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Cover design by Jennifer McCaffrey and Nora McGillicuddy, Limerick School of Art and Design, Limerick Institute of Technology. The cover incorporates the concepts of past, present and future, which is depicted, firstly by the use of the Buddhist symbol Aum. The idea is secondly represented by the illustrative heads looking in different directions. They symbolise the search for history by past, present and future historians.

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Foreword

History Studies was founded to publish the work of young scholars and to provide an opportunity to understand how the historian communicates original work. I am delighted to see that it remains true to these original ambitions, and congratulate the editors on successfully attracting, editing and publishing the work of five historians found here as volume twenty-one.

The editing and publishing of a journal is no easy task, but the editors have done it with energy and skill, and have produced an attractive and appealing edition. As the process has always involved online correspondence, the impact of the virus that swept the world in 2020 did not affect its production. Unfortunately, it will not be possible to launch the journal as we have done on every other occasion, though the virtual world provides, if somewhat unsatisfactory, alternative.

A sense that we are living at a time of social and political crisis has inspired this volume's theme. The five articles all examine particular moments of crisis, when unexpected events obliged individuals and groups to respond in varying ways. Unsurprisingly, the 1918 'Spanish Influenza' is subject of renewed attention, and particularly the role played by Irish newspapers in mediating it. At a more personal level, the correspondence of family members reveals the very intimate crisis faced by individuals. The ever-present possibility of death during crisis sharpened emotions and sensibilities. Those involved in the Irish revolutionary war of 1919-21 resorted to the supernatural as they faced the possibility of death. However, crisis can also provide moments of opportunity. During the First World War women embraced many of the openings that were created as a result of men leaving for the battle lines. The

final contribution brings the reader to the 1970s and the challenges faced by the Catholic Church as a result of the Northern Ireland conflict.

Readers will have plenty to consider after reading these contributions, which, in turn, might stimulate further discussion and historical research.

Dr David Fleming

Head

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Editorial

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus leading to a global pandemic, the year 2020 has been a taxing experience for many across the world. It has affected both the physical and mental health of individuals, while impacting on entire nations socially, economically, and politically. Befitting current global events, we, the editors, chose 'In times of crisis' as the theme for this volume. Articles for this volume have been drawn from both alumni and current postgraduate students based at different institutions in Munster.

This volume begins with two articles which discuss topics relating to a former devastating crisis, the Influenza pandemic of 1918-19 (more commonly known as the Spanish flu). The first discusses how media coverage of the disease could cause alarm, while at other times it could be used to prevent panic. The second article is based on the personal correspondence between a man, who was serving abroad with the Australian Imperial Force, and his future wife, who was writing to him about how the disease was affecting the people around her in County Limerick. The remaining three articles cover crises of a separate nature with each contributor discussing a different consequence of warfare. One discusses the employment opportunities made available to women during World War I, while also highlighting the unfavourable conditions and consequences of their employment. The next article explains how supernatural phenomena were a psychological coping mechanism for Irish revolutionaries who were faced with the prospect of death. The final article in this volume discusses how three Irish priests sought to address the abuses against Catholic internees during the Northern Ireland conflict.

As editors, we wish to thank, first and foremost, Dr David Fleming, Head of the Department of History, for his guidance, advice and support throughout the

production of this volume, as well as the financial contribution he granted on behalf of the Department of History. We would also like to express our deepest gratitude for the continuing financial support offered to us to by Dr Niamh NicGhabhann, Assistant Dean of Research of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. We extend this gratitude to Dr Niamh Lenahan and Anne Marie O'Donnell who continue to offer their support and encouragement. The editors also extend their gratitude to the President of the University of Limerick, Professor Kerstin Mey, and to the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Professor Helen Kelly-Holmes. Finally, we wish to thank the contributors for all their hard work in producing the outstanding articles issued in this volume.

The editors:

Milena Cosentino (UL)

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Newspaper reporting during the 1918 Influenza epidemic in Ireland

Luke Watson

The Influenza of 1918 (Spanish Flu) was one of the most significant pandemics of the twentieth century. Almost uniquely, it was the young and healthy who were most adversely affected, rather than the old and the ill. The pandemic caused a great deal of panic and uncertainty across the globe and exacted a high death toll amongst affected populations. In Ireland, as elsewhere, the disease is generally considered to have endured three waves: one initial surge in the Summer of 1918, a major surge in the late-Autumn of 1918, and a final surge in the Spring of 1919. During all three of these surges, the media and, most notably, the newspapers, were the public's main insight into the spread of the disease and its impact on the country. The newspaper coverage of the disease was a significant aspect of the public's understanding of the epidemic, and though the press was at times alarmist, it generally made an effort to contain public panic. During this time of crisis and panic, newspapers were key avenues for the distribution of public health notices, and they made a distinct effort to reassure the Irish populace, even despite occasional sensationalist reporting on the pandemic. This article will first offer some context regarding the Spanish Flu, then examine the extent to which Irish newspapers were deliberately alarmist and sensationalist in their reportage during its spread in the country. Thereafter, it will

assess arguments and evidence to the contrary, in particular analysing the explicit efforts made by print media to contain public anxieties.

The epidemic known to history as the ‘Spanish Flu’ was a particularly virulent, and later particularly lethal, strain of the Influenza virus which spread across the world from mid-1918 to early-1919. The Spanish Flu is most notable because of its lethality amongst the young and physically fit - individuals who would normally be largely unfazed by seasonal bouts of influenza who died in largely unprecedented numbers during the epidemic. It is believed that this was a result of the disease turning the body’s immune system on itself, rendering it more deadly for those with robust immune systems.¹ Although the exact death toll from the epidemic is unknown, it is generally agreed that over the course of its spread, the Spanish Flu killed at least 40 million people.² The first wave of the disease in the Summer of 1918 was not particularly lethal, but it was highly contagious. The later second and third waves, however, were made noteworthy by the high death tolls associated with them. As Mark Osborne Humphries writes, ‘The first wave is said to have caused few deaths but much sickness; it would probably have gone unnoticed in history were it not for the second and more deadly autumn wave between August and December 1918’.³

The origins of the Spanish Flu are still a matter of debate in the historiography of the pandemic. The 1918 Influenza epidemic’s title, ‘the Spanish Flu’ is derived from the fact that Spain, neutral in the first World War, was the only European nation affected by the disease to be publishing accounts of its spread during its first wave.

¹ Mark Osborne Humphries, ‘Paths of infection: the First World War and the origins of the 1918 Influenza pandemic’ in *War in history*, xxi, 1 (2013), pp 55-81: 59.

² Ida Milne, *Stacking the coffins: Influenza, war and revolution in Ireland, 1918-9* (Manchester, 2018), pp 1-2.

³ Humphries, ‘Paths of infection’, p. 56.

The other, warring, European nations censored any news stories which might hurt morale, even though they were equally as affected.⁴ Despite this, the disease's origins in Europe are a contentious issue. Three possible points of origin for the disease were isolated in 1927 by Edwin Oakes Jordan: military camps in Great Britain and France in 1916-17; Haskell, Kansas in the United States in March 1918; or China in the Winter of 1917-18.⁵ A commonly asserted theory is that the disease was brought to Europe by American soldiers arriving to fight in the war, with the first 'unusual' outbreaks of influenza in Europe occurring in Brest in early April 1918, and appearing in the French and British armies thereafter by mid-April.⁶ There are historians who argue for a European origin to the disease, however. Ida Milne, for example, emphasises the evidence that suggests that there may have been outbreaks of the disease in France and Great Britain in 1916-17.⁷ On top of this, there are even a small cadre of historians who argue for the Asiatic origins of the virus. Mark Osborne Humphries, almost uniquely, raises the less popular Chinese origin of the disease as being the most likely candidate, arguing that it spread through the mobilisation of the Chinese Labour Corps from Asia to Europe and America.⁸ He argues that, although the outbreak of influenza in Kansas in the United States was the first time the disease was reported amongst the civilian population, this was not the origin point of the disease, pointing out that there were other waves of the disease in the US before this, suggesting that the disease had its origins elsewhere.⁹

⁴ John M. Barry, *The great Influenza: the epic story of the deadliest plague in history* (New York, 2005), p. 171.

⁵ Humphries, 'Paths of infection', p. 59.

⁶ Barry, *The great Influenza*, p. 170.

⁷ Milne, *Stacking the coffins*, p. 7.

⁸ Humphries, 'Paths of infection', pp 64-5.

⁹ Humphries, 'Paths of infection', p. 64.

Whatever its specific origins, it remains the case that by the Summer of 1918, the so-called ‘Spanish Flu’ was active in Europe. This particular strain of influenza was initially quite mild in its symptoms, despite being very virulent in its spread. It was such that many doctors doubted whether it was influenza at all, owing to its short duration and relative lack of complications. In one example, an outbreak in the British Navy resulted in 10,313 sailors falling ill, but only four dying.¹⁰ The initial wave in the Summer of 1918 died down again by August, with the British army command declaring on 10 August that the epidemic was over.¹¹ The second wave began in late-August and early-September, with its lethality rapidly ramping up from mid-September onwards. In the United States, for example, in ten days from the end of September and into the start of October, the epidemic went from a few hundred civilian cases and one or two deaths a day, to hundreds of thousands ill and hundreds of deaths each day.¹²

The spread of the disease in Ireland more or less mirrors the pattern visible elsewhere across the globe, with one notable exception from the established trend. Rather than being easily demarcated into three distinct waves as elsewhere, Ireland’s three surges flowed into one another. Caitriona Foley writes that influenza was an ‘almost constant presence in Ireland from June 1918 to May 1919’. The first wave struck in the early weeks of the Summer of 1918, and abated for the most part by August, as occurred elsewhere. The second wave emerged in late September and persisted into the final weeks of 1918. However, unlike in other countries the second wave did not dissipate entirely by the time the epidemic entered its third wave, making

¹⁰ Barry, *The great Influenza*, p. 172.

¹¹ Barry, *The great Influenza*, p. 174.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 221.

the temporal boundary between the two less clear.¹³ Over the course of its spread, the Spanish Flu in Ireland killed more than 20,000 people, and infected between 600,000 and 800,000.¹⁴

In Ireland, there is a distinct overlap between the history of the influenza pandemic and major events in Irish political history. The Spanish Flu itself arrived just after the ‘German Plot’ arrests were being carried out, and was a major feature in the news even during the General Election of 1918.¹⁵ Caitriona Foley notes that the fact that the Spanish Flu was most lethal to those between the ages of twenty and forty stood out to many at the time, introducing a particular melancholy tone to the public reaction.¹⁶ As early as July 1918, the press had started to describe the disease as a ‘plague’, wording which Ida Milne argues had ‘significant resonance’ with the public.¹⁷

During this period of heightened uncertainty, the press frequently came under fire for being sensationalist and alarmist: local authorities often accused journalists of deliberately taking sensationalist angles in their reporting on the epidemic, and the medical community was quick to accuse the media of inciting fear.¹⁸ In late 1918, Dr George Peacocke explicitly blamed the media for alarming the public and stirring up panic.¹⁹ Lynn Buckley suggests that this tension between the press and the medical community was in no small part caused by the frequent ‘advice’ columns which appeared in newspapers. She suggests that these columns, which purported to offer

¹³ Caitriona Foley, *The last Irish plague: the great flu epidemic in Ireland, 1918-9* (Dublin, 2011), p. 14.

¹⁴ Foley, *The last Irish plague*, p. 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁶ Foley, *The last Irish plague*, p. 5.

¹⁷ Milne, *Stacking the coffins*, pp 23-4.

¹⁸ Foley, *The last Irish plague*, p. 75.

¹⁹ Foley, *The last Irish plague*, p. 69.

treatments and remedies, aggravated the medical community, contributing to the tension between them and the media.²⁰ This issue of responsibility for causing fear was by no means exclusive to the world outside the press either. During the second wave in October 1918, the newspapers themselves became increasingly filled with conjecture and debate about what measures should be taken and, significantly, who to blame for the spread of panic.²¹

This tension in the public sphere surrounding the media's culpability is particularly significant. Milne argues that at the height of the second wave, in the last week of October and the first week of November, even restrained papers became alarmist, describing the drama and severe conditions of the pandemic under provocative and unusually large headlines.²² In particular, the press frequently focused on the more grim and harrowing aspects of the disease: journalists reporting on it often went into explicit detail of its symptoms, in particular noting the discolouration of the bodies of some victims.²³ Indeed, the articles concerning the epidemic during this week made frequent use of inflammatory and alarmist language. One article in the *Irish Times* employs such phrases as 'the ravages of the prevailing malady' while it chastises the public for continuing to meet in crowds, thereby heightening the risk of spreading the infection.²⁴ Another writes that 'the influenza epidemic still maintains its deadly grip on Dublin...neither in malignancy nor incidence does [the epidemic] appear to be lessening'.²⁵ This was not limited to the *Irish Times* either. At the same time, the *Irish Independent* writes of the 'severe toll'

²⁰ Lynn Buckley, 'The Spanish Flu in Cork, 1918-9' in *JCHAS*, cxxii (2017), pp 63-77: 72.

²¹ Milne, *Stacking the coffins*, p. 30.

²² Milne, *Stacking the coffins*, pp 32-3.

²³ Ida Milne, 'The "Big Flu" in Wexford', *The past: the organ of the Uí Cinsealaigh Historical Society*, 27 (2006), pp 50-5.

²⁴ *Irish Times*, 28 Oct. 1918.

²⁵ *Irish Times*, 1 Nov. 1918.

that the epidemic extracts from its victims, noting that there are ‘many sad circumstances connected with its ravages’.²⁶

One story which was reported on heavily during this week, in a fashion which could be considered alarmist, was the fact that the daily death rate in Dublin had exceeded the rate of internment in Glasnevin Cemetery, necessitating bodies being stored in the vaults overnight. This event no doubt caused a great deal of anxiety in the public even without the media describing it in particularly harrowing terms. On 30 October, the *Irish Times* described the ‘practically unbroken succession of funeral processions which made their way to Glasnevin Cemetery’.²⁷ The paper continued to reiterate this story throughout the week, making explicit mention several times of the fact that bodies were being stored in the vaults overnight, and that the funeral processions were nearly unending.²⁸ This focus on the Glasnevin story reflects the frequent emphasis placed on the high death toll of the epidemic in the press. A front page article in the *Weekly Irish Times*, for example, notes the ‘alarmingly large death toll’ of the epidemic and the ‘lack of evidence for the spread appreciably abating’.²⁹ The *Cork Examiner* on the same day notes that though the epidemic was on the wane, there appeared to be no decrease in the number of deaths,³⁰ while the *Irish Independent* similarly reported the death toll and extent of the suffering in Ireland and Britain in a large amount of detail several times throughout the week.³¹

Despite this emphasis on the more gruesome aspects of the epidemic and on the death toll that resulted from it, Foley nonetheless calls into question how much the

²⁶ *Irish Independent*, 30 Oct. 1918.

²⁷ *Irish Times*, 30 Oct. 1918.

²⁸ See for example: *Irish Times*, 1 Nov. 1918.

²⁹ *Weekly Irish Times*, 2 Nov. 1918.

³⁰ *Cork Examiner*, 2 Nov. 1918.

³¹ See for example: *Irish Independent*, 31 Oct. 1918.

media really did heighten popular fears of the Spanish Flu. She points out that, while the Press certainly did ‘employ dramatic by-lines in their depictions of the epidemic’, even occasionally exaggerating figures, the rhetoric and language they employed was not far removed from that employed by others who were dealing with the epidemic first hand.³² She notes that ‘seemingly sensationalist and exaggerated reports ... were often part of the “terrifying realities” of this disease,’ and ultimately concludes that though the media may have had a contributory role, it was not necessarily the primary cause of public anxieties, which were formed largely on the basis of the grim realities of the disease.³³ In essence, Foley disagrees with the claim that the press were causing panic, rather suggesting that what they wrote and the tone their reporting took merely reflected the panic already extant thanks to the disease. Buckley similarly points out that the newspapers did make some effort to combat fear, linking panic with the symptoms of the disease and urging people to remain calm to better fight it.³⁴ Indeed, even Milne suggests that reporting during the first wave was relatively mild, and argues that there is a clear sense that news about the disease was being managed to contain public anxiety and panic.³⁵

Although Milne notes this about the first wave exclusively, such attempts to contain panic can be seen even during the week that she suggests had the most alarmist reporting. The *Irish Times*, for example, made an effort to pass on the recommendations of the Public Health Committee, the most notable of which was the recommendation, ‘Do not overexert yourself or give way to panic’.³⁶ Similarly, on 31

³² Foley, *The last Irish plague*, pp 77-8.

³³ Foley, *The last Irish plague*, pp 81-2.

³⁴ Buckley, ‘The Spanish Flu in Cork’, p. 71.

³⁵ Milne, *Stacking the coffins*, p. 23.

³⁶ *Irish Times*, 30 Oct. 1918.

October, the paper interviewed an unnamed ‘eminent city hospital physician’ who was asked whether there was ‘a good deal of needless alarm in the public mind just now?’ The physician responded that there was, and that the public should bear in mind that the high incidence of death is linked to the widespread nature of the disease, urging explicitly that public panic should be avoided.³⁷ Furthermore, the fact that the reporter prompted the physician on this point demonstrates that the paper was keen to assuage the public’s fears regarding the epidemic, rather than seeking a sensationalist story. Indeed, even while doctors note to journalists that they cannot express confidence in the disease’s tapering off, they nonetheless urge for ‘the repression of all anxiety and fear of infection’.³⁸ A similar trend is even reflected in the *Irish Independent*, which was generally more alarmist in its headlines than the *Irish Times* or the *Cork Examiner*. One article on 31 October cites two physicians who report a general improvement in the country, one of whom cautions people to remain cheerful, as ‘thinking about [the disease] only conduces to encouraging an attack’.³⁹

Similar to the story of the grim situation at Glasnevin Cemetery, one of the major news stories regarding the epidemic in this week was the press statement from Sir Charles Cameron, Medical Officer of Health for Dublin City, who publicly expressed his belief that the outbreak had reached its zenith and would soon be on the decline. The *Irish Times* reported in detail on Cameron’s statement, noting that he expected a decline in the epidemic within the week.⁴⁰ The *Cork Examiner* is somewhat less detailed in its reporting on this, but it too reported Cameron’s note of hope during

³⁷ *Irish Times*, 31 Oct. 1918.

³⁸ *Irish Times*, 1 Nov. 1918.

³⁹ *Irish Independent*, 31 Oct. 1918.

⁴⁰ *Irish Times*, 30 Oct. 1918.

this starkest week of the pandemic.⁴¹ This reflects the general trend of deference to medical professionals evident in the press during the crisis. In addition to citing Cameron's notes of hope, the papers also frequently turned to other doctors and medical bodies for advice and reassurance. In one article, the *Cork Examiner* notes that, thus far, the efforts to contain the disease have been successful, but that these must be maintained until the medical community declares that the pandemic has passed.⁴² Further, the article expresses a sense of wary calm, as it notes that the death rate in Cork 'is happily very low indeed'.⁴³ Likewise, the *Irish Times* cites other medical professionals, in addition to Cameron, who express their hope that the disease will soon be on the wane. One article notes that though the pandemic continues to rage in Dublin, 'there is a general hope among medical men that the next few days will show diminution in its severity'.⁴⁴

Throughout the spread of the Spanish Flu, newspapers and print media were one of the principle vessels for disseminating public health notices regarding the disease. Local and national newspapers both were central in the distribution of notices from officials recommending business closures and disinfections, among other preventative measures in the early stages of the pandemic.⁴⁵ The *Irish Times*, in one example, reports on a 'medical man of the highest standing in Dublin' who told the paper 'if the public only made them their hygienic rule of life [*sic*], the city would in a week or fortnight be freed from its present scourge'. The expert goes on to say that 'precautions should be taken to close houses where crowds gathered, and to avoid

⁴¹ *Cork Examiner*, 2 Nov. 1918.

⁴² *Cork Examiner*, 31 Oct. 1918.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Irish Times*, 2 Nov. 1918.

⁴⁵ Buckley, 'The Spanish Flu in Cork', p. 69.

overcrowding in tramcars'.⁴⁶ In another interview with a medical professional, the doctor in question gives the paper highly detailed advice to pass on to the public, stating:

In a time such as we are now passing through...everyone should realise the value of fresh open air. It was amongst the best of preventives, and people should spend as much time as possible in the open air or in well-ventilated rooms. The avoidance of crowded assemblies, such as places of amusement and public resort, was eminently desirable.⁴⁷

Thus, rather than intentionally heightening fears surrounding the epidemic, Irish newspapers were clearly heavily involved in tackling its spread. Indeed, that this was a task the newspapers were heavily invested in is highlighted by the fact that the newspapers often reiterated and reprinted advice previously distributed. In one example, an article in the *Weekly Irish Times* reprints verbatim advice from the Local Government Board and Public Health Committee which had been distributed three days prior in the *Irish Times*.⁴⁸

In many cases, the advice distributed by the newspapers was highly detailed and very thorough. An article in the *Irish Times*, for example, notes that 'in the present limited state of knowledge with regard to influenza, the advice which it is possible to give the public both as to treatment and as to preventive measures differs but little from that which is appropriate to other infectious diseases'.⁴⁹ It goes on to advise that anyone suffering from fever should seek medical advice and remain in bed until the fever passes, thereafter remaining at home until they feel 'quite well'.⁵⁰ Finally, the article issues some advice on limiting the spread of the disease through the 'habitual

⁴⁶ *Irish Times*, 1 Nov. 1918.

⁴⁷ *Irish Times*, 31 Oct. 1918.

⁴⁸ *Weekly Irish Times*, 2 Nov. 1918; *Irish Times*, 30 Oct. 1918.

⁴⁹ *Irish Times*, 30 Oct. 1918.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

use of a handkerchief’ for sneezes and coughing, ‘which afterwards should be boiled, or, if it paper, burnt’.⁵¹ In a similar vein, print media were also responsible for dispelling false rumours and myths. In addition to the medical advice provided, the above article notes that although inoculation or the use of vaccines has sometime been useful, ‘no such treatment can be recommended for the pulmonary complications of influenza’. Similarly, it notes that the inhalation of essential oils or substances like cinnamon or quinine ‘cannot with certainty be said to ensure freedom from attack’. On the other hand, it encourages preventative measures such as ‘gargling of the throat night and morning with a solution of one in 5,000 permanganate of potassium in water containing 0.8 per cent of common salt’ and the ‘complete ventilation of each occupied living room and bedroom’.⁵²

A significant aspect of the reporting on the epidemic, which undermines the argument that the press were being deliberately alarmist regarding the disease, is the fact that, in comparison to other major news stories, all three papers assessed spend comparatively very little time on the pandemic.⁵³ First and foremost, the pages of these papers are dedicated to the on-going war effort and the activities of Sinn Féin, while reporting on the pandemic only takes up a minor portion of the news coverage. While those other news stories would frequently have several articles dedicated to them on one page, news about the Spanish Flu was generally relegated to one or two articles per page, if it appeared at all. Although it was an unsettling and disruptive event, it was not necessarily more in the public mind than news from the front or of

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ The papers assessed are as follows: *Irish Times*, 28 Oct. 1918; *Irish Times* 30 Oct. 1918; *Irish Times*, 31 Oct. 1918; *Irish Times*, 1 Nov. 1918; *Irish Times*, 2 Nov. 1918; *Cork Examiner*, 31 Oct. 1918; *Cork Examiner*, 1 Nov. 1918; *Cork Examiner*, 2 Nov. 1918; *Irish Independent*, 30 Oct. 1918; *Irish Independent*, 31 Oct. 1918.

Sinn Féin's rise. It would still be possible for the media to be alarmist regarding the epidemic even if they only wrote sparingly on it, however the fact that it accounted for a smaller portion of their reporting suggests that, for one reason or another, it was not the news story they wanted to draw the public's attention to.

Though there are aspects of the newspaper reporting which were undoubtedly sensationalist and alarmist, and though the newspapers frequently came under fire for practicing such reporting, by and large the media was merely reflecting the panic present in the country, rather than deliberately stoking it up. In many cases, the press even went so far as to urge calm and to caution against panic, and acted as the primary distributors of public health information. Allowing for the general state of anxiety that was gripping the public at the time, it is reasonable to expect that the press would occasionally tend towards more harrowing news stories. Stories such as that of Glasnevin Cemetery being unable to cope with the death rate were grim, and in their content and their language they do represent a trend towards alarmist reporting. Generally speaking, however, the reporting on the Spanish Flu was sober and level, and with frequent deference to medical advice. As Foley suggests, the seemingly exaggerated reports were simply part of the grim realities of life during the pandemic. The papers were at times alarmist and harrowing, but for the most part they sought to contain panic. They frequently cited reassurances from medical professionals, and cautioned against anxiety and fear. Though they were quick to report on the death toll, they were also quick to report on signs of hope during the pandemic. It is hard to say exactly what impact this had on the public, but there was a clear effort made by the newspapers to allay public anxiety and to prevent widespread panic.

Spanish Influenza: ‘the devil of a fit’

Winnie Davern

In late June 1918, Edmond (Mun) Davern informed Winnie Toomey that he had been vaccinated ‘against the Spanish Plague or Influenza’, and he was happy to have been ‘inoculated’, as he considered that ‘after all prevention is everything in cases like that’.¹ This exchange was the beginning of an extended written discourse between Mun and Winnie on the outbreak and impact of the Spanish Influenza pandemic. While their surviving letters, numbering in excess of two hundred and fifty, narrate the story of two people who were very much in love planning their future together, their story is played out against a backdrop of a bloody war in Europe and political, social and cultural unrest in Ireland. It was indeed a time of crisis and the topics they discussed were wide-ranging. In addition to their plans for marriage and a future together their discourse also covers subjects such as local and national politics, religious practices, economic matters, health concerns and the impact of the Great War. This paper examines their correspondence from the perspective of their individual experiences of the Spanish flu as the highly contagious and lethal virus traversed around the world.

¹ Letter from Mun Davern to Winnie Toomey, 27 Jun. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

Despite extensive contemporary newspaper accounts of the influenza pandemic, Irish historiography has tended to overlook it in terms of any in-depth analysis. While recent publications, such as Ida Milne's and Catriona Foley's provide very thought provoking explorations of the impact of this killer disease during very turbulent times in Ireland, neither author deals with the Limerick area in any great detail.² First-hand accounts, such as those exchanged between Mun and Winnie, therefore provide an invaluable perspective on the impact of the pandemic in the Limerick area.

Mun, originally from Elton, Co. Limerick, had emigrated to Australia in 1912.³ He joined the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and departed from Melbourne on 23 December 1916, arriving in Plymouth on 12 February 1917.⁴ This voyage marked the beginning of the eventual return of this Irish emigrant to his native Co. Limerick. Mun spent the next two years at a number of training camps on the Salisbury plain, Wiltshire, from where he corresponded frequently with Winnie at her home address at Elton Post Office, Co. Limerick.

The influenza pandemic that swept throughout the world from spring 1918 to early 1919 infected approximately five hundred million people globally.⁵ Estimates of the total mortality caused by the disease have ranged from forty million to one hundred million people.⁶ Based on a reported death toll of 20,957, it is estimated that

² Ida Milne, *Stacking the coffins: influenza, war and revolution in Ireland, 1918-19* (Dublin, 2018); Catriona Foley, *The last Irish plague: the great flu epidemic in Ireland* (Dublin, 2011).

³ Inward passenger manifests for ships and aircraft arriving at Fremantle, Perth Airport and Western Australian outports from 1897-1963 (National Archives of Australia; Series Number: K 269; Reel Number: 37). Mun arrived in Fremantle, Western Australia from Liverpool on 26 November 1912 aboard the *Orama*.

⁴ Record of Service for Edmond Patrick Davern who enlisted on 7 August 1916 (National Archives of Australia, Series Number B2455, Davern, E.P. Barcode 3489265).

⁵ Jeffery K. Taubenberger, 'The origin and virulence of the 1918 "Spanish" influenza virus', in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 150, 1 (2006), pp 86-112: 90.

⁶ Ibid; Guy Beiner, Patricia March, and Ida Milne, 'Greatest killer of the twentieth century: the great flu of 1918-19' in *History Ireland*, 17, 2 (2009), p. 40; Milne, *Stacking the coffins*, pp 1-2.

there were in excess of 800,000 cases of infection in Ireland.⁷ Deaths from other related illnesses, such as pneumonia, can also be associated with the disease.⁸ The first wave of the pandemic appears to have arisen in March 1918 in the United States, although researchers have had difficulty definitively pinpointing the geographic origin of the pandemic. This is due to its almost concurrent appearance in North America, Europe and Asia in March-April 1918.⁹ The mortality rate during this first wave was described as ‘fairly low’ and was not the focus of much concern.¹⁰ The extremely deadly second wave manifested itself towards the end of August 1918 and the third less contagious wave occurred in 1919.¹¹

Recent studies of the epidemic have suggested that it spread ‘through networks of worldwide mobilisation’.¹² Foley highlights a correlation between soldiers and the disease both in Ireland and abroad.¹³ There is a possibility that a strain of the disease had occurred twelve months earlier among military forces involved in the war. During the winter of 1916-17 a disease with comparable symptomatology to influenza was recorded among British troops in Étaples and Aldershot.¹⁴ A similar disease may have affected Australian forces based at the Larkhill camp on the Salisbury plain during this period. The great majority of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) recruits arrived in England during the particularly cold winter of 1916-17, and many took ill shortly

⁷ Beiner, March, and Milne, ‘Greatest killer of the twentieth century’, p. 41. This estimate is calculated using an official mortality rate of 2.5 per cent of those affected by the disease.

⁸ Ibid. There were in excess of 3,300 more deaths from pneumonia than what would have been expected.

⁹ Taubenberger, ‘The origin and virulence of the 1918 “Spanish” influenza virus’, p. 90.

¹⁰ Howard Phillips, and David Killingray (eds), *The Spanish influenza pandemic of 1918-19* (London, 2011), p. 5.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Beiner, March, and Milne, ‘Greatest killer of the twentieth century’, p. 41.

¹³ Foley, *The last Irish plague*, p. 24.

¹⁴ Beiner, March, and Milne, ‘Greatest killer of the twentieth century’, p. 41.

after arrival.¹⁵ While the cold weather cannot be discounted for the level of illness experienced by the Australian soldiers, it is possible that virus that had presented at Étables and Aldershot had also infected troops at Larkhill.

Mun, stationed at Larkhill in August 1917, told Winnie that there were rumours that they were going to relocate to another camp as ‘last winter the Australians had seventy funerals per week from this camp’.¹⁶ He also mentioned that many thought the camp to be ‘most unhealthy’, although he did not share this view.¹⁷ Larkhill was among the Wiltshire camps that were reported to have been ‘ill-sited – exposed and bleak’.¹⁸ Mun’s knowledge on the conditions at Larkhill during the previous winter was, however, limited to hearsay. His initial base when he arrived in England in February 1917 was at the Park House camp, close to the town of Tidworth, and he did not transfer to Larkhill until early April 1917.¹⁹ While there may be a possible parallel between the documented accounts of the flu-like illness in Aldershot and the high death toll at the Larkhill Camp, less than sixty miles away, it is impossible to make any such definitive assertion. The absence of any reports in either the British or Australian newspapers, censorship notwithstanding, would seem to suggest that Mun’s statement to Winnie was inaccurate or, at the very least, the death toll was overstated.²⁰ The difficulties that the Australians experienced in adapting to the

¹⁵ Roger Beckett, ‘The Australian soldier in Britain, 1914–1918’ in Carl Bridge, Robert Crawford, and David Dunstan (eds), *Australians in Britain: the twentieth-century experience* (Melbourne, 2009), pp 6.1-6.17.

¹⁶ Letter from Mun Davern to Winnie Toomey, 23 Aug. 1917 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ A.G. Butler, *The Australian army medical services in the war of 1914–1918*, (3 vols, Canberra, 1940-3), ii, 561, quoted in Beckett, ‘The Australian soldier in Britain, 1914–1918’, p. 6.7.

¹⁹ Letters from Mun Davern to Winnie Toomey, 30 Mar. 1917; 2 Apr. 1917 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

²⁰ A search of the Australian newspapers on ‘Trove’ (<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/>), British Newspaper Archive (<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>) and the *Times* online, failed to uncover any account of this high death toll.

climatic conditions in England cannot be discounted as a cause for the high death toll, if indeed the rumours that Mun had heard was true.

One of the first Irish newspaper reports to mention an outbreak of influenza among the armies involved in the war related to the German military. On 25 May 1918, the *Freeman's Journal* reported that 'a very severe epidemic of influenza' was 'now raging in the ranks of the German forces'.²¹ Reports from the British press in late June also intimated that the German army had succumbed to 'a kind of influenza'.²² These initial media reports on the virus, however, did not ascribe any likely contagion. Other news reports from Europe at the time also minimised any likely threat of a serious or virulent disease. The Spanish ambassador confirmed to Reuter's Agency that the recent epidemic in Spain, which presented with influenza-like symptoms and gastric upset, was 'not of a serious character'.²³ While the illness did not originate in Spain it was dubbed the 'Spanish influenza'; Spain's neutrality meant that it 'had no wartime censorship to keep its health problems from the world' and many of the initial reports originated from Spain.²⁴

One of the earliest accounts that the illness had reached Ireland was published in the *Irish Independent* on 20 June 1918; it reported that 'a virulently infectious disease resembling influenza in its symptoms' had swiftly swept through Belfast with similar reports from Ballinasloe.²⁵ One of the marked features of the disease was the speed at which it spread. It infected large groups of persons housed or working together and schools and businesses were severely disrupted by the rapid contagion. The *Irish Times* reported that several thousand shipyard workers in Belfast had taken

²¹ *Freeman's Journal*, 25 May 1918.

²² *Cork Examiner*, 25 Jun. 1918.

²³ *Cork Examiner*, 31 May 1918; *Freeman's Journal*, 31 May 1918.

²⁴ Alfred W. Crosby, *America's forgotten pandemic: the influenza of 1918*, 2nd edition (Cambridge, 2003), p. 26.

²⁵ *Irish Independent*, 20 Jun. 1918.

ill and the high incidence of the disease among tramway workers there was seriously hindering services.²⁶ In Dublin there were reports of sixty children in one convent having taken ill, while in an 'industrial house' forty employees 'were prostrated'.²⁷ In Cork twenty employees in one city firm were ill with suspected influenza at the end of June 1918, and while there were other isolated reports of adults and children displaying similar symptoms, there were no notifications to the Municipal Public Health Department.²⁸ Around the same time a doctor in Killarney had diagnosed an outbreak of 'a mysterious disease' akin to influenza in a local institution.²⁹

Reports on the pandemic did not appear in the *Limerick Leader* until the end of June 1918. It published a short article stating that there had been 'an epidemic of influenza in Tipperary town' which had affected 'several hundred of the military and civilians'.³⁰ Like the earlier reports from Europe the illness was played down, being deemed a weak strain which was on the decline.³¹ Two days later, the editorial in the *Limerick Leader* recounted how the new mysterious illness, which bore similarities to influenza, had manifested itself in various parts of the country and had reached Limerick.³² The editor commented that the city was not largely affected and that there should be no cause for alarm.³³ The tone of the editorial was somewhat satirical, suggesting that 'many have the disease only in imagination'.³⁴ Events over the next six to nine months, however, would prove this editor very wrong.

One week following his initial vaccination Mun was inoculated again. He told Winnie that he did not feel 'too bright' as he was 'just after getting about one & half

²⁶ *Irish Times*, 29 Jun. 1918.

²⁷ *Irish Independent*, 25 Jun. 1918.

²⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 25 Jun. 1918.

²⁹ *Cork Examiner*, 27 Jun. 1918.

³⁰ *Limerick Leader*, 26 Jun. 1918.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Limerick Leader*, 28 Jun. 1918.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

(1½) inches of the doctors needle'; he considered this an additional safeguard against the disease.³⁵ Despite 'the Influenza wreaking havoc in the cities of England', he was convinced that he now had immunity from the disease and reassured Winnie that he would not catch it.³⁶ Mun could not have been aware, that the anti-flu vaccines developed hurriedly during this time were not particularly effective.³⁷ Winnie was of the opinion that while the 'needling' was not very pleasant, it was better than the sickness'.³⁸ Nonetheless, she had been reading accounts of the impact of influenza in the newspapers, including reported fatalities in Ireland, and was concerned for him.³⁹ There had been reports of an inordinately high death rate from flu-related pneumonia in Belfast and while the number of deaths in Dublin were low, flu-associated fatalities were recorded.⁴⁰

Anxiety levels were heightened when expected letters did not arrive from loved ones during war times and the outbreak of this influenza epidemic compounded this anxiety. At the end of July 1918, Winnie, having not heard from Mun for a number of days, penned an emotional letter to him in which she appealed to him to make contact with her.⁴¹ He had previously told her of an intended trip to London to obtain supplies for the bar as there was a dance coming up.⁴² Winnie, 'thinking all sorts of dreadful things', assumed that he had contracted influenza while in London.⁴³ As it

³⁵ Letter from Mun Davern to Winnie Toomey, 3 Jul. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

³⁶ Letter from Mun Davern to Winnie Toomey, 11 Jul. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

³⁷ Phillips and Killingray, *The Spanish influenza pandemic of 1918-19*, p. 6.

³⁸ Letter from Winnie Toomey to Mun Davern, 9 Jul. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Limerick Leader* 3 Jul. 1918; *Cork Examiner*, 9 Jul. 1918.

⁴¹ Letter from Winnie Toomey to Mun Davern, 29 Jul. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

⁴² Letter from Mun Davern to Winnie Toomey, 22 Jul. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

⁴³ Letter from Winnie Toomey to Mun Davern, 29 Jul. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

turned out Mun had gotten his leave extended and availed of the opportunity to travel to Newhaven to visit his sister, Sr Josephine (Sr Joe), in the convent where 'he had the time of his life'.⁴⁴ Mun had escaped this initial wave of the influenza outbreak.

In October 1918, during what has been considered the second wave of the disease, Mun did, however, fall ill. He wrote to Winnie that he had caught influenza and was 'after having an awful time', one that he was unlikely to forget for some time.⁴⁵ He revealed that he was the first in the mess to catch it and the doctor had chosen not to send him to hospital, but opted to treat him himself, although he does not mention any of the therapies he received.⁴⁶ Mun was, at this time, managing the bar in the Officers Mess and would have been in close contact with many of the Officers. The physician's decision was obviously a prudent one as one week later Mun appeared to have been well on the road to recovery. Despite complaining of still having 'a little cough' he told Winnie he felt fine.⁴⁷ Mun's reference to the doctor's decision to keep him out of hospital suggests that it was common for military patients diagnosed with influenza to be treated in hospital. Some of Mun's colleagues were not so lucky and he told Winnie that 'a lot of our fellows died from it, two died one day last week & one died Saturday last'.⁴⁸ He does not, however, provide any detailed information on the overall number of fatalities in the camp, neither does he provide any indication of how many became infected with the disease or the treatment regime provided to those who had fallen ill.

⁴⁴ Letter from Mun Davern to Winnie Toomey, 26 Jul. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

⁴⁵ Letter from Mun Davern to Winnie Toomey, 13 Oct. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Letter from Mun Davern to Winnie Toomey, 21 Oct. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

⁴⁸ Letter from Mun Davern to Winnie Toomey, 21 Oct. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

Winnie eagerly read newspaper reports on the spread of the disease and she continued to convey details which she considered significant. She told Mun of reported deaths in Dublin and Thurles, while closer to home a young man at the creamery in the nearby village of Knocklong had died from pneumonia after having influenza.⁴⁹ She told Mun that she had read that soldiers had been ‘sprayed in England as a prevention to influenza’, asking him if he had such an experience.⁵⁰ It is likely that she had read an account in the *Irish Independent* of soldiers at Aldershot being sprayed to prevent infection.⁵¹ Mun also related to Winnie news stories from the English newspapers, including a report of several cases in London where ‘they have to be buried without coffins as the undertakers are overcrowded with orders’.⁵² Mun did not mention the newspaper titles that he was reading but, a report in the *Gloucestershire Echo* on the ‘Influenza Scourge’ in the London area stated that undertakers in Kilburn were so busy that they could not ‘get wood enough for coffins’.⁵³

Winnie was not the only correspondent with whom Mun discussed the pandemic. He told Winnie that his sister, Sr Joe, had written to him from Newhaven telling him she was very weak after a bout of flu and commenting that another sister in Co. Limerick, Lizzie, had sent her some eggs, which she ‘was more than pleased to get’.⁵⁴ Eggs were in short supply in wartime Britain, and the eggs from Ireland must have been a rare treat and a welcome change from the powdered substitute such as

⁴⁹ Letter from Winnie Toomey to Mun Davern, 18 Oct. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

⁵⁰ Letter from Winnie Toomey to Mun Davern, 24 Oct. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick)

⁵¹ *Irish Independent*, 23 Oct. 1918.

⁵² Letter from Mun Davern to Winnie Toomey, 27 Oct. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

⁵³ *Gloucestershire Echo*, 30 Oct. 1918.

⁵⁴ Letter from Mun Davern to Winnie Toomey, 27 Oct. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

that made by Birds.⁵⁵ Good nourishment was seen as an important preventative measure against the disease and eggs were among the foodstuffs which were recommended for those seeking to fortify themselves against contagion.⁵⁶ Egg flip was one of the nourishing foods advocated to alleviate influenza symptoms.⁵⁷ Mun also told Winnie he had gotten letters from his sister, Nora (Nance), in Australia who had told him that the influenza was just as bad there.⁵⁸ She had also told him that doctors there said it was ‘the returned soldier’ taking his revenge.⁵⁹ Mun’s family in Ireland also fell ill with the virus. Winnie told him that his sister, Tess, had contracted ‘a great cold’, most likely to have been ‘a slight touch of influenza’.⁶⁰ Tess remained in bed for a week, but while it was quite severe, ‘she didn’t feel bad enough to have the doctor’.⁶¹ When the third wave of influenza hit Ireland in early 1919 Mun’s brother, Joe, wrote telling him that he had spent twelve days in bed with flu and that ‘it was the devil of a fit’.⁶² He also told Mun about a number of near neighbours who had died from the virus and in Joe’s opinion ‘it was worse than the war’.⁶³

There is no surviving correspondence that provides detail on whether Mun’s other brother, Fr John, a serving Chaplain with the U.S. army, had been vaccinated or if he had himself contracted the disease. Fr John had, however, some first-hand experience of dealing with victims of influenza. Following the end of the war he

⁵⁵ Matthew Richardson, *The hunger war: food, rations and rationing 1914-1918* (Barnsley, 2015), p. 105.

⁵⁶ Milne, *Stacking the coffins*, pp 134-5.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Letter from Mun Davern to Winnie Toomey, 27 Oct. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick). Nance’s letter to Mun has not survived.

⁵⁹ Letter from Mun Davern to Winnie Toomey, 27 Oct. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

⁶⁰ Letter from Winnie Toomey to Mun Davern, 12 Nov. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

⁶¹ Letter from Winnie Toomey to Mun Davern, 20 Nov. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

⁶² Letter from Joe Davern to Mun Davern, 31 Jan. 1919 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

⁶³ *Ibid.*

remained in France and was sent as Chaplain to a hospital in Brest where each day he reportedly buried between ten to fifteen doughboys who had died from influenza.⁶⁴ Brest was the main disembarkation port for the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) troopships, and during the September to October 1918 period alone, 2,336 doughboys had died from influenza five days after landing in France.⁶⁵ Influenza has many symptomatic similarities to other diseases and misdiagnosis was not uncommon during the 1918-1919 epidemic.⁶⁶ Perhaps, not all of those buried by Fr John had actually died as a result of influenza virus.

Many of those around the east Limerick village of Elton contracted the virus, and it appears that Winnie and her elderly father escaped it, unlike others in the Toomey household. Winnie's sister, Mollie, and their female servant both fell ill with the influenza virus at the same time. Although Mollie spent 'four or five days in bed', Winnie was not very concerned with her sister's bout of illness and described Mollie's encounter with the virus as having 'only got it slight'.⁶⁷ On 9 November 1918, Winnie told Mun that it was 'not very severe' in the immediate area 'but bad enough about Hospital & Bruff, a good many have died'.⁶⁸ By the 20 November 1918, however, it had started to take its toll on the people of Elton and the surrounding area. Winnie related to Mun that, while Mollie had recovered, both their servants had gone home to recuperate.⁶⁹ The disease had a knock-on effect on Winnie's own daily routine, with her sister still recovering and the two servants also ill, she told Mun that her letter

⁶⁴ *Advance Register*, 18 Jul. 1941; Obituary notice, Father John Davern, 12 Jul. 1941, Catholic diocese of Wichita, Necrology.

⁶⁵ Crosby, *America's forgotten pandemic*, p. 140.

⁶⁶ Milne, *Stacking the coffins*, p. 57.

⁶⁷ Letter from Winnie Toomey to Mun Davern, 9, 12 Nov. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

⁶⁸ Letter from Winnie Toomey to Mun Davern, 9 Nov. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

⁶⁹ Letter from Winnie Toomey to Mun Davern, 20 Nov. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

writing had suffered as a consequence.⁷⁰ Under normal circumstances when she had not the time to write an entire letter Winnie would usually send Mun a letter card with a few hurried lines on it. However, when the influenza hit the area she was forced to become the local messenger service thus abandoning her letter writing. On 20 November 1918, she told him she had intended to send him a card that evening but missed the post as she had to travel to the nearby town of Hospital for medicine for a neighbour, Patrick Ryan, who had gotten 'a very bad attack'. She also mentioned that Patrick's brother was 'also laid up' with flu.⁷¹ It appears from the foregoing that it was a rarity for influenza to visit a home without infecting more than one occupant.

There was an upsurge of deaths associated with influenza within an eight to ten mile radius of Elton during the November 1918 to January 1919 period. In early November, Winnie related to Mun that there had been quite a few deaths in the Bruff, Patrickswell and Hospital areas, many of whom had only been ill for a few days.⁷² She told him that she had read about the death of a man who had only been married a week and 'another in Tipp only married a fortnight'.⁷³ She had also read of families where both parents had died.⁷⁴ Her letters highlight the high mortality rate among children and young adults. She mentioned an account from nearby Bulgaden, where 'four of five children of a widow woman died'.⁷⁵

Winnie was not only reading accounts of deaths from the disease, but also relating how the deadly disease had taken lives of a number of people living much

⁷⁰ Winnie to Mun, 20 Nov. 1918.

⁷¹ Letter from Winnie Toomey to Mun Davern, 20 Nov. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick). Hospital was the nearest large town, approximately five miles from Elton and presumably Winnie would have had to make this journey by bicycle.

⁷² Letter from Winnie Toomey to Mun Davern, 1 Nov. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Letter from Winnie Toomey to Mun Davern, 4 Feb. 1919 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

closer to Elton village. These were deaths of people that Winnie knew personally. She told Mun about Jimmy Ryan, whose death was going to be ‘a great loss to his people’.⁷⁶ This is likely to have been James Ryan, aged twenty-four from Doonmoon, who died from septic pneumonia on 15 December 1918.⁷⁷ Winnie does not elaborate on why Jimmy Ryan’s death was such a loss to his family; perhaps he was the sole breadwinner in the household. Unfortunately the limited Irish statistical data available does not lend itself to a study of the social and economic circumstances of families effected by death from influenza.⁷⁸ Another local to die was twenty-six year old railway porter from Knocklong, Tom Finn; he was someone that Mun knew well.⁷⁹ He had only been ill for four days and his cause of death, like many of the others outlined earlier, was pneumonia.⁸⁰ A Knocklong mother of five, Mrs Hennessy, also fell victim.⁸¹ According to the Superintendent Registrar’s record for the Kilmallock district, Mary Hennessy was aged thirty eight and had died of pneumonia on 19 January 1919.⁸²

An analysis of the other nine deaths recorded alongside Mary Hennessy’s record emphasise the devastating impact the virus had on entire families in the locality. Six cases were due either to influenza or pneumonia.⁸³ Two young sisters, Ellen and Christina Real from Hospital, were both certified as dying from pneumonia;

⁷⁶ Letter from Winnie Toomey to Mun Davern, 30 Dec. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

⁷⁷ Death of James Ryan of Kilmallock District, County Limerick, 15 Dec. 1918 (GRO, Register of Deaths, no. 191).

⁷⁸ Milne, *Stacking the coffins*, pp 78-81.

⁷⁹ Letter from Mun Davern to Winnie Toomey, 29 Jan. 1919; Letter from Joe Davern to Mun Davern, 31 Jan. 1919 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

⁸⁰ Death of Thomas Finn of Kilmallock District, County Limerick, 17 Jan. 1919 (GRO, Register of Deaths, no. 276).

⁸¹ Letter from Mun Davern to Winnie Toomey, 29 Jan. 1919, Letter from Winnie Toomey to Mun Davern, 4 Feb. 1919 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

⁸² Death of Mary Hennessy of Kilmallock District, County Limerick, 19 Jan. 1919 (GRO, Register of Deaths, no.298).

⁸³ Death registrar, County of Limerick, Union of Kilmallock, District of Hospital, 1919, Record no. 291-300 (GRO, Register of Death, ref. 4421625).

seven year old Ellen died on 17 January 1919 and Christina, aged four, passed away one week later.⁸⁴ Five month old Ellen Hogan, from Kildeely, died on 20 January 1919 from influenza and her thirty five year old mother, Johanna, died three weeks later having had influenza for ten days.⁸⁵ Mary McEniry was present at the deathbeds of her two brothers, John and Richard Foley, aged forty nine and fifty five years respectively; both were single and had died from influenza.⁸⁶ Richard owned a grocery and provision merchant shop in the nearby town of Hospital and in 1911 he had five employees working for him.⁸⁷ He died at Hospital on 3 December 1918, while his brother died had pre-deceased him at Ballycahill on 13 November 1918.⁸⁸

Irish mortality from influenza correlates with international patterns in terms of age group, with a disproportionate number of deaths in the twenty to forty-four year old age bracket.⁸⁹ Despite the limited numbers in the sample above, the experience of influenza in east Co. Limerick in terms of mortality age has similarities with elsewhere in the country. Families were left bereft of parents, healthy young men in their twenties with their whole lives ahead of them were struck down while parents lost babies and young children. Others, like Richard Foley, left a workforce in limbo. Many of those who took ill, such as Joe, Tess and Mollie, recovered after a period with apparently no ill effects.

Mun and his siblings abroad had varying experiences which they shared with each other through the medium of postal correspondence. Whether based in England,

⁸⁴ Death of Ellen Reale of Kilmallock District, County Limerick, 17 Jan. 1919 (GRO, Register of Deaths, no. 292).

⁸⁵ Death of Ellen Hogan of Kilmallock District, County Limerick, 20 Jan. 1919 (GRO, Register of Deaths, no. 295).

⁸⁶ Death of John Foley of Kilmallock District, County Limerick, 13 Nov. 1918; Death of Richard Foley of Kilmallock District, County Limerick, 3 Dec. 1918 (GRO, Register of Deaths, no. 299-300).

⁸⁷ Census of Ireland 1911, Household of Richard Foley, DED of Hospital, County Limerick (NAI, Census of Ireland 1911).

⁸⁸ Death of John Foley of Kilmallock District, County Limerick, 13 Nov. 1918; Death of Richard Foley of Kilmallock District, County Limerick, 3 Dec. 1918 (GRO, Register of Deaths, no. 299-300).

⁸⁹ Milne, *Stacking the coffins*, pp 64-8.

France or Australia this deadly disease had visited all of them in one manner or another, but luckily none of them experienced its fatal hand. While Mun and Winnie both knew people who died from the virus, neither of their immediate families had personal experience of influenza-related deaths. There is no explanation as to why Winnie or her father escaped the virus; both were in constant contact with the public while working each day in the post office, and in addition, Winnie ran frequent errands for sick neighbours. Yet, despite their close contact with a significant number of those who had contracted the influenza virus they somehow remained immune. There was no mention of any active measures taken, either locally or nationally, to stem the spread of the virus; in general, it appears that the people of this rural community went about their daily business interacting with each other in their usual manner.

In conclusion, while none of the authors of the letters studied suffered acutely from the influenza virus, their personal observations provide a first-hand account of reactions to the illness from a number of perspectives. The dependence on print media for information relating to the disease is obvious from their correspondences; although in the main newspaper reports they mentioned related to the mortality figures attributed to the virus and the social and personal impact these deaths had on individuals and families. Other than the vaccinations Mun received and the spraying of some British soldiers, neither Mun nor Winnie mentioned reading about measures or advices that might have assisted in limiting the spread of the disease. However, they both held the firm belief that the vaccine administered to Mun would protect him from the virus, that belief was crushed when he actually contracted influenza. While their concerns and anxieties were fuelled by the news coverage of the influenza outbreaks these must, however, be positioned in the context of the other fears that they were coping with at the time. Despite rumours of an imminent end to the war, Winnie

consistently worried that Mun would be sent to the Front or forced to return to Australia, thus disrupting their future marriage plans.⁹⁰ Although not discussed in this paper the rapidly changing Irish political landscape also troubled them.⁹¹ It was a time of angst for both Mun and Winnie and the fear of the unknown was constantly in the background. The Spanish Influenza outbreak brought another unknown into play in what was an era of many crises.

⁹⁰ Letter from Sr Josephine Davern to Mun Davern, circa Sept. 1917; Letter from Mun Davern to Winnie Toomey, 5 Dec. 1917 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

⁹¹ Letters from Winnie Toomey to Mun Davern, 9 Jul.; 22 Aug.; 20 Nov. 1918. Letters from Mun Davern to Winnie Toomey, 10 Mar.; 7 Nov. 1918 (MS in the possession of Winnie Davern, of Raheen, Limerick).

Irish women were in the war too!

Emer McCarthy

The history of Ireland's contribution to World War One (WW1) has been distorted by the complex relationship which prevailed between Ireland and Britain in the aftermath of the 1916 Rising.¹ The Irish popular imagination also sought to isolate Ireland from the horrors of WW1 and the outcome of another world war.² Although the recent centenary of the war provoked a new revisionist approach to the era, this work was dominated by commemorations for Irishmen who lost their lives on the front.³ Additionally, while extensive work has been carried out to preserve the recollections of Irish female nationalist organisations, seen in the archives of the Bureau of Military History, the stories of tens of thousands of Irishwomen involved in the war effort between 1914 and 1918 have been largely ignored. This article aims to broaden the understanding of Irishwomen's historiography by highlighting the contribution that Irishwomen made to the Great War. The paper begins with a synopsis of two Irishwomen who emigrated to work in British munition factories throughout the war

¹ Elaine Sisson, 'Sisters in arms: Ireland, gender and militarism' in *Modernist cultures*, 13, 3 (2018), pp 340-63: 340.

² Catriona Pennell, 'More than a "curious footnote": Irish voluntary participation in the First World War and British popular memory' in John Horne (ed.), *Towards commemoration: Ireland in war and revolution 1912-1923* (Dublin, 2013), p. 43.

³ Leanne McCormick, 'Filthy little girls': controlling women in public spaces in Northern Ireland during the Second World War' in Gillian McIntosh and Diane Urquhart (eds), *Irish women at war: the twentieth century* (Dublin, 2010), p. 106.

years, their motivations behind their relocation and their experiences and impact overseas. This is followed by a comparison of Irishwomen workers who made up a majority of the workforce in the Irish munition factories after their establishment in 1917. The paper then examines the charitable works carried out by some of Ireland's upper-class women and the significance of Irish women's organisations throughout the period.

The Central Statistics Office estimated that 8,368 women emigrated to Britain between the war years.⁴ The breakdown of Irish female employment provided by the Labour Exchange showed that over 95 per cent of these women were involved in the production of ammunition.⁵ Although a lack of records makes it difficult to convey the experience of Irishwomen's participation in Britain to the war effort, The Imperial War Museum, as part of their Women and Work Collection, have a taped recording of a munition worker from Belfast, Isabella Clarke. Clarke emigrated to White Lund, Morecombe in 1915 to work in a National Filling Factory and later transferred to the Royal Ordnance Works in Coventry.⁶ Her story helps to shine a light on the experience of thousands of Irishwomen who were employed as munition workers in Britain during WW1. Gabrielle West was an English woman who worked as a supervisor in a munition factory in Hereford, England, an area which was particularly popular for Irish women emigrants. West kept diaries of her experience as a supervisor throughout the war. Her diaries have been extensively studied by Clare Culleton and

⁴ Central Statistics Office, Emigration Records, 'Life in 1916 Ireland: Stories from statistics', Estimated Emigration by sex, age group and nationality, 1916-1920 and 2011-2015 (<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-1916/1916irl/people/emigration/#d.en.97634>) (18 Oct. 2020).

⁵ *Irish Times*, 8 Mar. 1916.

⁶ Isabella Clarke's oral interview (Imperial War Museum (IWM), Women and Work Oral Collection, Catalogue No. 774) (<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80000768>) (18 Oct. 2020).

provide an invaluable insight into the treatment of Irish immigrants in Britain during this period.⁷

Economic prosperity was the main motivation to avail of munition work. The promise of a high wage was vigorously emphasised in advertising campaigns by the British government.⁸ The minimum wage rate of British munition workers was £1 at the beginning of the war. This was significantly higher than domestic servants and textile workers in Ireland. Moreover it was double the minimum wage of female munition workers in Irish shell factories when they were established in 1917.⁹ Additionally, Irishwomen were promised that munition work would allow them to send money back home.¹⁰ This proved to be true in the experience of Isabella Clarke who recalled sending one pound a week to her mother and five-shillings to her grandmother.¹¹ The economic incentive of munition work in Britain appears to have appealed to Irishwomen at the time as newspapers reported women ‘leaving the textile trades and rushing into the munition factories’.¹² Furthermore, soon after Irish women began emigrating from Ireland to England in search of better pay, unrest emerged regarding the wages of female workers in the textile industry as business owners feared there would be a shortage of female textile workers unless women were encouraged to remain at home.¹³

⁷ Amy Bell, ‘Book review: *Nice girls and rude girls: women workers in World War One* by Deborah Thom and *Working class culture, women and Britain 1914-1921* by Claire A. Culleton’ in *Labour/Le Travail*, xlvii (2001), p. 253.

⁸ Fionnuala Walsh, “‘We work with shells all day and night’”: Irish female munitions workers during the First World War’ in *Saothar, Journal of the Irish Labour History Society*, xlii (2017), p. 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Isabella Clarke interview (IWM, Catalogue No. 774).

¹² *Leitrim Observer*, 3 June 1916.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Irishwomen fortunate enough to obtain employment in British munition factories were confronted with highly dangerous work. The foremost danger was TNT-poisoning. It was reported that female munition workers were often seen laying in rows outside British factories overcome with sickness from toxic fumes.¹⁴ Additionally, TNT exposure caused toxic jaundice and workers teeth to rot. Although the Health of Munition Workers Committee introduced a number of measures to prevent the effects of TNT, most failed in their objective to protect workers. Drinking cocoa regularly was a necessity in most factories as it was deemed to offset the risk of poisoning.¹⁵ Government regulations also required women to wear gloves, hats and barrier creams on their hands and face which often trapped more TNT-powder to the skin.¹⁶ The machinery in these factories was also highly dangerous. Clarke recalled two separate incidents when her friends had been injured while operating dangerous machinery. One had lost her hand and another lost the tops of her fingers.¹⁷ Furthermore, there was always a risk of detonations. In October 1917, there was an explosion in White Lund factory where Clarke worked, and in August 1917, an explosion occurred in the Hereford factory where Gabriella West was employed.¹⁸

The poor infrastructure of factories also increased the likelihood of ill-health. West recorded in her diaries approximately eighteen casualties per night with only four casualty beds in her facility.¹⁹ Unhygienic facilities were also commonplace with West describing the factories restrooms as disgusting and rat infested.²⁰ Moreover,

¹⁴ Claire A. Culleton, 'Irish working-class women and World War I' in Susan Shaw-Sailer (ed.), *Representing Ireland: gender, class, nationality* (Gainesville, 1997), pp 161-2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Isabella Clarke interview (IWM, Catalogue No. 774).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*; *Hereford Times*, 25 Aug. 1917.

¹⁹ John Rickard, 'Studying a new science: Yeats, Irishness, and the East' in Susan Shaw-Sailer (ed.), *Representing Ireland: gender, class, nationality* (Gainesville, 1997), pp 106-9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

due to the short supply of housing, landlords often rented rooms to two groups of workers – one who worked by day and the other by night. These women rotated beds and often slept together. Irish immigrants who gained employment in larger factories were often given accommodation in temporary hostels and government-built huts.²¹ Despite the lack of standards in these accommodations they often came at extortionate prices. Clarke paid £15 a week for her hostel accommodation, approximately three-quarters of her weekly earnings.²² Furthermore, these women worked six days a week, some as many as 92 hours.²³ Though it was deemed as extremely fortunate for Irishwomen to obtain employment in British munition factories, they embarked on a journey of intense hard labour and often lived in appalling conditions.

In some factories there were tensions between English and Irish workers and outbreaks of violence occasionally occurred.²⁴ The most noted conflict occurred in 1917 in the factory where West was employed. The situation was resolved by sending twenty Irish girls home within a day of the riot.²⁵ As they departed from Hereford station, they were sworn at and pelted with rotten vegetables and eggs.²⁶ Furthermore, a report on the state of munition factories in Britain in November 1916, asserted that Irish munition workers were not popular.²⁷ Claire Culleton believed Irishwomen faced prejudgement from their co-workers and supervisors as being rowdy and disorderly.²⁸ West highlighted this prejudice as she described the Irish as ‘girls who stormed around yelled, shrieked, threw mud’.²⁹ In 1918, the Ministry of Labour questioned the

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Isabella Clarke interview (IWM, Catalogue No. 774).

²³ Claire A. Culleton, ‘Irish working-class women’, p. 157.

²⁴ Walsh, ‘“We work with shells all day and night”’, p. 11.

²⁵ Claire A. Culleton, ‘Irish working-class women’, p. 159.

²⁶ Walsh, ‘“We work with shells all day and night”’. p. 11.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Bell, ‘Book review’, p. 255.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

necessity to recruit Irish women at all as Irish ‘uneducated girls from remote villages’ were causing problems by arriving in English towns late at night.³⁰ Nevertheless, the British government continued to recruit Irish women, and in November 1918, the Ministry of Munitions contended that English munition employers, ‘spoke most highly of the morals of Irish girls and their good work’.³¹ Although nationalism may have created a source of conflict between Irish and English workers, particularly in the second half of the war, it seems that the majority of Irish women who emigrated to Britain integrated well into the factories and shared a combination of economic and patriotic motivations with their British counterparts in their decision to seek war work.³²

Armistice Day may not have been welcomed positively by most munition workers given that many were immediately dismissed. Like many other Irishwomen, Clarke emphasised that her main motivation had always been money. She earned six times more in England than Belfast. She described her naivety at the dangers of her work like so many of her colleagues and her lack of real concern in the actual events of the war or the 1916 Easter Rising as she had been too young.³³ While the war work of these Irishwomen contributed to the permanent social and economic emancipation for women in Britain, this failed to extend to Ireland. As well as a lack of advancements for women in Ireland, the contribution of these women to the war effort was condemned and portrayed in a negative light resulting in the memory of their work becoming ‘historically hidden’ in Irish history.³⁴

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Walsh, “‘We work with shells all day and night’”, p. 11.

³² Ibid., p. 14.

³³ Isabella Clarke interview (IWM, Catalogue No. 774).

³⁴ Deborah Thom, ‘Women, war work and the state in Ireland, 1914–1918’ in *Women's history review*, vol. 27, no 3 (2018), p. 455.

Between the war years, Irish munition factories made up just 2.6 per cent of British wealth.³⁵ Although the Irish munition industry was not as prosperous as Britain's, it succeeded in employing a workforce which was dominated by women. In 1917, the National Shell Factories were established in Galway, Waterford, Cork and two in Dublin.³⁶ Some small businesses had operated as munitions works prior to 1917 such as the National Fuse Factory in Dublin and Pierce Engineering firm in Wexford.³⁷ Mr Chamberlain had personally approved the conversion of Kynoch's cartridges factory in Wicklow after he had visited the factory in 1915.³⁸ Kynoch's employed more than two-hundred women throughout the duration of the war.³⁹ From the outset it was presumed that the majority of employment in the National Shell Factories would be female. Magazines such as the *Lady of the House*, reported on the 'ample' employment opportunities that it would provide girls of 'various social grades'.⁴⁰ Girls from the National Shell Factories in Waterford, Cork and Galway were sent to London for training.⁴¹ Additionally, the Technical Committee in Dublin and the City of Dublin Distress Committee set up training facilities in munition work for Dublin women.⁴² Some Irish women were sent to English munition factories to train as shell inspectors.⁴³ Despite government regulations outlining that only five percent of the industrial workforce could be male, this protocol failed to operate in reality. However, by the end of the war women did comprise the majority of the workforce in the National Shell Factories at 66.4 per cent.⁴⁴

³⁵ Walsh, "'We work with shells all day and night'", p. 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Freemans Journal*, 14 Sept. 1915.

³⁹ Walsh, "'We work with shells all day and night'", p. 3.

⁴⁰ *Lady of the house*, 15 Sept. 1915.

⁴¹ Thom, 'Women, war work and the state in Ireland', p. 460.

⁴² *Irish Independent*, 18 Mar. 1916.

⁴³ Walsh, "'We work with shells all day and night'", pp 4-5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

The vast majority of working-class women who availed of munition work were motivated by economic incentives. The significant difference in the wage rates between munition factories and the textile industry, as well as domestic service, was further demarcated in 1918 when Irish female munition workers were awarded a pay rise. Florence Lea from Sandymount in Dublin was a typical example of the economic prosperity which munition work offered women. Lea was an apprentice dressmaker in 1914 earning two shillings a week. In March 1917, she began working in the Dublin Dockyard Company's Munition Works and by the end of the war she earned 50 shillings a week.⁴⁵ Moreover, in April 1918, women workers were for the first time able to partake in an organisation to improve their working conditions when the National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW), a British Trade Union, expanded to Ireland to represent female munition workers. They successfully formalised branches in Cork, Dublin, Galway, Derry, Waterford and Wexford.⁴⁶ In April 1918, the NFWW earned their greatest achievement, when the wages of Irish female munition workers were raised to the same level as those in England. Women's daytime hourly rate increased from 18 shillings to 24 shillings per hour, and from 23s to 30s for night shifts – equivalent to men's night-time rate of pay. Additionally, factories were required to adopt piecework in place of their current bonus per output policy.⁴⁷ Other successful claims in 1918 saw the abolishment of the unpaid, overlapping half hour between shifts in the National Shell Factory in Dublin.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴⁶ Thom, 'Women, war work and the state in Ireland', p. 462.

⁴⁷ *Irish Times*, 28 May 1917.

⁴⁸ Theresa Moriarty, 'Work, warfare and wages: industrial controls and Irish trade unionism in the First World War' in Adrian Gregory and Senia Pašeta (eds), *Ireland and the Great War: 'a war to unite us all?'* (Manchester, 2002), p. 86.

From the beginning of the war there were mixed opinions regarding female munition workers in Ireland. The Irish Trade Union Congress and Labour party published posters highlighting women's role as home labourers and child-bearers.⁴⁹ Sinn Féin also vigorously responded to advertising campaigns by the British government in Ireland and as anti-war sentiments swept in, attitudes towards Irishwomen's war work became increasingly hostile.⁵⁰ Additionally, Nationalist women continued to scrutinise those who aided Britain. At the start of the war, the *Irish Citizen* claimed: 'the European war has done nothing to alter our condition of slavery'.⁵¹ Moreover, widespread debates surrounding women's physical and mental capacity were recorded in newspapers with extensive commentary on the lack of morals of women factory workers.⁵² In August 1917, Dr James Burnet claimed that war work had resulted in a lowering standard of female morals. He owed this decrease to the free intercourse of the sexes. Furthermore, he commented on widespread underage smoking and drinking by girls as a result of their increased earnings.⁵³ However, not all newspapers portrayed negative images of female workers. As early as 1916, Mr William Leighton wrote that women in factories were a surprising success.⁵⁴ With regard to the mis-spending of women's earnings, Lord d'Abernon, Chairman of the Liquor Control Board, declared that in December 1917 there had been a decline of 73 per cent in female drunkenness compared to the first year of the war. He attributed this decline to the great increase of women's employment in

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Claire A. Culleton, 'Irish working-class women', pp 159-160.

⁵¹ Pennell, "More than a 'curious footnote'", p. 43.

⁵² McCormick, "Filthy little girls", p. 106.

⁵³ *Irish Independent*, 23 Aug. 1917.

⁵⁴ *Leitrim Observer*, 22 July 1916.

industry.⁵⁵ Furthermore, during the NFWW wage negotiations employers praised the high morals and efficacy of their female munition workers.⁵⁶

The announcement of Armistice in November 1918 also resulted in the immediate loss of employment for these women.⁵⁷ Within a year, all of the munition factories in Ireland were closed.⁵⁸ Munition work had brought women into various forms of labour which would have previously been deemed impossible occupations for them and allowed some women the opportunity to economically advance.⁵⁹ The *Leitrim Observer* highlighted that the most interesting outcome arising from the development of women's war work was women's realisation of what their own power meant.⁶⁰ However, these women were met with harsh resentment in the volatile atmosphere of Irish society and their involvement in the war effort was seldom recognised. The lack of development in gendered roles in Ireland following the war was evident in the lack of appreciation for the work of these women. Women's primary role was still considered to be a homemaker and child bearer. Furthermore, in 1919, the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry concluded that a woman had been 'worth two-thirds of man' because 'the women made mistakes, had higher sickness rates and needed cloakrooms which increased costs for the employer'.⁶¹ In March 1919, a new regulation for unemployment benefit deemed that only women 'genuinely seeking work' were eligible to unemployment benefit. The few women who were granted unemployment benefit received only seven shillings a week.⁶² In the post-war years it became clear that women had only been accepted into the

⁵⁵ *Irish Independent*, 21 Dec. 1917

⁵⁶ *Irish Times*, 28 May 1917

⁵⁷ Walsh, "'We work with shells all day and night'", p. 12.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Irish Independent*, 23 Aug. 1917

⁶⁰ *Leitrim Observer*, 3 June 1916.

⁶¹ Thom, 'Women, war work and the state in Ireland', p. 455.

⁶² Moriarty, 'Work, warfare and wages', p. 88.

workforce because warfare necessitated it.⁶³ Furthermore, these women were urged to regard their labour as a privilege.⁶⁴ It is possible that the limited information on these war-worker women was reflective of the nationalist attitude in Ireland following the war as these women were overshadowed by their female counterparts who had fought against the usurpation of Ireland.

In Ireland, several women engaged in a significant amount of volunteerism. Many were mobilised in the Red Cross, the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) and St Johns Ambulance. The majority of women who volunteered in the war effort remained at home. Many were involved in the production of home comforts and essential supplies for soldiers. One of the most remarkable initiatives during the war was the collection of sphagnum moss which was used as an alternative to cotton wool throughout the country's bog lands and seaside. This was instigated and managed by Women VADs (WVAD) in the Royal College of Science Ireland (RCSi). Additionally, the benevolent work of upper-class women was particularly displayed when Belgian refugees were accommodated in Ireland. Although women of all classes were involved in this volunteer work, it was dominated by middle and upper class women who were largely motivated by ideological beliefs to support the men who had gone to fight 'for our rights and liberties', and many had male relatives fighting on the frontlines.⁶⁵ They remained united for the duration of the war through their enthusiasm to 'do their bit'.⁶⁶

⁶³ Walsh, "'We work with shells all day and night'", p. 13.

⁶⁴ McCormick, "Filthy little girls", p. 106.

⁶⁵ Clara Cullen, 'War work on the home front: The Central Sphagnum Depot for Ireland at the Royal College of Science for Ireland, 1915–19' in David Durnin and Ian Miller (eds), *Medicine, health and Irish experiences of conflict 1914-45*, (Manchester, 2016), p. 164.

⁶⁶ Pennell, 'More than a "curious footnote"', p. 41.

On 10 August 1914, President of the Irish Red Cross, Lady Aberdeen, held a meeting to endorse the organisation of first aid training and the production of necessities and comforts for soldiers.⁶⁷ A Joint War Committee was formed which coordinated the entire work of voluntary organisations in Ireland.⁶⁸ The Department of Agricultural and Technical Instruction funded over 170 first aid and emergency nursing classes, training over 10,000 men and women.⁶⁹ Thirty-eight WVADs were established in Munster, Leinster and Connacht with over 2,927 members throughout the duration of the war.⁷⁰ By March 1915, three hundred professional nurses joined the Dublin City and County Red Cross with a larger number of partially trained nurses enrolling in VAD classes.⁷¹ Meta Burgess from Co. Westmeath, was one example of an Irishwoman who served as a VAD nurse in France and Malta. She died in January 1919 after becoming sick while travelling home from a military hospital in France.⁷² Furthermore, surviving letters written by Marie Martin, a VAD nurse from Dublin who worked in a military hospital in Malta described the under-staffed conditions of St. George's Hospital in Malta which had approximately six nurses tending to one-hundred and forty patients. Martin later worked in France during the Battle of Somme.⁷³ Additionally, Sandra McAvoy brought to light the wartime writings of Susanne Rouviere Day from Cork, a volunteer relief worker in Belgium between 1915 and 1917 who spent twenty months in Bar-le-Duc after the Battle of Verdun. Her writings depict the tough circumstances of working in the war zone and the devastating conditions of refugees displaced by the war. Day deemed it impossible

⁶⁷Eileen Reilly, 'Women and voluntary war work' in Adrian Gregory and Senia Pašeta (eds), *Ireland and the Great War: 'a war to unite us all?'* (Manchester, 2002), p. 49.

⁶⁸ Cullen, 'War work on the home front', p. 157.

⁶⁹ *Irish Examiner*, 23 Sept. 1914; Cullen, 'War work on the home front', pp 156-7.

⁷⁰ Reilly, 'Women and voluntary war', p. 49.

⁷¹ *Irish Times*, 31 Mar. 1915.

⁷² Cullen, 'War work on the home front', p. 158.

⁷³ Marie Martin to her mother, Mary Martin, 4 Apr. 1916 (Maynooth University, Letters 1916-1923, Malta Letters Collection) (<http://letters1916.maynoothuniversity.ie/item/1380>) (18 Oct 2020).

not to be affected by her work.⁷⁴ The archives of the British Red Cross also preserve records of thousands of Irishwomen who were mobilised abroad in Britain.

At home in Ireland numerous women's organisations produced necessities and comforts for soldiers. The headquarters of the VAD in Dublin was converted into a workhouse where WVADs produced care packages for soldiers.⁷⁵ Throughout the war the Dublin City Red Cross produced 14,146 items of clothing.⁷⁶ The Cork branch also despatched 270,000 hospital supplies and 53,500 pieces of clothing throughout the war.⁷⁷ A number of independent women's organisations were also established to provide soldiers with comforts and necessities. Most notable was the Irish Women's Association (IWA) who provided food and clothing to Irish prisoners of war and 'comforts' to men on the Front.⁷⁸ At the end of 1917, the Cork branch of the IWA had sent seventy-five Irish POW comforts and £80 worth of comforts to Munster men in the Middle East since March 1916.⁷⁹ A branch was even established in London where Irishwomen were sending packages once a fortnight to over 2,000 Irish POW in Germany by November 1915.⁸⁰ In April 1916, the Queen offered a premises in Kensington Palace to the London branch of the IWA.⁸¹ The WVAD in Dublin and Cork also established an Enquiry Bureau for Wounded and Missing Soldiers and Prisoners of War.⁸² It is estimated that over 6,000 Irishwomen were involved in the

⁷⁴ Sandra McAvoy, 'Relief work and Refugees: Susanne Rouviere Day (1876-1964) on war as women's business' in *Women's History review*, xxvii, no. 3 (2018).

⁷⁵ Reilly, 'Women and voluntary war', p. 54.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Senia Pašeta, 'Women And War In Ireland, 1914-18' in *History Ireland*, xxii, no. 4 (2014), pp 24-7.

⁷⁸ *Leinster Leader*, 16 Oct. 1915.

⁷⁹ *Irish Examiner*, 11 Dec. 1917.

⁸⁰ *Kerry Advocate*, 13 Nov. 1915.

⁸¹ *Irish Examiner*, 11 Apr. 1916.

⁸² Reilly, 'Women and voluntary war', p. 54.

fundraising and running of programmes for soldiers and their families during the war.⁸³

In December 1915 the WVAD in the RCScI opened a special department for the production of sphagnum moss medical supplies.⁸⁴ Between forty and fifty women volunteered three days a week in the RCScI depot.⁸⁵ The organisation was sustained by female volunteer moss collectors throughout Ireland who operated as its backbone. Eventually moss collectors were organised in almost every county in Ireland, with approximately 325 sub-depots in total being identified.⁸⁶ When the depot closed in February 1919, the total production and output of surgical dressings was 967,422.⁸⁷ These supplies were sent to over eighty different hospitals throughout Europe.⁸⁸ The impact of these volunteers was highlighted when Ireland's sphagnum moss organisation was used as a model for the establishment of similar organisations in Canada and America.⁸⁹

The accommodation of Belgian refugees in Ireland was primarily undertaken by many upper-class women who privately sponsored refugees and various women's organisations who fundraised for the 'Catholic Belgium' cause. The County Cavan Women's Patriotic Committee fundraised and welcomed their first Belgian family in January 1915 and financed two more Belgian families in March 1915.⁹⁰ Additionally, a local women's committee in Beauparc, Co. Meath, raised money to accommodate

⁸³ Fionnuala Walsh, 'The impact of the First World War on Celbridge, Co. Kildare' in *The journal of the Kildare Archaeological Society*, xx, no. 3 (2013), p. 292.

⁸⁴ *Freemans Journal*, 17 Dec. 1915.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Cullen, 'War work on the home front', pp 159-160.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Monika Barget, Padraig MacCarron and Susan Schreiberman, 'Sphagnum moss and female agency' in *History Ireland*, vol 26. no 6 (2018), p. 33.

⁸⁹ *The Irish Times*, 26 Sept. 1918.

⁹⁰ Reilly, 'Women and voluntary war work', p. 56.

Belgian refugees in Seneschalstown House.⁹¹ The WVAD in Trinity College were able to house a number of Belgian refugees with the help of monthly donations which they advertised in newspapers.⁹² Furthermore, numerous upper-class women personally financed for the provision of refuge. Lady Inchiquin, from Co. Clare, financed and donated a fifteen roomed house at Castle Fergus for displaced Belgians.⁹³ The arrival of refugees in Cork was particularly noteworthy as their living arrangements in Palace Theatre were decorated with Irish, Belgian and Union Jack flags.⁹⁴ By March 1915, 1,646 refugees had arrived in Ireland.⁹⁵

Since the declaration of war on 4 of August 1914, many Irishwomen swiftly adapted to provide various forms of voluntary work. In 1916, the *Leitrim Observer* reported that there had been ‘a new found respect among non-working women for the dignity of labour’ due to the vast amount of volunteer work initiated in Ireland.⁹⁶ In December 1918, the Queen described her heart as being full of gratitude for the work she observed by women throughout her Empire during the war.⁹⁷ Armistice Day was welcomed with relief by much of the women involved in voluntary work as many had relatives fighting in the war.⁹⁸ The role of these women to partially alleviate the sufferings of the war was more than just volunteer work, it was a necessity to supply goods to soldiers and to help sustain the war effort. The work of these women is yet to be fully documented in Irish historiography.

⁹¹ *The Irish Times*, 5 Nov. 1914.

⁹² *Belfast Newsletter*, 10 Nov. 1914.

⁹³ Maeve O’Riordan, ‘Titled women and voluntary war work in Ireland during the First World War: a case study of Ethel, Lady Inchiquin’ in *Women’s History review*, xxvii, no. 3 (2016), pp 363-4.

⁹⁴ Pennell, ‘More than a “curious footnote”’, p. 40.

⁹⁵ O’Riordan, ‘Titled women and voluntary war work’, pp 363-4.

⁹⁶ *Leitrim Observer*, 3 June 1916.

⁹⁷ *Irish Times*, 14 Dec. 1918.

⁹⁸ Cullen, ‘War work on the home front’, p. 165.

In August 1914, the majority of the Irish population supported Ireland's involvement in the war effort.⁹⁹ For many the economic incentives that wartime employment provided counteracted the dangers of their work. The CSO estimated that over 8,000 women emigrated to Britain between the war years, the majority employed in munition work.¹⁰⁰ In contrast to the advancing role of women in Britain, in Ireland the war work of these women was seen as a shameful association.¹⁰¹ Isabella Clarke is one of the few women whose story has been recorded. Although Ireland's munition industry was not as prosperous as Britain's it succeeded to employ a female dominated workforce. These women also faced intense hostility for their labour. In Ireland, the aftermath of the war proved that the war had only provided these women with a temporary opportunity to advance in society. The lack of documentation and commemoration for these women is evidence of their unchanged circumstances in Ireland. Many women sought to directly aid the men who were fighting on the frontline. Their motivation initiated an immense amount of volunteer work in Ireland particularly amongst the middle and upper classes of society. While thousands of Irishwomen who were mobilised abroad, most Irishwomen who partook in voluntary work did so on home ground. A significant amount of these women spent the duration of the war producing comforts and necessities for soldiers and sailors. The collection of sphagnum moss is a prime example of the work that women undertook to produce much needed supplies. These women volunteered as a means to support a community of men, many with relatives, who had left to fight for the Allies. Their contribution to the war further ostracised them from society due to the wave of nationalism which prevailed from 1916.¹⁰² This paper is a segment of the unfamiliar story of

⁹⁹ Walsh, 'We work with shells all day and night', p. 12.

¹⁰⁰ Central Statistics Office Emigration Records, 'Life in Ireland, 1914-1918'; *Irish Times*, 8 Mar. 1916.

¹⁰¹ Thom, 'Women, war work and the state in Ireland', p. 462.

¹⁰² O'Riordan, 'Titled women and voluntary war work', pp 363-4.

Irishwomen's lives throughout the war years. More than a century later their contribution to the war effort between 1914 and 1918 remains an understudied portion of Irishwomen's historiography.

Death and the supernatural in the Bureau of Military History's witness
statements

Benjamin Ragan

Few times of crisis are more salient in a person's life than those moments when an unnatural death seems imminent. The witness statements contributed to the Bureau of Military History are riddled with such moments. They recount personal testimony of a noteworthy period of crisis in the Irish community, the ways in which that crisis percolated down into individual traumatic experiences, and how those experiences were coped with psychologically. Consequently, the Bureau of Military History's witness statement archive is replete with a variety of supernatural phenomena. This essay is an attempt to illustrate the characteristics of, and reasons behind, the supernatural ways in which Irish revolutionaries coped with death. Based off of data gathered from 1623 supernatural phenomena drawn from 206 of the Bureau of Military History's witness statements as part of my ongoing doctoral research, I conclude that it was not unusual for Irish revolutionaries to resort to the supernatural to cope with death anxiety. Furthermore, these supernatural experiences tended away from the paranormal and toward the religious as proximity to death and danger

increased, and this was likely due to differences in the perceived relative stability of paranormal and religious loci of control in the psychology of Irish revolutionaries.

The primary function of the Bureau of Military History (hereafter BMH) was not to collect supernatural reminiscences, it was to get a more operational overview of the revolution by collecting the personal testimonies of veterans along with any other relevant documents. Eve Morrison described it as follows: ‘Like the Irish Manuscripts Commission and Folklore Commission, the BMH was a cultural initiative of the newly independent state to establish the bona fides of its claim to nationhood.’¹ Supernatural material was given ample space for expression through the Folklore Commission; by contrast, the BMH was geared for military history of a more ‘narrow operational focus’.² In spite of this, the supernatural side of life appears quite regularly in the BMH witness statements, which is revealing of its significance.³

It was common for Irish revolutionaries to prepare their souls for the afterlife before facing death on the battlefield or before the firing squad. Typically, this would involve partaking in as many sacraments as possible, but most importantly confession. Absolution was the chief goal, but any iota of sanctifying grace that could be reasonably gathered was welcome. If time were pressing, large groups of men could be absolved by a priest with a conditional absolution. This was done on 2 November 1920 by Fr. Montford to Sean MacEoin’s flying column preceding the siege of Ballinalee, as described in MacEoin’s witness statement:

¹ Eve Morrison, ‘The bureau of military history’ in John Crowley, Donal O Drisceoil, and Mike Murphy (eds) *Atlas of the Irish revolution* (Cork, 2017), p. 876.

² *Ibid.*, p. 878.

³ Eve Morrison, ‘Hauntings of the Irish revolution: veterans and memory of the independence struggle and civil war’ in Marguérite Corporaal, Christopher Cusack and Ruud van den Beuken (eds), *Irish studies and the dynamics of memory: transitions and transformations* (Bern, 2017), p. 84.

...the others evacuated the town, notwithstanding my efforts to prevent them. The curate even decided he would go with them. I insisted that he should remain, for we were likely to go into action at any time, and, as we were by no means saints, his services would be needed in the event of any of us being seriously wounded. He thereupon ordered me to mobilise my total force ... Addressing them, Father Montford told them that he wished to prepare them spiritually in anticipation of their going into action, but that, as the time as short, he would ask them if they all had the intention of going to Confession. Having replied in the affirmative, they were told to say a confiteor and then make an act of contrition aloud. When the prayers had been said, Father Montford gave the men general absolution, and then asked me if he could leave.⁴

If death were deemed to be moments away, and no priest could be found, an act of contrition was whispered hastily into the ear of the mortally wounded individual and repeated by that individual if they could manage it. The dying moments of Liam Lynch, Michael Collins, and numerous others were accompanied by this prayer or something close to it: 'O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended thee: and I detest my sins most sincerely because they displease thee, my God, who art so deserving of all my love, for thy infinite goodness and most amiable perfections: and I firmly purpose, by thy holy grace, never more to offend thee.'⁵ This would suffice to absolve the soul in desperate circumstances. As Michael Callaghan, former mayor of Limerick, lay dying in his parlour, his wife and their housekeeper Brigid used an act of contrition in conjunction with rosary beads, a crucifix, and holy water:

I crawled back to my husband and fell across his body, all my being crying out to God to spare him to me. I had never seen anybody die, so I hoped where from the first shot there was no hope...Brigid had flung on a coat, and was on the landing when she heard the first shot. Others followed, and she knew what it meant. At once, she got her rosary beads with the cross blessed for the hour of death, my crucifix and holy water, and ran down to find us both lying at the foot of the stairs. At first she thought us both

⁴ Sean MacEoin statement, 1957 (N.A.I., Bureau of Military History WS 1716), p. 114. (Bureau of Military History henceforth B.M.H.).

⁵ Daniel Breen statement, 1959 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1763), pp 165-6; 'Michael Collins Death, Eye Witness Interviews', (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Eeka5fg_b4), 4:34, (22 June 2020); Leslie Price statement (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1754), p. 9; Sean E. Walshe statement, 1956 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1363), p. 13; James Butler, *The most R. Dr. James Butler's catechism; revised, enlarged, approved and recommended by the four R.C. Arch. of Ireland* (Dublin, 1836), p. 5.

dead. She roused me, and I asked her: "Is this a bad dream?" She held the crucifix to my husband's lips, and said the Act of Contrition before I could think.⁶

This tragic account was written a few months later in the Summer of 1921 while the memory of what happened was quite fresh for a combination of propagandistic and cathartic purposes.⁷ The priority given to religious ritual is a testament to its importance; it is notable that Brigid's first instinct was to collect her religious paraphernalia rather than attempt to find a doctor or call for help.

This primacy given to religious ritual is understandable given the importance of religion to both reaffirming communal identity and assuaging death anxiety. Absolution was in many cases seen as an important enough ritual that even traitors to the cause received the courtesy of spiritual aid before being executed. An example of this is the execution of Joyce, a suspected spy, in October of 1920, described by Mícheál Ó Droighnáin in his witness statement:

The priest was rowed across the lake from Kylebeg to Knockferry, and from thence to our rendezvous... We lit the place with candles. The court consisted of three of my highest Officers, and I prosecuted ... He [the spy, Joyce] denied that he had been communicating with the British authorities, but feebly. He was convicted of spying, and was sentenced to death. The priest was then brought to him, and heard his Confession, and he received the Holy Viaticum.⁸

Ó Droighnáin sent for the priest well before the trial, indicating its foregone conclusion, a fact probably not lost upon the unfortunate schoolteacher as the ceremonies proceeded. Ó Droighnáin's men went through the process of fetching the priest and rowing him across the lake, demonstrating that the soul of the condemned

⁶ Kate O'Callaghan statement, 1952 (N.A.I., B.M.H.WS 688), 'The limerick curfew murders' pamphlet, p. 22.

⁷ Kate O'Callaghan statement, 1952 (N.A.I., B.M.H.WS 688), p. 8.

⁸ Mícheál Ó Droighnáin statement, 1959 (N.A.I., B.M.H.WS 1718), pp 19-20.

was worth their trouble. They deemed it necessary to execute a man but would stop just short of damning his soul.

In the case of the attempted execution of an alleged spy ‘Mr. O’Kane’ by two Irish volunteers, Owen ‘Ginger’ Callan and Hugh Martin, this spiritual courtesy backfired, as Michael Sheerin describes in his statement:

He [O’Kane] was brought to a wood close by and prepared for execution. During this he was praying and pleading for a priest. Ginger was a very religious boy and volunteered to get the local Parish Priest in Ardara... The Parish Priest, an old man who did not approve of the Movement at all, refused to accompany Ginger. Ginger was trying to persuade him to change his mind and while doing so he heard a series of shots from the direction of the wood ... he found Martin searching for the victim. Martin's story was, after Ginger left, O’Kane, who was bound only on the wrists, passed the time praying on his knees. After a while O’Kane jumped up and made a dive into the wood ... Later we received a report that O’Kane had escaped.⁹

O’Kane’s escape is an example demonstrating just how tactically significant this spiritual courtesy could become. Regardless of whether Hugh Martin’s version of events is reliable (O’Kane may have simply persuaded Martin to let him go), the fact that Ginger was absent to fetch the priest was probably the deciding factor in the success of O’Kane’s escape. Notably, both these cases occurred in rural western parts of Ireland (Galway and Donegal respectively); Michael Sheerin described Ginger as ‘a very religious boy’, and Mícheál Ó Droighnáin was by his own description a very religious man, suggesting that going so far as to retrieve a priest for condemned spies might not have been standard procedure for less religious revolutionaries.¹⁰ Nevertheless, even the less obviously devout would often give the executed an

⁹ Michael Sheerin statement, 1953 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 803), pp 25-6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

opportunity to say their prayers before dying, or at the very least whisper an act of contrition into their ear as they lay dying.¹¹

Sometimes, revolutionaries would go so far as to attend religious services during lulls in combat, like Edward Boyle and his comrades during a shootout with the Ulster Special Constabulary near Mulladuff, on the Fermanagh/Donegal border in April 1922:

When the time for 10 a.m. Mass at Oram Chapel came, most of us evacuated our positions and we went as we were, with all the marks and dirt of nearly 24 hours fighting on our persons, to Mass. We naturally had to carry our guns and equipment with us. The priest who celebrated Mass took a rather poor view of our attendance at Mass. We returned to our positions after Mass was over...¹²

Though this was not explicitly a preparation for death, it is a testament to the religious conviction of these men, and the degree to which their political struggle was integrated with their religious life, even to the extent of these aspects of life coming directly adjacent to each other. Perhaps this action was a display of power over the local clergy, or perhaps the mystical union with the body of Christ provided them with just the respite they needed to carry on. Such religious preparations for death have been demonstrated to help cope with death anxiety by psychologists and sociologists, particularly when those religious preparations result in feelings of being forgiven by God.¹³ Religious ritual sets up an external locus of control in the face of an otherwise

¹¹ Michael Hynes statement, 1955 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1173), p. 9; Daniel O'Shaughnessy statement, 1956 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1435), p. 103; Michael Fogarty statement, 1952 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 673), p. 10.

¹² Edward Boyle statement, 1952 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 647), pp 21-2.

¹³ Neal Krause, 'Trust in God, Forgiveness by God, and Death Anxiety' in *OMEGA---Journal of death and dying*, lxxii, no. 1, (2015), p. 20; Neal Krause and R. David Hayward, 'Acts of contrition, forgiveness by God, and death anxiety among older Mexican Americans' in *The international journal for the psychology of religion*, xxv, (2015), p. 57.

uncontrollable or chaotic situation, helping the performer of the ritual to better cope emotionally.¹⁴

Religious ritual was not the only supernatural aid that revolutionaries received; more exotic paranormal faculties present themselves in the witness statements as well. Occasionally, a premonition might come from within to warn the percipient of danger and avert death altogether. In the spring of 1920, Michael Lynch's wife had such a premonition, which Michael described in his witness statement:

I was urged by my wife not to sleep at home, as she had a premonition that there would be a raid on the house. To ease her mind, I went out and stopped the night with Dan Kavanagh ... the next morning, I found that my wife's premonition had been quite correct and that there had been a very prolonged and thorough raid on the house in my absence ... I attended my office regularly and came home to my meals, but I did not sleep at home, for the simple reason that I would not be allowed by my wife. This went on for four or five days.¹⁵

This was probably a coincidence, but it is not the only one of its kind. Similarly, John King's dreams preserved him from bodily danger in June of 1921 according to his testimony:

One night, I had a dream as the three of us slept in the dug-out. I thought I was being pursued by the Tans, and I had fallen down, and that they were about to fire at me. I jumped up, and hit my head against the low sheet-iron root of the dug-out ... Try as I would, I could not get back to sleep again. About 9 a.m., Wallace and Coyne awoke and dressed, and started to go down in the direction of the house...I said that I did not think that we should go to the house today, as I had a feeling, due to a dream I had during the night, that something would happen. The two fellows looked at each other, shook their heads, thinking that I was cracking...After some dallying, they too got cold feet ... I began to think that, if those two told the O.C. that I was acting on dreams, I might be dismissed from the active service unit; so I did not feel too happy about the matter. It was not long,

¹⁴ Marija Branković, 'Who believes in ESP: cognitive and motivational determinants of the belief in extra-sensory perception', *Europe's journal of psychology*, xv, (2019), pp 131-2.

¹⁵ Michael Lynch statement, 1951 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 511), p. 109.

however, until we heard shots in the direction of Eriff woods and, through the telescope, saw dust rising off the road...¹⁶

John's decision to stay in his dugout kept him and his men out of a battle that they probably could not have won on their own. Perhaps this was a manifestation of the 'seventh sense' mentioned by Eamon Broy: '...all Government representatives were the enemies of the people out only to do evil to the ordinary population and they never appeared for any good purpose. The people had had to develop a sixth and if possible, a seventh sense in order to be eternally on their guard against their enemies.'¹⁷ The Bureau of Military History's witness statements contain numerous examples of precognition or Extra-Sensory-Perception in one form or another, which lends at least some anecdotal credence to Broy's claim.¹⁸

All of these 'queer instincts' found in the witness statements were typically recorded thirty or more years after they supposedly happened, so it is possible that many of them were fanciful additions included to spice up the narrative, explain survival in an otherwise impossible situation in the absence of clear memories, or perhaps even to excuse a moment of perceived cowardice. These might be satisfactory explanations in some cases, but there are others where the death was predicted but not averted, such as those found in the statements of Grace Plunkett and Katharine Barry-

¹⁶ John C. King statement, 1958 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1731), pp 39-41.

¹⁷ Eamon Broy statement, 1955 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1280), pp 7-8.

¹⁸ Patrick J. Bermingham statement, 1952 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 697,) pp 1-2; Edward Brennan statement (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1514), pp 3-4; John Flannery statement, 1949 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 287), p. 13; Michael Kilroy statement, 1955 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1162), p. 37; John C. King statement, 1958 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1731), pp 39-41; James Leahy statement, 1956 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1454), pp 41-4, 46; Mary Leech statement, 1954 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1034), p. 3; Patrick J. Little statement, 1959 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1769), pp 81-2; Maud Gonne MacBride statement, 1949 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 317), pp. 8, 13; Mary MacGeehin statement, 1953 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 902), pp 9-10; Thomas J. Meldon statement, 1952 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 734), pp 16, 20, 22; Sean Moylan statement, 1953 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 838), pp 146, 180-1; Patrick Mulooly statement, 1955 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1086), p. 34; Patrick Sarsfield O'Hegarty statement, 1953 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 839), p. 6; Michael O'Kelly statement, 1955 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1155), p. 51; Henry O'Mara statement, 1959 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1652), p. 9; Séumas Robinson statement, 1959 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1721), p. 33; Mary Flannery Woods statement, 1951 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 624), pp 62, Appendix C, p. 2.

Moloney, who claim to have foreseen the impending demise of their loved ones well before they ought to have known, but despite their best efforts, were unable to change that fatal destiny.¹⁹ A more likely explanation is that at the time of writing these statements their authors genuinely believed that what they were saying was as close to the truth as they could manage. This does not mean that what they said was, in fact, true, but at least it was trying to be. The process of remembering is a reconstructive process, and perhaps some paranormal mortar made its way into the crevices of their memorial edifice. The folklorist Ellen Badone offered an interpretation of the meaning of supernatural omens, stating that they represent ‘a reconstruction or ordering of past events which generates meaning and pattern where they are not otherwise apparent... It is in the telling and re-telling of events that the narrator attempts to bridge the gap between her desire to find a reason and the inherent unreason of her loss.’²⁰ In this way the seer of the omen copes retroactively with a traumatic event. These mentions of precognition in the witness statements only average out to around two percent of their respective narratives, but over the sweep of hundreds of statements such minor parts add up to a considerable bulk of paranormal material that is hard to dismiss easily. Furthermore, there are also numerous other, more anomalous examples of paranormal activity such as apparitions and haunted places present in the statements, suggesting that such activity was not only present, but diverse in manifestation.²¹

¹⁹ Grace Plunkett statement, 1949 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 257), pp 11-12.; Katharine Barry-Moloney statement, 1952 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 731), p. 10.

²⁰ Ellen Badone, ‘Death omens in a Breton memorate’, *Folklore*, lxlvi, no. 1 (1987), p 104.

²¹ Edward Boyle statement, 1952 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 647), p. 22; Eamon Broy statement, 1955 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1280), p. 7; William Kent statement, 1947 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 0075), p. 2; Michael Kilroy statement, 1955 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1162), p 57; James Leahy statement, 1956 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1454), pp 41-6; Sean MacEoin statement, 1957 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1716), pp 122-6; Joseph McCarthy statement, 1956 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1507), pp 5-6; Andrew McDonnell statement, 1959 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1768), pp 37, 64-66; Patrick Mulooly statement, 1955 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1086), pp 5-7, 31, 67-8; Michael V. O’Donoghue statement, 1958 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1741), pp 215-17; Colm O’Lochlainn statement, 1952 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 751), p. 5; James O’Shea statement, 1952 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 733), p. 40.

Further insight can be gleaned by comparing these paranormal responses to death with the previously discussed religious ones. They both offer a locus of control in the face of an uncertain situation; the key difference between the two is that the religious responses situate that locus externally in the traditions of their community, whereas the paranormal responses situate it more internally. Some recent research suggests that the former is more effective than the latter for alleviating anxiety, as an external traditional locus is typically more stable.²² In the absence of any clear reason however, explaining why one would choose to resort to internal or external loci is more difficult, but it is clear from the statements that they were not necessarily mutually exclusive; indeed, in some cases it is rather difficult to determine whether or not the supernatural experience lies more in the realm of the religious or the paranormal. George C. Kiely offers a striking example in his statement:

It would be shortly after midnight when we awoke with a start. All around the house we could hear voices and the sounds of feet as if there were many persons outside. We looked through the window but saw nobody. We jumped out of bed and grabbed our rifles. I remember well Pat Keating saying: "It looks as if we are surrounded, lads; when they come in I'll take the first that comes, and ye make a dash for it". The voices and footsteps still continued while we waited, all tensed up for what looked like a fight to the death. We had resolved to sell our lives dearly that night. This went on for fully half an hour or so. Gradually the voices faded and so did the footsteps. We were puzzled, but, naturally, relieved. We lay on the bed until morning came, but none of us slept...we went to contact some of our lads in a nearby farmhouse. We asked them if they had been raided during the night...They said they neither heard nor saw anybody...An old woman living there was listening to us and told us that the explanation was that the room which we had occupied the previous night had been built over what she called a "Mass path" which, was used by people going to Mass at night during the penal days; this path was, she said, desecrated by the erection of the room over it and the voices and footsteps we heard, were of those people.²³

²² Branković, 'Who believes in ESP', pp 131-2.

²³ George C. Kiely statement, 1955 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1182), pp 13-14.

In this case the mass path is religious, but the subsequent ghosts are decidedly paranormal. Other examples of religiously unsanctioned yet religiously flavoured supernatural coping mechanisms can be found in abundance surrounding the infamous Templemore miracles, the floating light which followed the funeral procession of William Kent’s brother, the prayer-infused psychic recovery of the bodies of the Loughnane brothers, or the mysterious clockwork relic used to cure Michael Fitzpatrick’s gangrenous leg wound.²⁴ Clearly in many cases the paranormal and the religious were in some degree of synthesis.

It would be unwise to overstate that synthesis; my research so far indicates that as proximity to death and danger increases, religiosity generally increases along with it. I come to this conclusion based on an analysis of 1623 supernatural phenomena drawn from 206 witness statements along fifty-four different metrics including combat proximity, religiosity, death relatedness, and funeral relatedness, some of which are presented below in the form of figures.²⁵

Table 1: Religiosity and Combat Proximity

Religiosity Rating	0	1	2	3
Mean Average Combat Proximity	1.01	1.06	1.43	1.3

Note: Each figure in the second row represents the mean average combat proximity of all supernatural phenomena with the specified religiosity rating, with a margin of error +/- 0.15.

²⁴ ; John Reynolds, *The Templemore miracles: Jimmy Walsh, ceasefires and moving statues* (Gloucestershire, 2019), *passim*; Sean Scott statement, 1956 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1486), pp 7-8; James Leahy statement, 1956 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1454), pp 41-4, 46; William Kent statement, 1947 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 0075), p. 2; Pádraig Ó Fathaigh statement, 1956 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1517), pp 3-4; Michael Fitzpatrick statement, 1956 (N.A.I., B.M.H. WS 1433), pp 14-15.

²⁵ These tables are derived from a database collected and compiled as part of my ongoing doctoral research; this database will be published in its entirety in forthcoming publications. For reasons of space a more comprehensive explanation of my data and methods could not be provided here. You may contact me directly at Benjamin.Ragan@mic.ul.ie with any queries about this data.

Table 2: Religiosity and Death

Category	Non-Death Related	Ante-Mortem	Post-Mortem
Mean Average Religiosity	1.88	2.33	2.65
Number of Phenomena	1017	344	262

Note: Each figure in the row represents the mean average religiosity of the specified category of supernatural phenomena and has a margin of error of +/- 0.15.

Table 3: Gender and Death

Gender	Female (percentage)	Male (percentage)
Death Related Phenomena	44.44	35.76
<i>Post-Mortem</i>	60.83	38.72
<i>Precognition</i>	6.66	4.59

Note: Death related phenomena figures represent the percentage of all supernatural phenomena reported by the specified gender which concerned death. Post-Mortem and Precognition figures represent percentages of all death related supernatural phenomena reported by the specified gender, not a percentage of all supernatural phenomena.

The witness statements from which this data was drawn were chosen from the archive based on the number of relevant keyword hits per page; more supernaturally dense statements were prioritized. Religiosity and combat proximity were assessed for each supernatural phenomenon on a scale of zero to three. Phenomena with a religiosity of zero had no discernible connection to a religious tradition, phenomena with a religiosity of one had non-doctrinal association with a religious tradition, phenomena with a religiosity of two had conditional adherence to the dogma of a traditional religion, and phenomena with a religiosity of three were prescribed rituals of an established church. Phenomena with a combat proximity of zero took place at least a month before or after a combat or dangerous mission, phenomena with a combat proximity of one took place within a week of a combat or dangerous mission,

phenomena with a combat proximity of two took place within several hours before or after a combat or dangerous mission, and phenomena with a combat proximity of three took place during a combat or dangerous mission.

This data demonstrates that supernatural activity generally tended to become more religious as it got closer to death and combat, but this tendency was by no means universal. The trend is modest (see table 1). Phenomena with a religiosity of two came closer to combat than religiosity three phenomena; this can be explained both by the difficulty of performing sacraments in an orthodox manner during combat, and the numerous cases of conditionally orthodox phenomena, like conditional absolution and alleged miracles. These phenomena tended to happen closer to combat than sacraments, but their religious legitimacy is conditional pending on the circumstances, and in the case of miracles, the investigation of church officials. Thus, I typically gave such phenomena a religiosity score of two. Interestingly, women seemed more concerned with death than men, and especially more concerned with the funerary aspects (see table 3); the presence of precognition however seemed to be less gendered, though women had a slightly higher percentage in this category. Women's orientation toward the post-mortem is likely due to them being largely relegated to logistical, support, and public roles during the conflict; funerary ceremonies would fit this milieu.

There were numerous outliers to these general trends but nevertheless the data seems to clearly point to a pattern. This pattern can be explained with the internal/external dichotomy concerning loci of control. The more deadly a situation became, the more likely those involved would be resort to more reliable, traditional, communal, and ultimately external loci of control when it came to their supernatural

experiences. In most cases, this could be best achieved by religious rituals. In safer situations, supernatural experiences with unorthodox characteristics and an internal locus of control became more likely. Funerary types of death related phenomena were on average significantly more religious than their non-funerary counterparts (see table 2), suggesting that the communal and external nature of funeral ceremonies resulted in a more traditional religious character.

In summary, my research suggests that it was not unusual for Irish revolutionaries to resort to the supernatural in the face of death. Supernatural experiences tended more toward the religious than the paranormal in more extreme circumstances, and in many cases religious rituals were performed despite their tactical consequences. The vast number of supernatural phenomena attested to in the statements noteworthy; if 1623 supernatural phenomena can be identified in 206 statements, this suggests that there are probably several thousand such phenomena in the entire witness statement archive. This indicates that supernatural experiences were more common in the Irish Revolution than has been widely acknowledged, and that they played an important role in the lived experiences of this time of crisis.²⁶ Reflecting on these experiences gives us insight into potential coping strategies for situations that defy any rational method of control or explanation. Emotionally coping with death is something we all must struggle with regardless of our place in history; all the medical advancements to date have yet to deprive us of our penultimate moments. The remembrances of these revolutionaries show us that the supernatural in

²⁶ With a few notable exceptions, see Eve Morrison, 'Hauntings of the Irish revolution: veterans and memory of the independence struggle and civil war' in Marguërite Corporaal, Christopher Cusack and Ruud van den Beuken (eds), *Irish studies and the dynamics of memory: transitions and transformations* (Bern, 2017), pp 83-110; Tomas Mac Conmara, *The time of the Tans: an oral history of the War of Independence in County Clare* (Cork, 2019), pp 187-91; John Reynolds, *The Templemore miracles: Jimmy Walsh, ceasefires and moving statues* (Gloucestershire, 2019), *passim*.

all its forms can provide some solace, both during times of crisis and when we remember those times.²⁷

²⁷ I give thanks and acknowledgement for the support and funding provided by the Government of Ireland International Education Scholarship, the Universities Ireland History Bursary, and the Mary Immaculate College's Departmental Assistantship; without the generous support of all of these organizations this research would not have been possible.

The Catholic Church's balancing act: The Catholic hierarchy and
parochial clergy's approaches to internment and alleged ill-treatment of
internees in Northern Ireland, 1971-5

Peter Stapleton

In response to escalating violence in Northern Ireland, the Northern Irish parliament exercised the authority granted by the Special Powers Act to introduce internment without trial. Internment began with Operation Demetrius being carried out on 9 and 10 August 1971; an operation which resulted in the internment of 342 people who were suspected of being members of the IRA. These arrests were disproportionately distributed throughout the state with the majority of those interned being from nationalist areas. The RUC and British Army were also accused of ill-treatment and in some cases torture of internees during interrogation. The introduction of internment and the manner in which it was carried out between 1971 and 1975 presented a political, social and moral crisis for the Roman Catholic hierarchy and clergy. This article will outline the approach taken by Fr. Denis Faul, Fr. Raymond Murray and Fr. Brian Brady following the introduction of internment without trial and their attempts to address the abuses of power which the British Army and Northern Irish security forces allegedly used against Catholics. In contrast, the Catholic hierarchy adopted a more restrained approach. This method typically involved the issuing of statements

denouncing violence in general and rarely included public denouncements of the British security forces and their actions. Sensitive discussions were confined to private backchannels established with British and Northern Irish politicians and other members of the clergy. The approach taken by the Catholic hierarchy will be compared to that of Faul, Murray and Brady. The issues which resulted from these contrasting approaches, such as disagreement between the three activist priests and hierarchical figures, for instance Cardinal Conway and Bishop Philbin, will be examined. The purpose of the paper is not to offer an analysis of the discussions held between these priests, hierarchical clergy members and the British and Northern Irish authorities but will instead show how these conversations exasperated the difficulties between the priests and the Catholic hierarchy.

Following the introduction of internment without trial in August 1971, the Catholic Church hierarchy quickly voiced their discontent. Cardinal Conway condemned Operation Demetrius, claiming that ‘it is necessary to state the abhorrence of internment without trial, and particularly its one-sided application, is equally deep and widespread among [Catholics]’.¹ Conway also pleaded with the Catholic community to ‘avoid any action which could cause them injury or death’ while also expressing his disapproval regarding the ‘events of the day’.² Significantly, he did not go so far as to openly criticise the British and Northern Irish governments or security forces. Throughout 1971, Cardinal Conway would issue several other statements broadly outlining this core position except where violence perpetrated by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) prompted focussed criticism. Gerald McElroy attributed this to the hierarchy’s belief that in the later months of 1971 ‘it was more important than

¹ Fr. Brian Brady, Fr. Denis Faul, Fr. Raymond Murray, *Internment 1971 -1975* (Dungannon, 1975), p. 7.

² *Irish Independent*, 10 Aug. 1971.

ever to make their views known on republican violence, given the rapid escalation in the level of violence in Northern Ireland'.³ Given the precarious social position occupied by the Catholic Church at the time, this was not unreasonable. Any statement which could be interpreted as a criticism of the Northern Irish government was met with quick responses by Unionist politicians and Protestant churchmen. However, the hierarchy also had to be seen as sympathetic towards the grievances of the majority of Catholics. As a result, declarations emphasised Protestant fears which had been apparently heightened due to increased IRA activity.

With a far more outspoken position, Fr. Denis Faul, a Catholic priest based in Dungannon, Co. Tyrone, unequivocally denounced internment as immoral. In contrast to Conway, he cited Church doctrine to criticise internment: 'arbitrary imprisonment was condemned without any qualifications by the Second Vatican Council in the documents on the Church in the Modern World, paragraph 27'.⁴ Following a visit to the Long Kesh internment camp, he reiterated his stance that internment was immoral, claiming that 'the detention without trial of even one person cannot be tolerated'.⁵ Faul also stated that 'one got the impression that the detainees were being held as hostages for some private sinister political motive', a criticism that was not echoed at the hierarchical level.⁶ Fr. Brian Brady, based in St. Joseph's College in Belfast, voiced similar concerns, stating his belief that it was 'a violation of the fundamental human right of a public and fair trial' and questioned the legality of internment under international law.⁷ He declared that the 'answer to our problems is not repressive measures... but impartiality in the administration of justice together with social and

³ Gerald McElroy, *The Catholic Church and the Northern Ireland Crisis, 1968-1986* (Dublin, 1991), p. 113.

⁴ *Irish Independent*, 28 Aug. 1971.

⁵ *Irish Independent*, 3 Oct. 1971.

⁶ *Evening Herald*, 2 Oct. 1971.

⁷ *Donegal News*, 14 Aug. 1971.

political reforms'.⁸ While the hierarchy did not denounce internment as immoral, it is important to note that in a statement entitled 'Violence in Northern Ireland', issued in November 1971, the Catholic Northern Irish bishops declared 'interrogation in depth' to be 'immoral and inhuman'.⁹

The difference in approach between Conway and Faul was not the first time which they appeared to have had a public disagreement on how the Church should approach issues concerning the Catholic community. In 1969, Faul published 'a lengthy analysis of how the courts and the judicial system were being used against the Catholic population'.¹⁰ He came under criticism from unionists, and the Northern Irish minister for Commerce, Roy Bradford, called for him to be disciplined.¹¹ Due to this pressure from politicians, Conway's office publicly denounced Faul's comments with the statement claiming that 'the Cardinal deprecates [Faul's] remarks about the judicial system in Northern Ireland'.¹² In a statement issued the following month by the Diocesan Office in the Archdiocese of Armagh, it appeared that Conway agreed to a certain extent with Faul's grievances regarding the impartiality of justice. It was clarified that Conway's earlier comments 'did not refer to the whole field of justice in Northern Ireland, but solely... to certain remarks, couched in general terms'.¹³ The statement also criticised the use of his censuring of Faul as evidence of 'a blanket approval of the whole system and practice'.¹⁴

Given this backdrop, it is important to note that following the introduction of internment and Faul's very public criticism of this policy, Cardinal Conway never

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Margaret Scull, *The Catholic Church and the Northern Irish Troubles, 1968-1998* (Oxford, 2019), p. 46.

¹⁰ *Irish Times*, 26 April 1984.

¹¹ McElroy, *Catholic Church*, pp 121-2.

¹² *Irish Press*, 18 Nov. 1969.

¹³ *Irish Press*, 5 Dec. 1969.

¹⁴ Ibid.

publicly censured him for his comments or his publications. In private correspondence, Faul informed Conway of his work with the families of internees and the documenting of statements of those who claimed to be mistreated by the security forces.¹⁵ Confining these sensitive conversations to privacy rather than public denouncement or discussion was a trait of Conway. This was of importance as he was described by the NIO (Northern Ireland Office) as being ‘extremely well informed politically, keeping in contact with most of the leading politicians North and South of the border’.¹⁶ Publicised criticism of British authorities would have compromised these contacts. Faul revealed another motivation of Conway’s to avoid a more outspoken position in an interview for the *Religion, Civil Society and Peace* project carried out by John D. Brewer, Gareth I. Higgins and Francis Teeney. In 2011, Faul claimed:

Cardinal Conway was told about the torture, he could have got into the pulpit and blazed about it and everyone would have joined the IRA and there would have been all-out sectarianism. He didn’t. He went to see [British Prime Minister] Mr. [Ted] Heath... and he also notified the Archbishop of New York ... Cardinal Conway wouldn’t do it himself, rightly so. The IRA would have grabbed the opportunity to recruit a whole lot of people.¹⁷

Conway, therefore, was in a difficult position in which he had to consider the ramifications of publicly criticising the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and British Army. In order to prevent any negative repercussions from an ill-advised statement, he approached these sensitive issues in private discussions with the relevant individuals. In 1984, Faul also reflected on Conway’s disciplinary action taken against

¹⁵ ‘Fr. Faul to Cardinal Conway, 16 August 1971’ (Cardinal O Fiaich Memorial Library and Archive, Cardinal Conway Papers, Internment box).

¹⁶ ‘Personality note and briefing for Secretary of State’s meeting with Cardinal Tomás O Fiaich on 9 July 1979’, 5 July 1979 (P.R.O.N.I., Prisons - Complaints. Conditions at her Majesty's Prison Maze, NIO/12/121A).

¹⁷ John D. Brewer, Gareth I. Higgins, Francis Teeney, *Religion, Civil Society and Peace in Northern Ireland* (Oxford, 2011), p. 99.

him in 1969 and believed that ‘the poor Cardinal thought he could run the whole show, being a Bishop in the old style, and that the rest of us would keep quiet’.¹⁸ This would not be possible due to the priests in his diocese being regarded to as ‘rugged Nationalists’.¹⁹ It is clear that this was noted by Conway and he adopted a less strict approach to monitoring the parochial clergy’s actions in the following years as violence escalated.

The continuance of internment into 1972 saw a similar campaign from the Catholic clergy with enduring calls for the ending of internment and attempts to address the ill-treatment of detained Catholics. Faul and Raymond Murray, a priest in the archdiocese of Armagh and chaplain to Armagh Women’s Prison from 1971 until 1986, published a large booklet entitled *British Army and Special Branch RUC Brutalities: December 1971-February 1972*, which outlined the illegal torture of internees with medical evidence proving abuse of internees. It contained a scathing attack on General O/C Sir Harry Tuzo and his claims that the allegations of torture were false; a conclusion supported by the Compton and Parker reports, which had been established to investigate allegations of brutality during the first arrests carried out under Operation Demetrius and the interrogation techniques used by the security forces in Northern Ireland. General Harry Tuzo had previously claimed that the allegations published by Faul were ‘basically untrue’ and that ‘the complainants... refused to substantiate their allegations when questioned by the investigators... [and] they had refused to co-operate in any way’.²⁰ He went so far as to accuse Faul and the internees to be ‘more interested in propaganda than in eliciting the truth’.²¹ Faul

¹⁸ *Irish Times*, 26 Apr. 1984.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Fr. Denis Faul, Fr. Raymond Murray, *British Army and Special Branch RUC Brutalities: December 1971-February 1972* (Dungannon, 1972), p. 52.

²¹ *Ibid.*

countered that the lack of cooperation was not due to the inability of the internees to substantiate their claims but that they refused to 'co-operate in an investigation by those who tortured them' and that the internees were 'only looking for a fair and impartial inquiry'.²² Faul also argued that their accusations were supported by the 'testimony of independent doctors in at least sixteen cases'.²³

Fr. Brian Brady was also in frequent contact with the British authorities throughout 1972. These allegations of 'selectivity in the prosecution and preferment of charges' in Northern Ireland was dismissed by the Attorney General of Northern Ireland, Sir Peter Rawlinson; however, he did request Brady to furnish information.²⁴ In December 1972, Brady submitted a large memorandum of evidence, alleging selectivity in the justice system. He made the case that in regards to marches, the wearing of paramilitary uniforms, 'promoting the aims ... of subversive organisations' and allegations of assault against the British Army, Catholics were disproportionately targeted by the security forces.²⁵ Brady made his reasons for these allegations clear, stating that it was his belief 'that subversion flourishes in [the Catholic] community because a large section of the population feels that it is not being justly treated' and that Catholics had 'lost faith in the legal system as a means to redress their grievances'.²⁶ To ensure that his efforts would not be misconstrued as Nationalist politics or anti-Protestant, Brady emphasised that he was not 'implying that most of those who have been prosecuted and charged ... should not have been brought before the courts ... neither [was he] pursuing some sort of witch hunt to have Protestants

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ 'Selectivity in Prosecutions and Preferring of Charges in Northern Ireland – Memorandum presented by Rev. Brian J. Brady to Sir Peter Rawlinson, M.P., Attorney General of Northern Ireland', 1972 (COFLA, Cardinal O Fiaich Papers, An Tuaisceart-FC-4-An Tuaisceart) (henceforth referred to as 'Selectivity in Prosecutions', 1972, COFLA).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12

²⁶ 'Selectivity in Prosecutions', 1972, COFLA, p. 12.

and members of the security forces imprisoned on a large scale'.²⁷ However, despite the large amount of evidence produced by Brady and the public statement and press conference, no action would come from the British Authorities. He would receive a letter from the Attorney General's secretary in April 1973 which, again, denied the allegations of selectivity and stated that more information would be sent as it became available. This documentation was never relayed to Brady and he claimed that 'there was no satisfactory result'.²⁸

The level of activity by the lower clergy in 1972 was contrasted by a hierarchy that remained relatively silent. Denis Faul criticised the Church hierarchy and alleged that the 'magisterium of the Church had failed to provide any guidance on the question of caring for prisoners and their families'.²⁹ He elaborated in saying 'maybe 1972 was a bad year, but I failed to find any guidance from the Pope or the great cardinals on this subject in the general index of *L'Osservatore Romano*...that is apart from about 100 words to prison chaplains in October warning them not to become social workers'.³⁰ He also criticised the lack of guidance given in pastoral speeches by bishops in Ireland, Scotland and England.

Faul continued his work with Murray and Brady primarily focussing on the inequality in how internment policy was carried out and the living conditions found in Long Kesh. Despite internment beginning in 1971, it took until February 1973 for the first suspected Loyalist paramilitaries to be interned, and by the end of the practise in 1975, no more than 107 were detained. Faul, Murray and Brady harshly criticised the differential in February 1973. They regarded this as an 'empty gesture to the

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ 'Selective Justice in Northern Ireland – Memorandum prepared by Fr. Brian Brady', 1973 (COFLA, Cardinal O Fiaich Papers, An Tuaisceart-FC-4-An Tuaisceart).

²⁹ *Irish Independent*, 15 Jan. 1973.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

opinion of that section of the public which agree[d] with internment, but which could no longer stomach the blatant internment of Catholics only'.³¹ This was not a credible or genuine attempt to carry out internment in an impartial manner, but rather 'a farcical response to the apparently uncontrollable assassination of Catholics'.³²

Faul, Murray and Brady believed that this biased implementation of interment came from the history of sectarianism in Northern Irish politics. They accused government bodies and security forces, particularly the RUC, as viewing Northern Catholics as suspect due to their traditional nationalist stance. Many unionists believed that these nationalist aspirations would lead to the destruction of the Northern Irish state. These suspicions made Catholics 'fair game for the full lash of emergency laws' in unionist eyes; an issue which was compounded, according to the three priests, by the fact that 'the administrators of the law... [were] all excused by emergency legislation from the fundamental ethical requirement in a democratic society of having to justify their actions'.³³ Due to these allegations, Faul, Murray and Brady were requested to draft a memorandum for proposal to the Gardiner Committee. This committee was set up to review potential human rights violations and amendments to the Emergency Provisions Act which was introduced in 1973. The Emergency Provisions Act of 1973 increased the powers of the security forces in Northern Ireland in an attempt to suppress the growth of proscribed groups, such as Sinn Féin and the Provisional Irish Republic Army (PIRA), in Northern Ireland and to quell violence carried out by these organisations.³⁴ Articles in this Act gave the Army the right to

³¹ Fr. Brian Brady, Fr. Denis Faul, Fr. Raymond Murray, *Internment 1971 -1975* (Dungannon, 1975), p. 7.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Fr. Brian Brady, Fr. Denis Faul, Fr. Raymond Murray, *Corruption of Law: memorandum to the Gardiner Committee on the working of Emergency legislation in Northern Ireland* (Dungannon, 1974), pp. 27-8.

³⁴ Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act, 1973, Eliz. II, c. 53 [N.I.] (25 July 1973).

‘stop and question any person for the purpose of ascertaining that person’s identity and movements’.³⁵ It also allowed ‘any member of the Her Majesty’s forces on duty or any constable... [to] enter any premises or other place than a dwelling-house for the purpose of ascertaining whether there are any munitions unlawfully at that place and may search the place for any munitions’.³⁶

Faul, Murray and Brady published the memorandum they submitted to the Gardiner Committee in September 1974, five months before the Gardiner Report was published. Entitled *Corruption of Law*, they criticised many aspects of the Emergency Provisions Act 1973, the actions of the Army and the RUC and the apparent unwillingness of the security forces to justify their actions. Faul, Murray and Brady framed these actions as violations of the human rights of Catholics. The primary examples of actions by the Army that the three priests focussed on included identity checks, head counts and ‘census-taking’.³⁷ Identity checks, allowed under section 16 of the Act, were primarily carried out on young people. This involved frisking them and then questioning their name, religion, school and recent movements. These checks sometimes led to arrests so the individual could be screened at the local army base. The pamphlet claimed that the use of these checks ‘was frequently abused and... employed beyond security measures to harass young people’.³⁸ Identity checks were harshly criticised by the priests who authored the pamphlet claiming that they were ‘an incentive to terrorism rather than a deterrent’ and that they built up a ‘resentment and hatred against law and order’ in young Catholics.³⁹ Census-taking and head counts

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ *Report of a Committee to consider, in the context of civil liberties and human rights, measures to deal with terrorism in Northern Ireland*, 191, [Cmnd. 5847], H.C. 1974-5, XXVIII. 157, 27 (hereafter cited as ‘The Gardiner Report’).

³⁷ *Corruption of Law*, p. 11-2.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁹ Ibid.

came under similar scrutiny with Faul, Brady and Murray claiming they were invasions of privacy. While the security forces were permitted to enter a premises they suspected of storing munitions under section 10 and 11 of the Emergency Provisions Act, they also highlighted that there were no provisions in the Act ‘which entitl[ed] them to take a general census’, highlighting the ‘creeping extension of power to the military authorities which seem[ed] to follow inevitably from sweeping emergency measures’.⁴⁰

There was also criticism of the RUC and their interrogation, and torture in some cases, of Catholic internees carried out under Section 10 of the act which allowed the RUC to detain arrested people for seventy-two hours. The ill-treatment of detainees was an accusation frequently denied by the British Government, citing the detainees signing of ‘no complaints’ forms upon release. This, according to the pamphlet, was done under fear of internment or the detainees being beaten until the form was signed.⁴¹ The condition of the released detainees was often questioned by independent doctors upon examination.

The three clergy members also argued in *Corruption of Law* that the army had achieved a great deal of autonomy and that the use of officers who had been deployed to other British colonies could lead to the potential use of ‘tactics used in the suppression of terrorism and subversion abroad...against peaceful protesters and dissenters at home’.⁴² The recruitment pool of the RUC and the powers given to it under the Emergency Provisions Act was also highlighted as an issue which heightened the conflict in Northern Ireland. Faul, Murray and Brady argued that the RUC recruited from entirely Protestant areas and the force attracted the most bigoted

⁴⁰ *Corruption of Law*, p. 15.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

elements from these areas. Their partisan use of the Emergency Provisions Act against Catholics was ‘their greatest weapon for the oppression’ of the minority community and coupled with an inadequate complaints procedure resulted in a feeling of the RUC being above the law, according to the pamphlet.⁴³ It was argued that these issues led to a ‘sectarian and militaristic’ attitude in the RUC which ‘colour[ed its members’] judgement in the enforcement of the law’.⁴⁴ To remedy these issues, Faul, Murray and Brady recommended several changes to Northern Irish legislation. These included the repeal of the Emergency Provisions Act and the introduction of ‘independent and impartial legal machinery for the investigation of complaints against the security forces’.⁴⁵

Upon publication of the Gardiner report, it was clear that the proposals made in *Corruption of Law* had been completely disregarded. The British Authorities argued that the emergency legislation did not breach any international ruling on human rights as article 15 of The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms 1950 allowed ‘in a time of war or of any other public emergency’ a government ‘the right to derogate from its obligations’ regarding general liberty and security.⁴⁶ The Gardiner Report recommended that ‘the existing powers of arrest and search in Part II of the 1973 Act should be retained subject only’ to small changes such as allowing a parent to be present when an individual under fourteen years of age was being questioned and the right to seize illegal communications equipment.⁴⁷ The Gardiner Report claimed that proposed amendments to the legislation such as ‘reasons [being] given at the time of arrest, and reasonable

⁴³ *Corruption of Law*, p. 28.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴⁶ ‘The Gardiner Report’, 6.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

suspicion ... [being] a necessary pre-requisite' to being detained were 'impracticable' to 'impose on soldiers in the present conditions'.⁴⁸

Criticism of this behaviour from the British security forces was not forthcoming from the hierarchy. In comparison to the organised and evidence-based denunciations from Faul, Murray and Brady, the hierarchy acknowledged the occurrence of potential human rights violations but they never outrightly castigated the security forces for their actions. Statements issued by Bishop Philbin regarding this are the clearest example of such a reluctance to condemn. In several separate declarations issued during the period of internment, Philbin lamented that 'people in so many areas... are suffering in the present situation, whether from assassination, harassment, intimidation from their homes ... or from the deeds of violent men'.⁴⁹ McElroy highlights Philbin's unwillingness to accuse 'the army of waging a campaign of violence' and argues that the 'statement was so vague that its only reference to military activity, however oblique, was when it spoke of people suffering from harassment'.⁵⁰ In order to highlight the dissatisfaction from the lower clergy with the hierarchy's approach, it is necessary to also reference McElroy's questionnaire carried out in the late 1980s. The data gathered by this project found a high level of dissatisfaction amongst the clergy, with the lowest level of dissatisfaction in a diocese, with 43.1% of priests disapproving of the hierarchy's methods, whilst Bishop Philbin's own diocese, the diocese of Down and Connor, registered a level of disapproval of 59.5%.⁵¹ It is clear that whilst allegations of conflict may be overplayed, there was certainly a profound disagreement amongst the clergy at parochial and hierarchical levels regarding how best to confront the issues of

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁹ McElroy, *The Catholic Church*, p. 105.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

internment and harassment from the British authorities.

Faul would direct a harsh critique at Merlyn Rees, stating in an address in Galway that the Secretary of State was ‘playing an immoral and dirty game’ and that internment was being used as ‘a political operation to give Britain bargaining power with the minority’.⁵² This outspoken criticism was echoed by the Catholic hierarchy. Faul also criticised Rees’ claim ‘that he was releasing more internees than he was putting in’, declaring it to be ‘nonsense’.⁵³ Merlyn Rees’ position that internment would end when there was a ‘genuine and sustained cessation of violence’ also came under fire from Frs. Faul, Murray and Brady. Rees’ unwillingness to specify which groups would have to cease their violence alongside accusing the internees in Long Kesh of membership of the PIRA led to the accusation of further discrimination against Catholics and the underplaying of the severity of Unionist paramilitary groups. They alleged that the actions of ‘Protestant extremists ... [was]... being dismissed as gangsterism which [was] not worthy of the political gesture of internment’.⁵⁴

In 1974, Cardinal Conway appeared to withdraw from the public sphere with a noticeable decline in the number of statements he issued denouncing internment. The Cardinal’s statements became more generalised calls for peace. Instead, Conway became more involved in efforts at reforming the Northern Ireland security forces and judiciary. Despite Faul and Murray’s explicit criticism of the Secretary of State, Conway was in frequent contact with Merlyn Rees. Continuing Conway’s typical approach to these discussions, the conversations were consigned to privacy. In cases where meetings were made public, there was very rarely a statement issued regarding the meetings’ contents. Rees was anticipated to introduce some reform to the RUC

⁵² Fr. Denis Faul, Fr. Raymond Murray, *The Shame of Merlyn Rees – 4th Year of Internment in Ireland Long Kesh 1974 -1975* (Dungannon, 1975), p. 32.

⁵³ *Ulster Herald*, 9 Nov. 1974.

⁵⁴ *Internment 1971-1975*, p. 8.

and he consulted with Cardinal Conway in an attempt to ensure parity across Northern Irish society. While no official statement was issued regarding the details of the discussion, it was believed that ‘the flurry of activity [was] a prelude to Mr Rees announcing his long awaited places for policing in the North and... [he was] “testing the temperature” before going public’.⁵⁵

Despite Conway’s channel of communication with Rees, the attacks on Rees would continue throughout 1974. Faul, Brady and Murray argued that the bilateral truce and ceasefire that the British Government had negotiated with the PIRA was an example of the ‘genuine and sustained cessation of violence’ that Rees claimed would lead to an end to internment. However, the three priests claimed that the only internees that were released were Loyalists and that all Catholic internees remained in Long Kesh.⁵⁶ Following the PIRA ceasefire of 1975, Brady extended this criticism to the RUC and British Army for their attempts to suppress evidence regarding Loyalist extremist groups. He alleged that this was proved by the continuation of violence following the declaration of the ceasefire in February. The RUC was accused of concealing evidence that proved that ‘the vast majority of attacks directed against civilians in their homes, at work and places of recreation ... are attacks by Protestant extremist organisations against innocent Catholics’.⁵⁷ Despite a large number of sectarian attacks carried out against Catholics in the first six weeks of the ceasefire, the RUC had ‘not asked Mr. Rees to sign interim custody orders for Protestant assassins and bombers’.⁵⁸ Brady would also direct his criticism towards Rees, claiming that the Secretary of State had ‘released 100% of the remaining UVF/UDA internees’ while only releasing ‘24% of the internees who are alleged to belong to the

⁵⁵ *Irish Examiner*, 30 Aug. 1974.

⁵⁶ *The Shame of Merlyn Rees*, p. 13.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Provisional IRA'.⁵⁹ In a rare instance of public agreement from the hierarchy, Catholic bishops from Armagh also criticised this biased implementation of internment declaring that internment was 'now once again entirely one-sided in its operation' and it was increasingly 'difficult to defend its continuation ... when a particular paramilitary organisation, which has been officially declared to be legal, openly boasts of named murders which it has committed'.⁶⁰ There was also an increase in support for the calls to end internment from the Catholic clergy in Britain. Rt. Rev. Monsignor Bruce Kent claimed he hoped that 'concerted campaign in action' regarding internment 'would create an 'international consciousness' in parishes about the evils in detention without trial'.⁶¹

In 1975, there was also a renewed attempt by members of the Catholic clergy to have internment without trial declared immoral by the Catholic Church hierarchy. The first attempts to do so began with the introduction of internment in 1971 with efforts intensifying in the last year of internment. Faul and Murray expressed their dissatisfaction with the Inter-Church Working Party on Social and Legal Problems' report on internment. Their position for demanding such was that 'churchmen should always deal primarily with the moral aspect'.⁶² Brady later elaborated on this stating further reasoning behind this demand. He claimed 'I did this for two reasons: first because I believe it is true; I also believe that it is the only unanswerable argument for the ending of internment in N. Ireland.'⁶³ To support this, he cited articles from Vatican II which proclaimed 'arbitrary imprisonment' to be immoral and argued that detention without trial fell under this area.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 41-2.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 35.

⁶² *Internment 1971-1975*, p. 13.

⁶³ *The Shame of Merlyn Rees*, p. 29.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

To assess the positions of the Catholic hierarchy in 1975 it is necessary to reference Fr. Des Wilson, who, by the end of 1975 claimed that there were members of the Catholic clergy who 'were admitting privately that nearly all the conditions required by Catholic theology for a justified revolution were present in Northern Ireland'.⁶⁵ However, these clergy members continued to condemn the PIRA's campaign as 'their task as parish clergy was to pass on to the people a message for which the local bishops, not they, were responsible'.⁶⁶ The hierarchy was clearly still guiding priests against adopting public outspoken positions similar to Fr. Faul and Fr. Murray.

This paper has demonstrated that Fr. Faul, Fr. Murray and Fr. Brady adopted a far more critical approach of internment, and the treatment of Catholics as a result of its operation, than their hierarchical figures in the Northern Irish Catholic Church. The hierarchy's reasoning for doing so, particularly the reasoning of Cardinal Conway, has been thoroughly examined and contrasted with the motivations of the clergy at parochial level. While undoubtedly there were cases of an unwillingness to criticise certain issues, Conway and other members of the hierarchy occupied a precarious social position which meant that any criticism of ill-treatment of Catholics and internment would receive backlash from Unionist politicians. These statements also had to be carefully constructed so as not to be seen to be stoking militant Republican sympathies. Cardinal Conway had opened channels of communication with high ranking politicians and issuing harsh critiques of government policy would hinder the potential success of these conversations. Given that Conway had shown his desire for reform, it is not surprising that he placed great importance on protecting these

⁶⁵ Des Wilson, *An End to Silence*, (Cork, 1985), p. 57.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

relationships.

As quoted in this paper, Fr. Faul also referenced the difficult position Conway occupied; a position which required him to sympathise with the concerns of the Catholic community whilst also considering potential Unionist backlash. Due to the lower clergy's less public and influential position, it can be argued that they had more freedom when it came to outlining their grievances. This is evidenced by the private conversations and the lack of disciplinary action taken against Faul, Murray and Brady despite their explicit denouncement of internment and Northern Irish political figures. Due to these private conversations and the fact that no attempt was made by the Cardinal to prevent these public criticisms, it is difficult to declare that there was a conflict between the hierarchy and lower level clergy. There was certainly a disagreement in how the situation should have been approached and a level of dissatisfaction as to how the hierarchy dealt with the situation. However, to describe it as a conflict would be to dismiss the multi-layered relationship between Cardinal Conway and Fr. Faul and the lower clergy's awareness of the restrictions on how outspoken the hierarchy could be on internment. Margaret Scull's argument that the 'clergy gave more impassioned, involved, and pastoral response than their hierarchy counterparts' while also acknowledging the 'volatile and confused situation in which Conway needed to tread diplomatically' supports this position.⁶⁷ Scull's analysis is far more considerate of the nuances of the relationship between the Church hierarchy and clergy than McElroy's examination. While McElroy's study does provide some valuable information, his argument in which he posits that the clergy and hierarchy had a tense conflict throughout this period does not consider the multi-faceted clergy-hierarchy relationship.

⁶⁷ Scull, *The Catholic Church and the Northern Irish Troubles*, pp 59-60.

In conclusion, the introduction of internment presented a crisis for the Catholic Church in Northern Ireland at many levels. The hierarchy was primarily concerned with the social and political ramifications of their approach while the parochial clergy confronted the human rights violations and moral issues that internment presented. There was no clear precedent as to how this issue in the context of widespread violence should be confronted and there were so many elements to consider when outlining an approach that it was inevitable that some difficulties would arise between the Catholic hierarchy and clergy.

Contributors

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Winnie Davern: In 2017, Winnie graduated from Mary Immaculate College with a First-Class Honours in the Bachelor of Arts Degree programme. She attained first place in both of her major subjects, History and English. The following year she completed a Masters with the Department of History also at Mary Immaculate College. Her Master's thesis centred on a private collection of correspondence written by her grandparents between 1917 and 1919. Themes explored included the changing political landscape, emigration, the outbreak of the Spanish Influenza pandemic and the experience of ex-service men in the aftermath of the Great War.

Emer McCarthy: Emer graduated from University College Cork in May 2020 with a Bachelor of Arts (International), majoring in History. Emer's dissertation explored the contribution Irishwomen made to the Great War both at home and abroad between 1914 and 1918. During her studies Emer conducted a research project on her great-granduncle, Michael Knightly, who served in the G.P.O. throughout Easter Week of 1916, before working as one of Michael Collins' secret agents throughout the War of Independence. Furthermore, Emer extensively analysed Irish police reports from 1916 which she compiled into a thesis on the aftermath of the 1916 Rising. Emer hopes to further enhance her research talents when she relocates to London in January 2021.

Benjamin Ragan: Benjamin is a doctoral candidate and departmental assistant for the Department of History at Mary Immaculate College in Limerick. He studies the history of the supernatural in the context of Anglo-Irish conflict. He received his BA from The Evergreen State College in the United States of America studying history, literature, and philosophy. He received his MA in History from Mary Immaculate College in Limerick, studying witchcraft and colonization in Ireland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He is a recipient of both the Government of Ireland International Education scholarship and the Universities Ireland history bursary.

Peter Stapleton: Peter is a PhD candidate in Department of History at the University of Limerick. His research is focused on the Catholic Church's position on Republican prisoners in Northern Ireland and how this affected the Church's relationship with successive British and Northern Irish governments. This research will pay particular attention to the impact of internment, the blanket and 'no-wash' protests and hunger strikes on backchannels established between Church figures and members of the British and Northern Irish authorities.



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