sept 1940; *Evening Herald*, 15 Oct 1940; *Irish Examiner*, 12 Dec 1940; *Limerick Leader*, 26 Nov 1941, 9 Mar, 5 Oct 1942.

structure and its domination of public spaces, stating that ‘we [non-Labour Party candidates] had no opportunity to hold a meeting in Bank-place [one of the principal public meeting places in the city].’<sup>3</sup> More than any other development, this election campaign heralded the future career of many trade unionists as public men in their own right and Nelson complained how one meeting in the Mechanics’ Institute was presided over by ‘some gentleman named Michael Murphy.’<sup>4</sup> Murphy, tailor, had been President of the Congregated Trades in the mid-1880s but was still unknown to many in the Corporation prior to the 1899 Municipal election campaign. For this brief period the political class recognised organised labour as a political force in its own right rather than an advocacy group. The fact that this period also marked the dissolution of the Trades Council and the weakening of fraternal links within Limerick’s organised labour is unlikely to be entirely coincidental. It appears that the clearly defined artisan class, with eighty years of practice in class solidarity, was too robust for the Limerick Trades Council, with its wider social base, to contend with, and this body was inevitably consumed by the Congregated Trades. The empowerment of the organised labour leadership inevitably alienated them from their working class peers and quickly led to an Orwellian ‘two legs better’ predicament.

The Labour Party dramatically dwindled in strength after the 1899 election, returning fewer members in every successive municipal election until it disbanded as a party in 1906 when John Daly and seven other members resigned from the Town Council.<sup>5</sup> Organised labour continued to have a voice at municipal government level but in the decade that followed the 1899 election there was a subtle but important change whereby operative societies ceased to support fellow operatives and chose instead to support popular employers. In many other cases, which strengthened the Orwellian analogy, the operatives of 1899 themselves became

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<sup>3</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 30 Dec 1898.

<sup>4</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 30 Dec 1898.

<sup>5</sup> Moloney, *Limerick constitutional nationalism, 1898-1918*, p. 53.

employers – Michael Murphy, operative tailor in 1899 was a master tailor by 1905; John O’Brien, dock labourer in 1899 had become a stevedore by 1911 – and in other cases employers such as Patrick Bourke, builder, were favoured by trade unionists as they had previously been trade unionists or were sympathetic to trade unions. It is therefore at this point that the Marxist ‘labour aristocracy’ concept can be re-examined cautiously in the Limerick context.<sup>6</sup> The situation was, of course, similar to that which had existed prior to the 1898 Local Government Act where individuals such as Richard Gleeson, builder and member of the Guild of Carpenters, and Patrick Kenna, builder and member of the Mechanics’ Institute, had represented the trades. Moloney described the mid-1900s trend as one where the ‘men in the middle’ were now favoured but cautioned that the 1899 Labour Party did not represent a significant departure in terms of class background noting that, on the eve of the election, the Party had ‘minor manufacturers, retailers and even professionals in its ranks.’<sup>7</sup> This goes a little too far, however. Apart from William Whelan in 1898, no operative trade unionists had ever sat in the Limerick Town Council prior to 1899, and the fact that fifteen skilled or semi-skilled operatives took their place in the council chambers was a significant development. There is some truth in the contention that the Labour Party was not exactly what it purported to be: amongst those who won municipal office were nine whose occupational background did not neatly fit the traditional ‘labour’ fraternity. The two horse dealers, one of whom was also a publican, appear to have had a limited relationship with the Labour Party and both subsequently followed a political career which had little relevance to organised labour in general.<sup>8</sup> Michael Joyce, a river pilot, had an occupational background that did not separate him from organised labour but was undoubtedly out of step with the traditional profile and he quickly switched his

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<sup>6</sup> Hobsbawm, 'Lenin and the aristocracy of labour', pp 207-210; Moorhouse, 'The Marxist Theory of the Labour Aristocracy', pp. 61-82; *Limerick Leader*, 9 Jan 1905. Patrick Bourke was described as a 'trade unionist' and employer in 1907, see *Limerick Leader*, 23 Jan 1907.

<sup>7</sup> Moloney, *Limerick constitutional nationalism, 1898-1918*, p. 53.

<sup>8</sup> Moloney described the two men in question as members of the fledgling UIL whose membership of the Labour Party was merely a brief affair. Moloney, *Limerick constitutional nationalism, 1898-1918*, pp 50, 56-57.

allegiance from Dalyite anti-constitutionalism to the United Irish League and the Irish Parliamentary Party, subsequently enjoying a long parliamentary career representing Limerick city.<sup>9</sup> Other Labour Party members who were certainly peripheral to the general labour fraternity included a fisherman, a pig buyer/publican, John Daly himself (bakery owner), a book-keeper and two solicitors.<sup>10</sup> It seems possible that there was disquiet amongst the city's working class regarding both the centralisation of power and the fact that so many Labour Party candidates had tenuous links with organised labour or with working class identity in general.<sup>11</sup> There were, however, few if any voices of opposition to this development prior to the 1899 election with the *Leader* portraying the local working class as steadfastly united behind Daly and the Labour Party, while the *Munster News* and, more particularly, the *Limerick Chronicle* gave comparatively scant coverage of the Labour Party election campaign. Collins' contention that the revival of constitutional nationalism in the form of the United Irish League (UIL) caused the demise of the Trades Council undoubtedly has some merit.<sup>12</sup> The (UIL) had established a foothold in the city by July 1899 and was the dominant local political body after the general election of 1900.<sup>13</sup> Certainly, by 1902 the dominance of the UIL meant the withdrawal of support for Labour by the *Leader* and the disintegration of the Labour Party whose leading light, John Daly, increasingly appeared inflexible and overly belligerent. The involvement of the O'Mara family (Nationalist bacon-merchants) with the UIL, which they

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<sup>9</sup> David Murphy, 'Joyce, Michael', in James McGuire and James Quinn (ed), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009) <http://dib.cambridge.org> accessed 10 Aug 2014; Moloney, *Limerick constitutional nationalist, 1898-1918*, pp 79-86.

<sup>10</sup> James Connery TC was a Strand fisherman, a group that occasionally associated with organised labour groups in the city but generally kept to themselves. Daly's purchase of a bakery certainly did not result in him being accepted as a baker and it is noteworthy that, despite his efforts, his nephew Ned Daly – of 1916 fame – was not apprenticed into the bakery trade as his father was not a baker. Thomas Gough was a book-keeper but was recorded at the time of the 1899 election as 'Sec. to the Pork Butchers Society', Moloney, *Limerick constitutional nationalist, 1898-1918*, pp 79-86; McKay, 'Limerick Municipal Elections, January 1899', pp 3-10.

<sup>11</sup> Many trade unionists appeared uneasy with some of the arrangements but it was the Printers (Typographical Society) who were most vocal in this regard and even questioned whether Daly (a lath-splitter who became a bakery owner) had the right credentials to represent labour. Moloney, *Limerick constitutional nationalist, 1898-1918*, pp 50-55.

<sup>12</sup> Collins, *Labour, Church and Nationalism in Limerick*, pp 288-292.

<sup>13</sup> Moloney, *Limerick constitutional nationalist, 1898-1918*, pp 79-85.

soon began to dominate, certainly signalled a return to the pre-1890 paradigm where the local political pecking order closely reflected social class. Once again, constitutional nationalism had become the dominant political movement and the demand for class-based representation had seriously declined.

The most telling indications of Limerick organised labour's political approach throughout the century can be gleaned, not from struggle it waged with the UIL and resurgent constitutional nationalism, but rather from the revolt from *within* the ranks of organised labour and, more particularly, from the unorganised workers ranked below the artisans. There was undoubtedly latent disquiet at the manner in which the Labour Party had chosen professionals ahead of 'honest straightforward trade-unionists' for the municipal elections of January 1899 but the artisan hierarchy chose to ignore the growing grassroots resentment towards their leadership and was caught unawares when a number of Labour nominees were rejected in favour of 'independent' Labour candidates during the March 1899 District Election campaign.<sup>14</sup> Just as many of the political class had discounted the political potential of a coherent artisan class, the same artisans had unwisely assumed the support of the unskilled and unorganised workers. The fact that the latter had achieved political agency was due to a process of identity formation triggered by the growth of musical and sporting clubs in the 1880s. The resultant identity groups, forged by associational culture just as the Congregated Trades had been previously (see Chapter Four conclusion), were determined by loyalty to club and locality as opposed to loyalty to occupation, which characterised the Labour Party artisans. The revolt from below was most palpable in the city's two predominantly working class wards, the Abbey and the Irishtown, where 'independent' Labour candidates were put forward in protest at the

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<sup>14</sup> Moloney, *Limerick constitutional nationalist, 1898-1918*, p. 52. Tom Savage, cabinet-maker, actually did contest the 1899 Municipal Election but polled seventh in a five-seat ward. James Moran, solicitor, polled second in the same ward on a Labour Party ticket and the point made in September 1899 presumably implied that Moran was elected at the expense of Savage, the true trade unionist.

exclusive, almost secretive, nature of the official Labour Party nomination process (carried out in the Mechanics' Institute with only a select committee of artisans in attendance). The contest in the Abbey Ward best illustrated the social divisions in the wider working class community, divisions which undermined the political cohesion of the Labour Party's support base. There the local general labourers and fishermen rejected Labour Party nominee, Patrick Keane, in favour of 'independent' Labour candidate, Patsy McNamara. The former was a baker living in a six-bedroom house situated on a main thoroughfare and was a member of the Athlunkard Boat Club (composed mainly of artisans, pig-buyers and sandmen) whereas the latter was a general labourer living in a one-bedroom house in a laneway and was a member of the more plebeian St. Mary's Band (located close to Athlunkard Boat Club but backed by fishermen and labourers).<sup>15</sup> St. Mary's Secretary, John Sullivan, encapsulated the mood by labelling the Labour Party hierarchy as 'bosses' and introducing the slogans 'Up with democracy' and 'Down with bossism' which defined the alternative new labour identity. Sullivan was clear as to where the problem lay:

It is in the interests of the workingmen of Limerick that the 'ring' who have aspired to boss the show should be smashed and that every man's opinion must be recognised whether he be a trades unionist or not.<sup>16</sup>

Aside from the overly-centralised power structure of the local Labour Party, the assumption that what was good for organised labour was good for the working class as a whole quickly proved divisive. The Mechanics' Institute responded violently to the challenge from below and a number of street battles featured. In one notable case William Doherty, mason, who resided close to the St. Mary's Bandroom in 'the Abbey', accompanied a number of other artisans in an attack on the said Bandroom. A few days later he was assaulted by members of the band in

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<sup>15</sup> McGrath, *Sociability and socioeconomic conditions in St. Mary's Parish*, p. 43.

<sup>16</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 10 Mar 1899.

a counterattack; significantly, two of the men who attacked him resided in the same street as he did, but were not affiliated to any organised labour society and belonged to an identity defined by locality and club rather than trade.<sup>17</sup>

The District Council elections of March 1899, showed evidence of a marked dip in support for the Labour Party relative to the Municipal Elections of two months previously, with Patrick McNamara, of St. Mary's Band topping the poll in the Abbey Ward and non-Labour or 'independent' Labour candidates trouncing Labour candidates in the two other working class wards.<sup>18</sup>

By 1902 constitutional nationalism had replaced liberalism as the safe, rather palatable political stance to rival the political ambitions of labour and advanced nationalism. Collins's study of Limerick highlights the fact that Bishop O'Dwyer and the Limerick clergy, whilst relatively detached from local politics during the 1890s, withdrew completely during the tenure of John Daly's mayoralty (during a period when other churchmen were reaching out to organised labour in recognition of *Rerum Novarum*) when the Labour Party held a majority in the Corporation and the communication between the Corporation and the Catholic hierarchy only resumed when Daly left.<sup>19</sup> The vulnerability of the Labour Party stemmed from the fact that the artisan hierarchy assumed far too early that the entire working class of the city, unionised and unorganised alike, shared their world view and politics. In truth, a core group of politicised artisans – appointed only by their fellow artisans in a vaguely democratic manner –

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<sup>17</sup> McGrath, *Sociability and socioeconomic conditions in St. Mary's Parish*, p. 46.

<sup>18</sup> In the Irishtown Ward Michael Donnelly (IRB/Parnellite publican) polled well above the *de facto* Labour Party leader, John Daly, and his running mate Michael Prendergast, baker (Donnelly received 473 votes as oppose to 344 and 174 for Daly and Prendergast respectively. In the Castle Ward Thomas Donnellan, a farmer and town councillor who had sat in the council since 1891, received 315 votes as oppose to the 212 that Labour candidate David Gilligan received. In The Abbey Ward 'Independent' Labour candidate Patrick 'Patsy' McNamara polled 300 votes and official Labour candidate Patrick Keane 194.

<sup>19</sup> The growth of Catholic guild socialism in the 1890s saw more interaction between church and labour. O'Dwyer had been making some awkward attempts to oversee trade disputes involving the pork butchers and dockers, as London Bishops had in 1889, but he withdrew from organized labour after the creation of the Limerick Labour Party in 1898. Hughes and MacRaild, 'Irish politics and labour', p. 60; Collins, *Labour, church and nationalism in Limerick*, pp 58-65, 84-94, 114-120, 277-282; Moloney, *Limerick constitutional nationalism*, pp 88-93.

had purportedly represented the working class of the city since the 1820s without once consulting the semi-skilled and unskilled who constituted the bulk of that class. The manner in which the Labour election campaigns were run in 1898 and 1899 suggests that the trades, collectively and individually, were either ignorant of, or unconcerned with, those below the artisan class. Aside from the overly-centralised power structure of the local Labour Party, the assumption that what was good for organised labour was good for the working class as a whole quickly proved to be divisive. The pre-election pledge from the Labour candidates to oppose a Limerick tramway project was particularly problematic in this regard.<sup>20</sup> Opposition to the tramways, which culminated in the ‘battle of the trams’, was based on the premise that occupational groups such as the blacksmiths, farriers, carriage-makers, carters and hackney car drivers would be detrimentally affected.<sup>21</sup> There was no consideration on the part of the Labour Party of the unorganised labourers – one of whom commented, ‘I know but too well that there are hundreds of labouring men like myself who are out of employment at the present time, who have wives and children almost starving’ in contrast to the the jarveys who were ‘independent men with houses and land property.’<sup>22</sup> The Ratepayers’ coalition that emerged in local politics in 1899 – large employers and merchants – mercilessly took advantage of the situation by reaching out to the unorganised working class and undermining the authority of the Labour Party leaders who further damaged themselves by depicting the pro-tramway general labourers as something akin to Marx’s *lumpenproletariat* (i.e. a hired underclass).<sup>23</sup> This issue split the Labour Party: critically, John Daly, whilst nominally adopting a neutral stance, was widely

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<sup>20</sup> Plans for a tramway system in Limerick had been voiced since 1883 and local unskilled and semi-skilled labour groups (mainly carters) had expressed their concern at this early point. By the late 1890s the tramway project was more tangible and had attracted significant backing from local sponsors but opposition from organised labour groups remained firm. *Limerick Chronicle*, 4 Dec 1883; *Munster News*, 9, 23 Feb, 12 April 1884.

<sup>21</sup> The ‘battle of the trams’ was a riot which occurred when a pro-tramway rally, consisting mainly of general labourers, was met by an opposing group composed of hackney drivers and carters. The street battle was preceded in the pages of the *Leader* by a war of words which firmly pitted unorganised workers against trade unionists. *Limerick Leader*, 29 Sept 1899, 4 Oct 1899.

<sup>22</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 29 Sept 1899.

<sup>23</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 4 Oct 1899. S Hastings the solicitor defending the jarveys made reference to this.



known to be in favour of the tramway plans and a number of other Labour councillors, notably R. P. O'Connor, printer, were quietly in favour of the scheme.<sup>24</sup> The schism was taken advantage of by Alderman Cleeve – a unionist and central figure of the Ratepayers' Association – who effectively used populist language to support the scheme, stating that he hoped it would 'be of benefit to the working classes of the city.'<sup>25</sup> This marked the beginning of a trend which saw the bulk of the unorganised labouring class and sections of the unionised working class, including many artisans, withdraw their support for the Labour Party. This lack of confidence in the party from within the ranks of labour grew steadily and by January 1901 many of the original core Daly supporters were distinctly uneasy with the direction and policy of the party, so much so that a number of them, most notably James Kett, cooper and Fenian, crossed the floor during the mayoral election and supported unionist merchant Thomas Cleeve in opposition to John Daly.<sup>26</sup> A number of factors led to this development, and certainly Collins's theory that a revival in constitutional nationalism played its part has some credence, but most crucial was fact that the local working class had ceased to believe that they could govern themselves – a collapse in confidence resulting from a political ideology that focused upon the shortcomings of the prevailing orthodoxy but declined to offer clear prognosis.<sup>27</sup> As the Labour Party tore itself apart the ties that had bound artisans together for the best part of a century were exposed for their frailty: the skilled worker affinity, which had always been perceptible if not tangible, almost vanished. Gone too was the ability of the uncomplicated, and yet, idiosyncratic nationalism of the trades to unify the artisan hierarchy and, with that, the rank and file. One particular Town Council meeting witnessed an unprecedented level of disunity amongst the artisan class as Kett and Whelan, both artisans and Fenians, exchanged heated words against a

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<sup>24</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 20 Oct 1899.

<sup>25</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 27 Oct 1899.

<sup>26</sup> Moloney, *Limerick constitutional nationalist, 1898-1918*, p. 52. The fact that Kett worked for the Limerick Market Trustees, of whom the industrialist Cleeve was an individual of some prominence, is further revelatory.

<sup>27</sup> Collins, *Labour, Church and Nationalism in Limerick*, pp 147-49, 288-292.

deafening background of hissing and shouting from within the council chamber as well as from the noisy crowd outside.<sup>28</sup> The meeting eventually closed when nobody could be heard and John O'Brien TC, cooper and Cleeve supporter, was assaulted by sections of the mob attending the meeting.<sup>29</sup> Certainly, it would appear that the wider voting public now required municipal candidates to be men of more substance than the 1899 Labour Party and from 1902 onwards the working class electorate placed more trust in friendly employers than in leaders from within their own class.<sup>30</sup>

### Concluding remarks

To a certain extent the trades defined their own class identity, in another sense the political class defined it for them by excluding them from the centres of power and popular political movements gave them the impetus to mobilise and challenge those same centres of power. In this way their manner of self-identifying changed in accordance with political circumstances: the creation of the Congregated Trades in 1824 – a clear response to O'Connell's Catholic Association and adoption of mass mobilisation as a political technique – invited the artisans to unify for the cause of national politics. Sixty years later the 1880s centralisation of power by the Irish Parliamentary Party, which eliminated this social dynamic, caused the trades to consider issues specific to their class and to further interpret nationalism as a tool for the betterment of their class. The best evidence for this comes from the 1880s National League debates or the vain efforts to launch a House League: the opposition of the retailers and publicans (representing the lowest level of the city's political class) to the interests of organised workers clearly demarcated the class threshold.<sup>31</sup> In one sense this supports the view, explored

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<sup>28</sup> *Nenagh Guardian*, 27 Feb 1901.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> The 1902 Municipal Election resulted in the defeat of a number of Labour Party candidates including James Kett, cooper; John Godsell, baker; James Moran, solicitor; Thomas Gough, secretary to the Pork Butchers Society; William Fitzgerald, plasterer; James Connery, fisherman; John Vaughan, carpenter; William Whelan, fitter; R.P. O'Connor, printer; and Patrick Moloney, painter. *Freeman's Journal*, 17 Jan 1902.

<sup>31</sup> *Munster News*, 9 June 1886.

in the British context by Stedman Jones, that politics defined class. But there were limits to the applicability of this theory in the Limerick context and the journey of Richard Raleigh from operative tobacconist to retailer and Richard Gleeson from carpenter to builder saw both leave the class they came from (see Chapter Six summary and Chapter Seven summary).<sup>32</sup> The trades could form alliances between themselves and like-minded individuals outside of their class, Citizens Club activist Patrick Lynch and popular Fenian John Daly being two cases in point, but the definitions of the artisan class trumped these alliances and despite Daly's close relationship with the bakers his nephew Ned (of 1916 fame) was not allowed to become an apprentice baker as he was not the son of a baker.<sup>33</sup>

The rise and fall of the Limerick Labour Party highlighted inherent weaknesses at the political heart of organised labour in Limerick city. The divisive parliamentary elections of 1858-9, when the politics of the respective candidates was irrelevant, showed how the internal cohesion of the trades was reliant upon the unifying effect of a strong political doctrine. In 1899 they were presented with an occasion where the weakness of the political class was matched, in the wake of the Parnell split, by the weakness of the prevailing political orthodoxy, but they were unable to demonstrate any political programme which could bind the working class of the city together. The skilled and unionised artisan class can be forgiven somewhat in this regard: for most of the century the political ambitions of the classes below them were never a factor as these groups had never achieved political agency. In Cork, Cronin described a similar situation citing the 'narrowness of the skilled men's class awareness' as an impediment to political radicalism.<sup>34</sup> What differentiated the Limerick trades from their brethren elsewhere

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<sup>32</sup> Stedman Jones's work can roughly be applied here, particularly his chapter 'Rethinking Chartism' which stresses that 'political exclusion' was instrumental in forming the identity of the working class who felt obliged to challenge the 'monopolisers of political representation and power.' Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of class: Studies in English working class history, 1832-1982* (Cambridge, 1996), pp 90-178.

<sup>33</sup> Moloney, *Limerick constitutional nationalist, 1898-1918*, pp 79-86; McKay, 'Limerick Municipal Elections, January 1899', pp 3-10.

<sup>34</sup> Cronin, *Country, class or craft*, pp 192-194.

in the country, however, was the scope of their ambitions, in the context of municipal power in the 1890s and, indeed, the extent of their success in the 1899 municipal election, but the subsequent events which facilitated their fall from grace (as detailed in Chapter Seven) only served to highlight that the ‘skilled men’ of Limerick were every bit as narrow in their ‘class awareness.’ We must here, however, acknowledge the success of the Congregated Trades of Limerick, a body that defined and empowered the artisan class more assuredly than any similar organisations in other Irish cities; it was certainly evidence of class awareness (the ability of the trades to detach themselves from divisive 1890s national politics was a notable achievement and an indication of a class that was self-interested) but the siege mentality which underpinned it impeded the widening of this class unit.

Forming the background to the rise and fall of successive political movements was an economic and class rivalry that was most apparent in the electoral contests, nomination processes and political clubs throughout most of the century. The overall trends most evident support the conclusion that the political class – composed mainly of professionals, merchants and small traders with the qualified support of the Catholic clergy – were undoubtedly able to maintain political power due to the limited nature of the electoral franchise. Another contributory factor was the ability of the merchants and industrialists to maintain greater class solidarity in the 1898-1900 period which allowed them to weather the storm (i.e. the Labour Party) and regain some control at local level by the mid-1900s. Most indicative of these trends during the period in question was the opposition to the nationalist Labour Party in 1898 by the middle-class sitting members of the Corporation; the outright refusal on the part of the Catholic bishop and clergy to co-operate in any manner with that party despite its electoral success; and, most tellingly of all, the decision of the sworn Fenian Stephen O’Mara – at the time the most prominent Catholic nationalist in the city, both commercially and politically – to contest the 1899 Municipal Election as a candidate of the Ratepayers’ Association (a.k.a. the ‘Merchant

Party') alongside men whose only common interest with him was based on a similar socio-economic background. When faced with a general class revolt, in a political sense, many of the existing political class were clearly willing to abandon traditional party-political allegiances in an attempt to protect their class's political hegemony. As evidenced by the parliamentary nominees chosen by the political class from the 1840s to the 1880s, relationships founded on old familial ties, shared social class and common commercial interests rivalled and often outweighed devotion to the prevailing political movement/party of the day. In short, the need to withhold political power from the wider working class was an even greater priority for the existing political class than were any purely political objectives.

Equally, the myriad of political battles, squabbles and debates suggest that the political campaigns fought on behalf of the trades of Limerick throughout the nineteenth century were conducted by a political elite from within that group and we cannot assume that the political views expressed by this leadership were shared by other artisans, much less by the wider working class. Throughout the century the entire working class of the city was represented politically by a core group of about ten artisans, many of them transcending the employer-employee divide, and for the majority of that period two or three voices from within this group dominated. This format developed, not as an attempt to develop an inclusive form of democracy in the city, but rather as a way of developing a system efficient enough to combat the hegemony of the traders, professionals and merchants that made up the political class of the city. This approach reflected the limited ambitions of the working class in the 1820s and 30s when only the artisan class could hope to develop any sort of organisation of mutual support amongst workers of a similar trade. The failure of the Labour Party in 1899 to develop any sort of meaningful cohesion was a reflection of the fact that its approach to politics was based upon an early nineteenth century system faced with a predicament it was not designed to resolve. The manner in which the Congregated Trades came to dominate and eventually annex the

Trades Council at a critical political juncture was a crucial development and there is no satisfactory explanation as to why this happened although it appears to have been because the dominant personalities amongst the artisan class were more politically adept and experienced.

The organised labour model spoke of the desire of the late eighteenth century Catholic artisan who (as detailed in Chapter One) yearned, not for a radical new departure, but rather for inclusion in a system that exclusively celebrated the skilled worker and protected him from the non-local, the non-apprenticed and the progressive capitalist. Their overall political philosophy was a simple defensive one which, on a micro level, equated to rigid defence of the craft and, on a macro level, call for protection of native industry. The extent to which the Limerick trades were able to develop this economic nationalism, seemingly without the assistance of anyone outside of their class, was impressive. They failed, however, to adequately communicate with the notable economic nationalists of the day – with the possible exception of Michael Davitt; they remained on the fringe of the 1840s Home Manufacturing movement, content to make independent but parallel arguments; their 1870s encounters with Butt (see Chapter Five) were notable for the fact that both parties utterly failed to appreciate how they shared a similar world view; and, similarly, although their practical ideas in the 1880s had potential they did not take account of like-minded public men such as John Gordon Swift MacNeill.<sup>35</sup>

This aspect of their political outlook should be of particular interest to social and economic historians both for the evidence it provides of an artisan community reacting to change and forming its own independent ideas and for the opportunity it provides to the scholar of Fredrich List's protectionism, Hamilton's 'infant industry' theories and nineteenth century

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<sup>35</sup> MacNeill's work did not have great depth but was easy to read and had the potential to be popular. John Gordon Swift MacNeill, *English interference with Irish industries, passim*.

economic nationalism in general.<sup>36</sup> The political outlook of the Limerick trades – as with other Irish artisan bodies – certainly deserves the attention of the historians of Irish nationalism whilst the area of popular Irish nineteenth century protectionism (not to be associated with Sinn Féin/Fianna Fáil’s twentieth century interpretation of the subject nor Nazi Germany’s collectivist application of economic nationalism) certainly warrants a study in itself.<sup>37</sup> To the labour historian, the case of the Limerick artisans is certainly of interest once one does not assume that British social theories are entirely applicable in the context of an Irish provincial city. Instead, one must recognise the profound and (in the global sense) unusual social and economic conditions to which the British nineteenth century working class was subjected; in this regard the Limerick artisans serve – to use scientific parlance – as the ‘control group’ that remained largely independent of the same social upheaval.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> List’s theories were particularly applicable to Ireland, and may have been plagiarized by Thomas Davis, and identified English industrial strength as a particular problem from small developing countries. Alexander Hamilton was the father of the "infant industries" argument tariff protection. This tied in with Hamilton’s notion of the ‘commercial republic’, an earlier and more elitist argument which favoured tariff protection to favour native mercantile interests. Michael Allen Gillespie, ‘Political parties and the American founding’, Peter W. Schramm, Bradford P. Wilson (eds), *American Political Parties and Constitutional Politics* (Lanham, 1993), pp 21-24; Michael Yaffey, ‘Friedrich List and the cause of Irish hunger’, John Toyle and Helen O’Neill (eds), *A world without famine?* (London, 1998), pp 84-85.

<sup>37</sup> Heilperin distinguishes between ‘old fashioned protectionism’ of the nineteenth century and ‘the new economic nationalism’ of the twentieth century that he associated with collectivism and the desire to infringe on the rights of the individual. Heilperin’s work, much of it relying on Rappard’s earlier work, offers some of the best insights and definitions of the relatively maligned topics of economic nationalism and protectionism. Michael A. Heilperin, *Studies in economic nationalism* (Auburn, 2011), pp 1-30.

<sup>38</sup> The concept of the ‘control group’ is frequently used by social scientists looking to compare one group with another. The same methodology cannot exactly be applied by historians but elements of the concept are certainly relevant to labour historians considering the British and Irish examples. Simeon Yate, *Doing Social Science Research* (London, 2003), pp 17, 68-73.

# Appendices



## Appendix One

Election year	Election candidate	No. of Freeholder votes cast	No. of Freeman votes cast
1812	Lord Glentworth	15	12
	Charles Vereker	15	124
1817	John Tuthill	156	13
	J.P. Vereker	164	352
1818	Thomas Spring Rice	272	21
	J.P. Vereker	279	347
1820	Thomas Spring Rice	535	25
	J.P. Vereker	379	417

Note: Vereker was unseated by petition after the 1820 election as many of his freeman supporters were declared ineligible.

Source: *Elections, Ireland. Returns of the number of electors who polled at the contested elections in Ireland, since 1805; together with the names of the candidates for whom they respectively voted, and the numbers for each candidate; distinguishing, in the cities and counties of cities, the freeholders from the freemen*, p. 16, H.C., 1829 (208), xxii, 1.

## Appendix Two

1817 Election

Occupation/Title	Tuthill	Vereker
Esq.	49	169
Farmer	46	78
Burgess/Corporation	0	37
Gentleman	26	24

Professional	4	17
Clergy	5	28
None stated	28	17
Military	0	18
<b>Artisan/Tradesmen</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>10</b>
Retail/Pawnbroker/Publican/Merchant	21	4
Labourer/Gardener	13	1
Servant/Coachman/Gardeners	6	0
Small Manufacturers	4	0
Miscellaneous	4	0
Sir. (possibly a Knight or Baron)	0	3
M.P.	0	1
Clerk	1	0

Source: *A history of the proceedings at the particularly interesting election for a member to represent the city of Limerick in parliament : containing a full and impartial report of the speeches of the candidates & electors, their places of residence and the quality in which they voted : to which is annexed a copy of Mr. Tuthill's petition to parliament against the legality of the sheriff's return : interspersed with a variety of interesting matter and arranged, so as to give it not only a local, but general importance, (Limerick, 1817), passim.*

### Appendix Three: Parochial election committees and political clubs

#### Parochial and political Clubs

Source	Club member		Occupation or position
6 Nov 1832 LEP	Kelly	Nicholas	Harware merchant
9 Nov 1832 LEP	Potter	Robert	Solicitor
9 Nov 1832 LEP	McNamara	Dean	Catholic Dean
9 Nov 1832 LEP	Sheehy	Fr.	Parish Parish
9 Nov 1832 LEP	Geary	Dan	Newspaper proprietor/printer

9 Nov 1832 LEP	Mahony	T.F.	Cotton manufacturer
30 Nov 1832 LEP	Creagh	Pat William	Linen draper
30 Nov 1832 LEP	Enright	Fr.	Parish Priest , St. Mary's
30 Nov 1832 LEP	Geary	William	Physician
Dec 6 1832 LH	Fisher	James	Bleacher
Dec 6 1832 LH	O'Shaughnessy	J.	Solicitor
18 Dec 1832 LEP	Arthur	Michael	Grocer
21 July 1837 LS	Unthank	John	Cotton manufacturer
21 July 1837 LS	Howley	William	Magistrate and solicitor
21 July 1837 LS	Kelly	John	Deputy Lieutenant
21 July 1837 LS	Roche	Thomas	Banker
21 July 1837 LS	O'farrell	John	Solicitor and PLG
21 July 1837 LS	Furlong	William	Professor and Teacher
21 July 1837 LS	O'Shaughnessy	James	Solicitor
21 July 1837 LS	Goulding	Patrick	Corn merchant and poor law guardian
21 May 1841 REP	Bromell	J	Grocer and Spirit merchant
21 May 1841 REP	Brahan	Fr.	Parish Priest St. Mary's
21 May 1841 REP	Mulcahy	Denis	Herring merchant
25 June 1841 REP	O'Neill	Francis John	Coal Merchant
25 June 1841 REP	Honan	Martin	Mayor, woollen merchant and draper
25 June 1841 REP	O'Hara	Charles	Coal and Iron merchant
25 June 1841 REP	Quin	Michael	Grocer and Spirit merchant
25 June 1841 REP	McNulty	Bernard	Tobacconist proprietor
25 June 1841 REP	Quin	Rev. James	Curate, St. John's
25 June 1841 REP	Kane	Richard	Sec. United General Gas Works Company
25 June 1841 REP	Marshall	Joseph	Auctioneer
25 June 1844 REP	Geary	William	Mayor, Barrington's Hospital doctor
25 June 1844 REP	Cullen	Daniel	Grocer and Spirit merchant
25 June 1844 REP	O'Callaghan	Eugene	Leather merchant
25 June 1844 REP	Lynch	Patrick	Journalist and mineral water manufacturer
25 June 1844 REP	Kelly	Michael	Pawnbroker
14 Aug 1847 NAT	Walnutt	Thomas	Mayor and corn merchant
14 Aug 1847 NAT	Murphy	Joseph	Solicitor
17 May 1879 MN	O'Callaghan	Eugene	Leather merchant
17 May 1879 MN	Cleary	John J.	previously mayor, proprietor of Cruises hotel
17 May 1879 MN	O'Brien	Michael	Boot and Shoemaker business
17 May 1879 MN	Hartney	Michael	Pig Buyer
17 May 1879 MN	Conway	Fr. C	Adm. Parish Priest St. Michael's
17 May 1879 MN	Dundon	John	Solicitor
17 May 1879 MN	Connolly	P. S.	Solicitor
17 May 1879 MN	Hardiman	John	House and land agent
17 May 1879 MN	Riordan	Patrick	Oil and colour merchant
17 May 1879 MN	De Courcy	M.J.	Solicitor
17 May 1879 MN	Kenny	T.H.	Solicitor

17 May 1879 MN	Fitzgerald	D	Parish Priest
17 May 1879 MN	Nolan	Rev. T.	Curate
17 May 1879 MN	Ellard	John	Solicitor and Clerk of Crown and Peace Lim
17 May 1879 MN	Herbert	Patrick	Boot and Shoemaker Business Proprietor
20 Oct 1883 FJ	Dundon	John	Solicitor
20 Oct 1883 FJ	O'Mara	James	Bacon merchant
20 Oct 1883 FJ	Smith	George	Wine and spirit dealer
20 Oct 1883 FJ	O'Brien	M	Town Councillor
20 Oct 1883 FJ	Anglim	Jere	Town Councillor
20 Oct 1883 FJ	Riordan	P	Town Councillor
20 Oct 1883 FJ	McSwiney	P	Town Councillor
20 Oct 1883 FJ	Clune	J	Tobacco merchant
20 Oct 1883 FJ	Begley	D	Grocer and spirit dealer
20 Oct 1883 FJ	Ambrose	Fr.	Curate, St. John's

Guide to newspaper acronyms: FJ – *Freeman's Journal*; MN – *Munster News*; REP – *Limerick Reporter*; Nat – *The Nation*; LS – *Limerick Star and Evening Post*; LEP – *Limerick Evening Post*; LH – *Limerick Herald*.

## Appendix Four: 1899 Municipal Election

### Sarsfield National League: candidates and supporters in 1899 town council election.

Name		Role	Occupation	Address	No. of Rooms	No. in family	Tenement *
Burke	Christopher	<b>Supporter</b>	Book-binder	Bank Place	3	8	5
Carr	Laurence	<b>Candidate</b>	Tobacco Merchant	Patrick Street	7	4	1
Donnelly	Michael	<b>Candidate</b>	grocer/publican	Mungret Street	9	10	1
Earls	John	<b>Supporter</b>	Corporation Clerk	Francis Street	1	4	6
Earls	Francis	<b>Supporter</b>	Compositor	Francis Street	1	4	6
Finn	David	<b>Supporter</b>	Accountant	Killeely	4	6	1
Halpin	Robert	<b>Supporter</b>	Van man	Rutland Street	4	8	6
Keyes	Richard	<b>Supporter</b>	Printer machinist	Sheep Street	2	3	1
O'Kelly	John	<b>Supporter</b>	Accountant	Mulgrave	6	4	1
O'Sullivan	Christopher	<b>Supporter</b>	<i>Limerick Echo</i> owner	Sarsfield Street	7	3	1

\*= The number of households per building, indicating whether or not the person is living in a tenemented building.

### Ratepayers/Merchant Party: candidates and supporters in 1899 town council election.

Name		Role	Occupation	Address	No. of rooms	No. in family	Tenement *
Beauchamp	William	<b>Supporter</b>	solicitor	Mallow Street	10	2	1
Browne	James	<b>Supporter</b>	Architect/Civil engineer	Glentworth Street	10	5	1
Cleeve	Edward B.	Candidate	Condensed Milk Merchant	Farranshone	18	8	1
Day	John	<b>Supporter</b>	Pharmacist	George Street	12	8	1
Dundon	John	<b>Supporter</b>	Solicitor	George Street	15	13	1
Earles	Hugh	Supporter	Bacon manager	Kilrush, Limerick	9	5	1
Fitzgerald	Cornelius	<b>Supporter</b>	Grocer assistant	Ellen Street	7	8	1
Flynn	James	Supporter	Hotel owner	George Street	65	17	1
Frost	William	<b>Candidate</b>	grocer/publican	Ellen Street	10	9	1
Goodbody	Gerald Ernest	<b>Candidate</b>	Merchant	Munster Terrace	43	6	1
Goodbody	J E	Candidate	Corn merchant	Farranshone	17	11	1
Griffin	Daniel	<b>Supporter</b>	Cooper	Denmark Street	4	7	4
Hartigan	Patrick	Supporter	Hotel owner	George Street	49	23	2
Hickey	Robert	Supporter	Butter merchant	Thomas Street	13	12	1
Holliday	William	Candidate	Seed oil merchant	Corbally	14	12	1
Kennedy	F.G.	<b>Candidate</b>	Agent for Guinness	Shelbourne house	25	13	1
Kirby	Johanna	<b>Supporter</b>	Shop Keeper	Rutland Street	3	1	3
Lee	Sam Edward	<b>Candidate</b>	Foundry owner	North Strand	12	6	1
Long	EJ	Candidate	Leather merchant	South Circular Road	9	7	1
Matterson	Joseph	<b>Candidate</b>	Merchant	Castletroy House	26	14	1
McNamara	John	<b>Supporter</b>	Hotel Keeper	Catherine Street	11	12	1
Moore	Catherine	<b>Supporter</b>	House Holder	Mallow Street	10	5	1
Nash	Vincent	Supporter	Land agent	George Street	15	10	1
Nelson	David	<b>Candidate</b>	seed merchant	Patrick Street	7	5	1
O'Brien	John	<b>Supporter</b>	Gunmaker	Patrick Street	4	1	2
O'Callaghan	Eugene	Candidate	Tanner	Quinn Street	9	3	1
O'Mara	Stephen	Candidate	Bacon Merchant	Hartstonge Street Upper	13	6	1
O'Meally	Patrick	Candidate	Publican	High Street	13	10	1
Place	John Alfred	Supporter	Manager	Corbally	15	10	1
Power	John Francis	Candidate	Merchant	Ballinacurra	11	6	1
Roche	James H	Candidate	Flour merchant	William Street	8	11	1
Russell	John N.	<b>Supporter</b>	Flour Merchant	Tivoli, Kilrush Little	15	4	1
Ryan	Michael	<b>Supporter</b>	Grocer and Wine Merchant	Sarsfield Street	9	9	1
Shaw	Alexander	Candidate	Bacon Merchant	Roxborough	12	16	1
Spain	Michael	Candidate	Bacon Merchant	Military road	12	5	1
Spring	Michael	<b>Supporter</b>	Clock-maker	Ellen Street	4	3	3
Stokes	William L.	Candidate	Butter Merchant	Barrington Street	14	5	1
Toomey	Alice	<b>Supporter</b>	Hotel Keeper	Nelson Steeet	28	12	1

\*= The number of households per building, indicating whether or not the person is living in a tenemented building.

**Labour Party: candidates and supporters in 1899 town council election.**

Name		Role	Occupation	Address	No. of rooms	No. in family	Tenement *
Barry	James	<b>Candidate</b>	horse dealer	St. Alphonsus Terrace	8	4	1
Bernard	Thomas	<b>Supporter</b>	Photographer	Rutland Street	6	8	1
Bourke	James	<b>Candidate</b>	Tailor	Anne-street	4	4	2
Bourke	Michael	<b>Supporter</b>	Tinsmith	Arthur's Quay	1	2	5
Carrick	Patrick	<b>Supporter</b>	Green Grocer	Roches Street	5	3	1
Connery	James	<b>Candidate</b>	Fisherman	Thomondgate	4	9	1
Conway	Frank	<b>Supporter</b>	Shopman	Francis Street	1	3	6
Daly	John	<b>Candidate</b>	Bakery owner	William Street	10	13	1
Daly	Charles	<b>Supporter</b>	Miller	Clare Street	6	4	1
Dineen	James	<b>Supporter</b>	Trade Baker	Nicholas Street	6	10	2
Donovan	Thomas	<b>Supporter</b>	Pig Buyer	Browne's Lane	6	7	1
Fitzgerald	William	<b>Candidate</b>	Plasterer	Athlunkard Street	3	9	1
Gaisford	GEorge	<b>Supporter</b>	Tailor	Sarsfield Street	2	3	3
Godsell	John	<b>Candidate</b>	Baker	Glentworth Street upper	8	4	1
Hassett	James	<b>Candidate</b>	Horse Dealer/Publican	High Road	7	6	1
Joyce	Michael	<b>Candidate</b>	River pilot	Arthur's Quay	2	5	5
Keane	Patrick	<b>Supporter</b>	Baker	Ahern's Row	6	11	1
Kennerk	John	<b>Supporter</b>	Van man	Roxboro Row	3	8	1
Kett	James	<b>Candidate</b>	Cooper	Henry Street	6	6	1
King	Patrick	<b>Supporter</b>	Blacksmith	Watergate	4	10	1
Lyons	James	<b>Supporter</b>	General Labourer	Sheep Street	1	3	5
Madden	John	<b>Candidate</b>	Saddler	High Street	5	8	1
McCarthy	George	<b>Candidate</b>	law clerk & spirit dealer	Shannon Street	8	5	1
McMahon	William	<b>Supporter</b>	Plasterer	Emly Street	2	5	1
Meade	Patrick	<b>Supporter</b>	Tailor	Ellen Street	7	8	1
Moloney	Thomas	<b>Supporter</b>	House painter	Bank Place	4	11	5
Moran	James	<b>Candidate</b>	solicitor	Catherine Street	10	5	1
Murphy	Michael	Candidate	Tailor	Clare Street	4	10	1
O'Brien	John	<b>Supporter</b>	Docker	New Street	2	2	6
O'Mara	John	<b>Supporter</b>	General Labourer	Sheep Street	2	9	1
O'Neill	Thomas	<b>Supporter</b>	Carpenter	Sandmall	4	8	1
O'Brien	Jeremiah	<b>Candidate</b>	Sawyer	Roches Street	2	6	1
O'Brien	John	<b>Candidate</b>	Cooper	O'Donoghue's Lane	4	5	1
O'Brien	John	Candidate	Docker	New Street	2	2	6
O'Brien	Jeremiah	Supporter	Labourer	Wickham Street	4	7	2
O'Carroll	Michael	<b>Supporter</b>	Baker	Boherbouy	6	8	1
O'Connor	Richard P.	Candidate	Printer	Richmond Street	6	3	1
O'Connor	Michael	<b>Supporter</b>	Carter	Wilkinsons Bow	2	6	1

Prendergast	Thomas	Candidate	baker	Edward Street	6	13	1
Prendergast	Michael	Candidate	Baker	Aherns Bow*	6	9	1
Quilty	Joseph	Supporter	Shipping Agent	Roxboro Road	3	7	1
Savage	Thomas	Candidate	cabinet-maker	Bedford Row	8	10	1
Shanahan	John	Supporter	Sand merchant	The Abbey	3	7	1
Slattery	John	Candidate	Shop porter	Ball-alley place	2	2	1
Talbot	William	Supporter	Cycle Maker	Bedford Row	10	7	1
Vaughan	John	Candidate	Carpenter	High Road	3	4	1
Whelan	William	Candidate	Fitter	Mountpleasant avenue	5	9	1

\*= The number of households per building, indicating whether or not the person is living in a tenemented building

### **Town councillors seeking re-election who were not clearly aligned to any party.**

Name		Role	Occupation	Address	No. of rooms	No. in family	Tenement *
Anglim	Jeremiah	<b>Candidate</b>	Soap Merchant	William Street	8	5	1
Clune	John	Candidate	Tobacco manufacturer	Lower William Street	9	7	1
Counihan	William	<b>Candidate</b>	solicitor	George Street	11	6	1
Counihan	W.	Candidate	Solicitor	George Street	11	6	1
Cusack (Mayor)	M.	Candidate	House decorator and painter	George Street	12	10	1
Donnellan	Thomas	Candidate	Farmer	New Road	2	7	1
Gaffney	James	Candidate	Solicitor	Farranshone More	12	3	1
Gleeson	Richard	Candidate	Carpenter	Punches Row	5	3	1
Hall	Ambrose	<b>Candidate</b>	House agent	North Strand	9	4	1
Hickey	John	<b>Candidate</b>	grocer	Mungret Street	8	4	1
Maguire	Peter	<b>Candidate</b>	Hay exporter	New Street	6	5	1
McDonnell	Patrick	Candidate	Publican	Nelson Street	7	9	1
Nash	Ralph	<b>Candidate</b>	Solicitor	Corbally	8	4	1
O'Connell	William	<b>Candidate</b>	Victualler	Thomas Street	8	5	1

\*= The number of households per building, indicating whether or not the person is living in a tenemented building

### **Builders Party candidates for 1899 town council elections**

Name		Role	Occupation	Address	No. of rooms	No. in family	Tenement *
Hayes	James	<b>Candidate</b>	builder	Pery Street/Reeve's Path	7	4	1
Hayes	John	<b>Candidate</b>	builder	Military Road	10	3	1

\*= The number of households per building, indicating whether or not the person is living in a tenemented building



**Appendix Five: Organised violence in the city area (urban area of the city excl. liberties) Sept 1819 – Nov 1821**

<b>Description of violence</b>	<b>Date of Report</b>	<b>Other details</b>
A number of soldiers attacked in similar fashion on a number of different occasions	Sept 1819	Similar pattern of violence, two or three attackers, one armed with an iron cudgel to fracture the skull and another armed with a knife to inflict facial wounds, presumably with the intention of sending a message.
Arms raid	Sept 1819	
Master tailor attacked	Nov 1819	Skull fractured but the accomplice was disturbed before he could inflict the facial wound. Extensive damage to the property. Attackers described as ‘well dressed.’ Master tailor had been employing ‘strangers’ for quite some time.
‘Foreign’ wear and apparel destroyed.	22 Jan 1820	Gang estimated to be ‘more than fifty’ in number. ‘Foreign’ wear was from Bandon and Cork.
A number of master artisans and workmen deemed to be ‘colts’ are attacked on the	12 Feb 1820	Approximately four properties extensively damaged and the wife of one of the colts was severely beaten. The targets included

same day in rapid succession.		individuals from different trades. This was the first time that the term ‘United Trades’ was applied to a group of combiners by the press.
A number of outrages committed by ‘trades people.’	11 Mar 1820	The outrages were described by the <i>Chronicle</i> as being carried out by ‘a riotous gang under the pretence of dictatory laws to the trades people.’
Large crowds parading streets and ordering employers to discharge non-natives	1 July 1820	Crowds consisted of labourers and skilled artisans and prompted the five magistrates of the city to issue a notice ordering them to desist.
Master coachmakers attacked	12 Aug 1820	The two master coachmakers, James Quinlan and Standish Stephenson, were first warned in writing and then attacked by a gang numbering in the hundreds who extensively damaged both properties and injured both parties before departing.
‘Foreign’ wear and apparel destroyed.	16 Aug 1820	Gang estimated to be approximately four hundred in number.
A number of master artisans and workmen deemed to be ‘colts’ are attacked on the	Oct 1820	A large number of artisans, employers, workplace machines along with business and residential premises were attacked. The

same day in rapid succession.		victims in this case include two master chandlers, an iron manufacturer, a master nailor and three operative smiths. A number of military personnel were injured trying to prevent the attack.
Master Baker attacked	29 Nov 1820	According to the victim, Thomas Russell, the military were present but did not intervene, apparently because no High Constable or magistrate was present. Extensive damage to property
Master Baker attacked	13 Jan 1820	The victim again was Thomas Russell. His wife died during the attack, possibly of a heart attack.
Operative Tailor fatally attacked	24 Jan 1820	Axe used in attack. William McNamara was later convicted, the guilty party was a tailor.
Soldier attacked	24 Oct	Soldier was alone when attacked, left senseless and disposed of his weapons.
Soldier attacked	17 Nov 1821	Soldier was guarding stores before being shot and gravely wounded

**Appendix Six: Organised Violence in the Rural Hinterlands (within the liberties or 15Km of city centre) Sept 1819 – Nov 1821**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Description of violence</b>	<b>Date of Report</b>	<b>Other details</b>
Lemonfield (Liberties near Raheen)	Arms raid	Oct 6 1819	The location and timing of this attack suggests that it was carried out by a group from the city area who attacked this location on their way to Clarina (see below)
Clarina (8.5 Km from modern city centre)	Arms raid	Oct 6 1819	
Kilpeacon, (Near Crecora, 11 Km from modern city centre)	Arms raid	Oct 16 1819	
Ballyseeda (Liberties near Kilbane)	Arms raid	Nov 24 1819	
Ballynanty (Liberties)	Arms raid/threatening attack	Nov 24 1819	

Roxborough (Liberties)	Attack on 'strangers' who are ordered to leave.	Feb 26 1820	
Meelick, Co. Clare (7 km from modern city centre)	Land turned up	Mar 1 1820	Accompanied by threatening notice Signed 'Captain Ribbin man [sic]'
Newcastle (Liberties)	Land turned up	Mar 18 1820	Threatening notice left
Mungret (Liberties)	Arms raid	Mar 29 1820	
Loughmore (Liberties, Raheen area)	Arms raid	Mar 29 1820	
Clarina (8.5 Km from modern city centre)	Arms Raid	1 April 1820	Perpetrators apprehended just outside city.
Patrickswell (13 Km from modern city centre)	Strangers warned to leave.	April 26 1820	Threatening notice signed by Capt. Moonlight.
Roxborough (Liberties)	Strangers asked to leave	July 5 1820	Threatening notice 'Notice to all strangers to go home to their own places before this day week; or positively any person remaining will die a diabolical dead [sic].

			Given under my hand this 2 <sup>nd</sup> day of July, 1820, Captain Boneall.’
Ballyseeda (liberties near Kilbane)	man using plough is threatened as he did not employ affiliated labourers instead.	Oct 20 1820	
Ballymore (Liberties)	Threatening notice	Jan 24 1821	All strangers leave this area, signed the Ballymore Land Head Quarters Committee
Ballinacurra Bowman (liberties)	Arms Raid	Feb 21 1821	A large number of firearms taken from the house of Richard Vokes, a city high constable.
Lifford (Liberties, Ballinacurra area)	Arms Raid	April 7 1821	A number of properties attacked, threatening notice left on gate of one house, ‘I Captain Stepwright do show you the honour to give you notice, to send by the bearers the gun and pistols

			<p>I left in your house last Wednesday night as I showed the worthy gentleman, the Roman Catholic Clergyman, the honour not to disturb him when I entered the room he lay in, so therefore as I showed you the honour send there now to me or if not I will re-visit your place in a more terrible manner than before. I need say no more but that my appearance is worse than my threatening. By so doing, I will remain yours,</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Captain Stepwright of the Corsican Corps.</p> <p>The arms or Death, take your choice.'</p>
Cunnigar (liberties)	Arms Raid	April 11 1821	Torrance household attacked and one raider

			shot. Mrs Torrance later killed in retaliation.
Glounagross (Co. Clare, described as 'near the city')	Arms raid	April 14 1821	Perpetrator is one Thomas Purcell, also involved with the United Trades.
Newcastle (Liberties)	Livestock maimed	8 Sept 1821	
Fort (near Artillery Barracks in the Liberties)	Arms Raid	17 Oct 1821	
Loughmore (Liberties, Raheen area)	Attack on soldier	Oct 24 1821	
Kilpeacon (close to Crecora in the county. 11 Km from modern city centre)	Arms raid	Oct 24 1821	A large number of 'gentlemen's properties' raided in the area on same day. 12 houses in total in the same area robbed of arms within a week.
Ballinacurra (liberties)	Arms Raids	31 Oct 1821	A number of properties in the area attacked.
Roxborough (liberties)	Arms Raid	3 Nov 1821	



Greenpark (liberties, Ballinacurra area)	Arms Raid	7 Nov 1821	
Milford House (Liberties)	Arms raid	14 Nov 1821	

### Appendix Seven: Ribbon oath found in Sixmilebridge in 1823

Found in the possession of a man in Sixmilebridge – which appears to have been an integral part of the Limerick Ribbon network – and it very much suggests the presence of Ribbonism:

[Upon invoking the Trinity] I will be true and steadfast to my Brothers of the society, dedicated to St. Patrick the Holy Patron of Ireland, is all things lawful and not otherwise; and that I will duly and regularly attend when my lawful Superior thinks proper and concern myself to the regulations made by them so long as those made may by intrust conform think proper.

That I will not provoke, challenge or fight any of my Brothers, if a Brother I shall aid according to circumstances, give the earliest information aiding him with my sincere friendship when in distress.

That I will not admit any person or persons of a bad or suspicious character into our Honourable Board, knowing him to be such and that I will endeavour to propagate brotherly[?] laws using any of my acquaintances that may be thought worthy of.

At any of our meetings I will not drink to intoxication so as to endanger myself to disclose of names, regulations or members thereof.

In town or country that I will give the preference to dealing to any one attached to our material interest according as circumstances afford me.

That I will not withdraw myself from the Hon Society in joining a Society where persons of other denominations are made may the censure of God's judgement in its considerable mercy, not meaning trade society or soldiers.

I A.B. have made the above promise of my own free will and accord may God endeavour me to fulfil the same may God protect our friendship and grant us to live in a state of Grace. Amen.

Source: *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 April 1823.

Note: The Oath was almost identical to one used as evidence during the trial of Dublin Ribbon leader Michael Keenan, the notable difference being the fact that the Dublin oath began with a pledge to the Monarch, see *Report of the trial of Michael Keenan for administering an unlawful oath*, p. 48.

## Appendix Eight: Population data for Limerick city, 1841-1901

Places of Birth	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901
Limerick city & co.	42,552	40,319	34,344	30,624	29,367	28,437	30,260
Rest of Munster	4,023	10,103	6,259	5,033	4,862	4,334	3,553
Leinster	675	929	1,110	1,156	1,138	1,331	1,774
Ulster	208	256	385	322	343	366	322
Connacht	297	484	400	357	352	367	381
England & Wales	369	774	1,444	1,300	1,841	1,631	1,264
Scotland	185	248	213	164	199	208	160
Rest of World	82	335	321	392	453	485	437
Total	48,391	53,448	44,476	39,348	38,555	37,159	38,151
Limerick city born %	87.90%	75.50%	76.40%	77.80%	76.40%	77.10%	79.82%
Military barracks				1188	1405	606	1104

Source: *Report of the commissioners appointed to take the census of Ireland, for the year 1841*, H.C. 1843 [504], pp 555-56, xxiv.1; *The census of Ireland for the year 1851. Part VI. General report*, H.C. 1856 [2134], pp 742-43, xxxi.1; *The census of Ireland for the year 1861. Part V. General report*, H.C. 1863 [3204-IV], pp 675-76, lxi.1; *Census of Ireland, 1871. Part I. Area, houses, and population: also the ages, civil condition, occupations,*

*birthplaces, religion, and education of the people. Vol. II. Province of Munster, H.C. 1873* [C.873], pp 644-45, lxxii pt.i.1, lxxii pt.ii.1; *Census of Ireland, 1881 Part I. Area, houses, and population: also the ages, civil or conjugal condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion, and education of the people. Vol. II. Province of Munster, H.C. 1882* [C.3148], pp 742-746, lxxvii.1; *Census of Ireland, 1891. Part I. Area, houses, and population; also the ages, civil or conjugal condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion, and education of the people. Vol. II. Province of Munster, H.C. 1892* [C.6567], pp 749-53, xci.1; *Census of Ireland, 1901. Part I. Area, houses, and population: also the ages, civil or conjugal condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion, and education of the people. Vol. II. Province of Munster, H.C. 1902* [Cd. 1058], pp 916-920, cxxiv, cxxv.

## Appendix Nine: Population data for Limerick according to occupational breakdown, 1831-1891

	1831	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891
Bakers	118	113	171	190	159	171	165
Black smiths	218	196	158	178	157	119	114
cabinetmakers	88	115†	68	74	87	88	78
Carpenters	311	347	546	269	253	292	272
Coachmakers	48	39	27	54	75	59	68
Coopers	248	240	151	174	154	110	129
Masons/bricklayers	177	162	159	131	120	165	90
Painters, house and coach	104	128	121	143	131	96	109
Printers	41	61	61	81	59	76	84
Saddlers & harnessmakers	54	67	47	53	59	53	48
Sawyers	92	99	97	269	50	46	37
Shipwrights/boatbuilders	18	65	114	94	34	41	19
Shoe & bootmakers	587	544	553	581	464	408	194
Slaters & plasterers	121	141	115	82	80	80	64
Stonecutters	89	81	87	97	71	75	50
Tailors	408	438	300	375	302	210	210
Tallow chandlers	51	58	61	42	34	19	5
Tanner	22	5	30	18	32	30	21
Tin-plate worker	0	42	43	60	47	0	50
Tobacconists	58	56	42	97	111	93	39
Weavers total	198	139	146	77	18	2	2

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Rules and regulations of the United Smiths Benevolent Sick and Mortality Society, 1861, bound pamphlet entitled *Nineteen Limerick printings* in the Limerick City Library Local Studies Section.

*A history of the proceedings at the particularly interesting election for a member to represent the city of Limerick in parliament : containing a full and impartial report of the speeches of the candidates & electors, their places of residence and the quality in which they voted : to which is annexed a copy of Mr. Tuthill's petition to parliament against the legality of the*

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