

DONEGAL COUNTY ARCHIVES
CARTLANN CHONTAE DHÚN NA NGALL

A DECADE OF CHANGE: DONEGAL AND IRELAND 1912 - 1923

DOCUMENT STUDY PACK



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1885
RECTORS OF DONEGAL:
HOME RULE IS DEAD

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Brooklyn

GAEILIC ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION
PROGRAMME

THE UNIONIST MAJORITY
PROGRAMME

FIRST GRAND INTER-COUNTY CONTEST
WICKLOW V. WEXFORD,
 Under the Rules of the G.A.A.
AT AVONDALE,

at least 120, and UNIONISTS will
be in POWER for SEVEN YEARS at least
INTER-COUNTY CONTEST,
WICKLOW V. WEXFORD,
 Under the Rules of the G.A.A.
AT AVONDALE,

The Seat of the distinguished Leader of the Irish People,
C. S. PARNELL, Esq., M.P.,

The Seat of the distinguished Leader of the Irish People,
C. S. PARNELL, Esq., M.P.,

ON SUNDAY, 31st of OCTOBER, 1880

ON SUNDAY, 31st of OCTOBER, 1880

To commence at 12 o'clock sharp.

The FRIEND of the POOR MAN, who will belong to this powerful Government and will see that MONEY is SPENT in YOUR INTEREST.

GENERAL MANAGERS :

Messrs. E. WALSH, Wexford; and P. M'DONNELL, Bray

Messrs. E. WALSH, Wexford; and P. M'DONNELL, Bray

REFERES :

Messrs. E. J. KENNEDY, V.P. G.A.A., and JOHN GRACEY, T.C. Sub-Sheriff, Dublin.

Messrs. E. J. KENNEDY, V.P. G.A.A., and JOHN GRACEY, T.C. Sub-Sheriff, Dublin.

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WEXFORD—Messrs. P. COCHRAN, W. PETTIT (Field); S. KAVANAGH, and J. STAFFORD, Wexford; W. KELLY, Rosslare; JOHN SCALLAN, Pigeonstown; JAMES MCKEHTY, Crossabeg; EDMUND PIERCE, Lady's Island (Goal)

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TIMEKEEPERS :

WICKLOW—Dr. M. C. DWYER, Rathdrum; and Mr. LEO COLLEN, Crosskerry.

WICKLOW—Dr. M. C. DWYER, Rathdrum; and Mr. LEO COLLEN, Crosskerry.

WEXFORD—Messrs. J. F. WALSH, Wexford; and M. DOYLE, Cottage.

WEXFORD—Messrs. J. F. WALSH, Wexford; and M. DOYLE, Cottage.

HON. SECS.—Messrs. P. M'DONNELL and N. KEHOE.

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MATCHES AND TEAMS :

The Programme of the Six Matches, commencing at 12 o'clock sharp. (Time for each Match 40 minutes).

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- 12.45 p.m.—Tugher v. Rosslare.
- 1.30 p.m.—Avondale v. Crossabeg.
- 2.15 p.m.—Ashford v. Hollymore.
- 3 p.m.—Rathdrum v. Pigeonstown.
- 3.45 p.m.—Rathore v. Castlebridge.

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- 3.45 p.m.—Rathore v. Castlebridge.

Trains—From Wexford, 9.15 a.m.; from Dublin, 5 p.m.; from Rathdrum (for Wexford), 6.20 p.m.; from Rathdrum (for Dublin), 6.25 p.m.

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PART ONE: CONTEXT

Overview of Ireland 1870 – 1912

INTRODUCTION

The period 1912 – 1923 is perhaps one of the most important in Irish history. The events that occurred during this decade transformed the island of Ireland and have had a lasting legacy on Irish politics and society up to the present day. This pack hopes to encourage you as students of Irish history to explore the ways that these key events are remembered and challenge you to examine them from the varying viewpoints and perspectives of all the people involved. It is hoped that you will develop a better understanding of how these events were experienced by different communities within Donegal and how they have impacted on community relationships across the island of Ireland in the twenty first century.

Of course as with all histories, the events of 1912 – 1923 did not occur in isolation. They had their roots deep in Irish history. The history of Ireland has always been marked by tensions between the ‘native Irish’ and ‘newcomers’ as various waves of settlers came to the island. The arrival of the Normans marked the introduction of English influence to Ireland, an influence which would increase through the Plantation period and reach its height with the Act of Union in 1801. The Act of Union merged the Irish parliament in Dublin with the British parliament in Westminster and made Ireland an equal partner with England, Scotland and Wales in the United Kingdom.

However by this point Ireland was a deeply divided island. The sixteenth and seventeenth century land confiscations and plantations had created racial

tensions, while the establishment of different forms of Christian religions during the Reformation and the attempts to impose the Reformation on Ireland had added religious tensions. In addition, attempts by the Irish population to regain control of the land and the country had led to rebellion and counter-rebellion. The 1798 rebellion was the first and only time that people from all religious creeds in Ireland united in pursuit of a common goal – liberty and equality for Ireland through freedom from Britain. Despite a united religious front in Ulster atrocities occurred in other parts of Ireland, which led to the breakdown of trust between the different religious groupings and ensured that from then onwards co-operation was at an end.

Irish Protestants began to fear what might happen if Ireland was governed by a Roman Catholic majority and became convinced of the importance of preserving a close link between Ireland and Britain. They saw the Act of Union as guaranteeing this link and viewed any possibility of weakening the Union as a threat. Realising that the Act of Union would not solve any of the grievances relating to the penal laws, land ownership or political equality, the Roman Catholic population grew increasingly insistent that Ireland should be given some form of independence. Religious reform was achieved through the success of the Catholic Emancipation campaign led by Daniel O’Connell and the eventual disestablishment of the Church of Ireland, but political equality and land reform were still pressing issues by 1870.

DIVERSITY IN NINETEENTH CENTURY IRELAND



Redcastle House c. 1900: while 50% of Donegal's population lived in houses with just two rooms, the largest landlords lived in houses like this.

© Donegal County Archives Service

The 1871 Census showed that the Irish population stood at 5.4 million, a figure which had decreased sharply from almost nine million on the eve of the Great Famine in 1845. It has been estimated that during the Great Famine approximately 1.4 million people died and another 1.25 million emigrated. Despite a return to relative prosperity from the mid 1850s onwards emigration remained a huge part of Irish life. This, combined with later marriage and smaller families, resulted in a continued population decline. It also had an impact on the religious makeup of the Irish population. The poorer Roman Catholic population suffered most during the famine, and despite comprising 81% of the population at the start of the nineteenth century, by 1871 this had dropped to just below 77%.

Notwithstanding the removal of the penal laws, by the end of the 1860s Roman Catholics owned only 5% of the profitable land of Ireland. The penal laws

had also been directed against Presbyterians, but they were not so strictly enforced. This may have been due to the small numbers of Presbyterians in Ireland; by 1871 they comprised only 10% of the population.

The main power holders in Ireland in the nineteenth century then were Protestants of English descent whose families had been granted lands in Ireland during the plantations and land confiscations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They made up only 13% of the population, but they owned the vast majority of land and acted as landlords to the rest of the population. As well as being the wealthiest members of Irish society they were also very powerful and influential, in Ireland and in Britain, as they had a large amount of political control. More than half of all Protestants living in Ireland lived in Ulster, with the rest scattered across the island.

With so much power in the hands of so few, it was inevitable that tensions would overshadow Irish social and political history throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

LAND REFORM, HOME RULE AND THE LAND WAR

In the aftermath of the famine, land reform became the main political issue in Ireland. The land question (as it became known) revolved around two main issues, the unequal system of land ownership in Ireland and the way that tenants were treated by their landlords. Between 1845 and 1853 alone 70,000 families had been evicted by their landlords. Eventually, frustrated by the inability of many Irish



Membership card for the Irish National Land League, 1880.

© Donegal County Archives Service

landlords to settle problems on their own estates and concerned by the recent Fenian Rising in 1867 (the Fenians, also known as the Irish Republican Brotherhood, were a militant secret society), the Liberal government under Prime Minister Gladstone decided to introduce a number of pieces of legislation aimed at settling the land question in Ireland. These measures included the introduction of land purchase schemes and legislation outlining a range of rights for tenants.

At almost the same time a new political agenda was also being created for Ireland. Isaac Butt, a native of Glenfin near Stranorlar in County Donegal, founded

the Irish Home Government Association. Butt was a unionist and an Orangeman, but he believed that there were problems with how Ireland was governed. He felt that the government at Westminster was too far away to govern Ireland properly and began to campaign for the parliament in Dublin to be reinstated. He called this idea home rule and it initially garnered much support from the mainly Protestant landed class across Ireland. However, there were early signs of divisions as elements of the party began to campaign for tenant rights. As this part of the group grew stronger, the landed class became increasingly concerned that a new Dublin parliament would not represent them or their property rights fairly and they withdrew. Home rule then began to take on a much more nationalist and Roman Catholic character.

It was into this movement that Charles Stewart Parnell arrived as MP for Meath in 1874. Parnell quickly made a name for himself as one of the most prominent home rule MPs at Westminster. In addition, he became involved in the newly created Land League in 1879. It was this combination of social and political reform that brought him to national prominence and in 1880 Parnell was elected as leader of the Home Rule party.

The late 1870s in Ireland was a period of economic decline. International agricultural prices fell and there were localised failures of the potato crop across Ireland. Large numbers of the Irish population were once again faced with the threat of starvation and eviction. It was to combat these issues that the aforementioned Land League was created as a local movement in Mayo. The movement quickly spread to national prominence under the organisational skills of Michael Davitt and was renamed the Irish National Land League with Parnell at the head. The national

organisation's aim was to end landlordism in Ireland and therefore it appealed to all shades of nationalism. Home rule and Irish National Land League activists were joined by the Fenian movement in what became known as the 'New Departure'. This was the meeting for the first time of the physical force and constitutional nationalists, land and political reformers. This proved a strong combination and the organisation spread rapidly everywhere across Ireland except into the Protestant strongholds of Ulster. There the Orange Order was used to stop agitation locally and maintain property rights. For the first time an obvious political divide was apparent between Ulster and the rest of Ireland.

The operations of the Irish National Land League in threatening landlords and their employees, attacking property and the organised refusal to pay rents gave this period the title of the Land War. The Land War forced the government to introduce another more comprehensive Land Act, which they did in 1881. This act created a Land Commission which took over responsibility for the setting of rents from the landlords, ensuring fairer treatment for tenants. With this most serious of grievances tackled Parnell once more turned his attention to the issue of home rule.

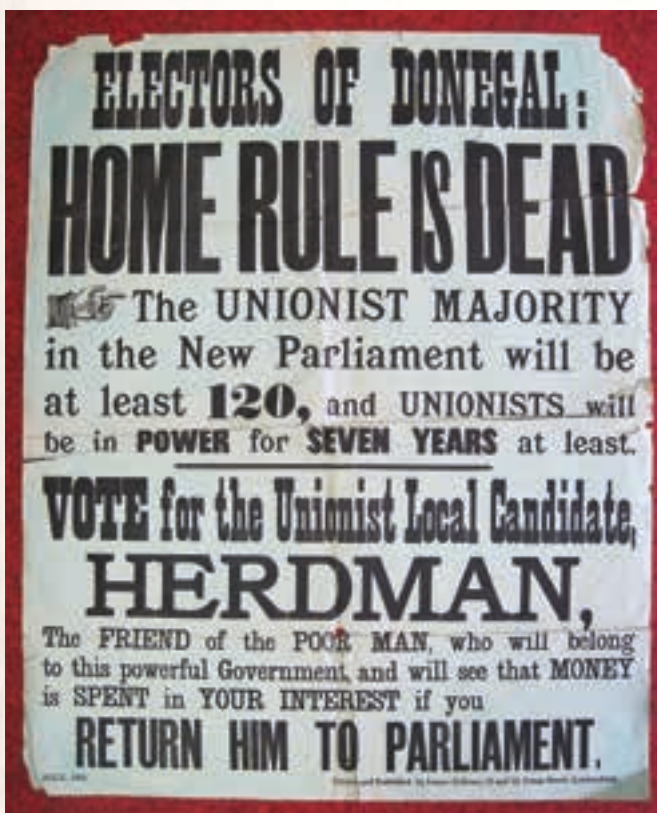
Parnell used his experience of the New Departure to great effect. He recognised the importance of mass support across Ireland and set about creating a modern political party. He used the Irish National Land League as a basis for grassroots support and changed the name of the party to the Irish Parliamentary Party. With the momentum of the Land War and the New Departure behind them, the Irish Parliamentary Party won 85 of a possible 103 seats in Ireland in the general election of 1885. They also won one seat in England. This block of 86

MPs joined in coalition with the Liberal Party, led by Gladstone, to form a government which took office in 1886. In return Gladstone introduced the First Home Rule Bill. It was defeated by 30 votes, but its significance for Parnell and the people of Ireland was huge.

Unfortunately for Parnell he would not survive to see a second home rule bill. Parnell's private life became problematic when his long term affair with Katherine O'Shea was made public in 1889. The scandal caused the withdrawal of the support of the Catholic clergy for the Irish Parliamentary Party and with it a large portion of its public support. Parnell refused to step down as leader and the party split. Parnell died in September 1891 in the middle of a new election campaign leaving the Irish Parliamentary Party in a state of disarray. Despite Parnell's death and divisions in the party's ranks Gladstone kept his promise to introduce a second home rule bill which he did in 1892. This bill successfully passed through the House of Commons, but was blocked by the House of Lords. With Gladstone's retirement and the Irish Parliamentary Party in disorder home rule disappeared off the agenda at Westminster for the next few years. It was 1900 before the party reunited under John Redmond and 1912 before a third home rule bill was introduced.

RISE OF UNIONISM

While Irish nationalists were celebrating the introduction of the First Home Rule Bill, the loyal mainly Protestant population grew increasingly worried about their fate in an Ireland dominated by a nationalist majority. This fear was most obvious in Ulster where the increased presence of the Irish National Land League was viewed as an invasion.



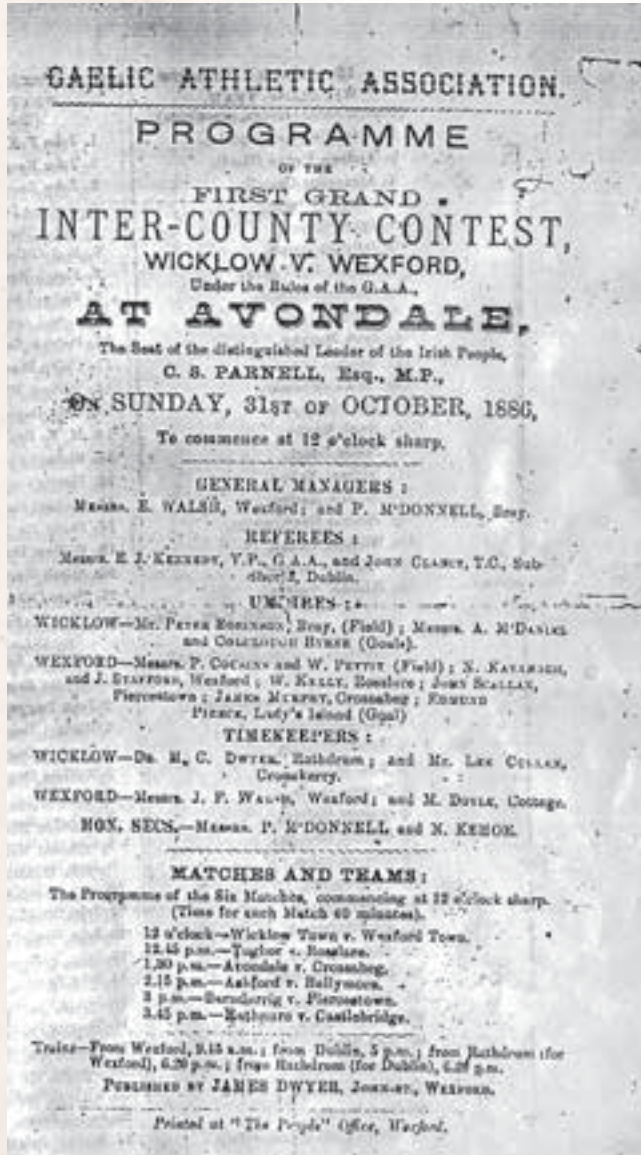
1895 campaign poster for the unionist candidate ET Herdman.

© Donegal County Archives Service

The Ulster Loyalist Anti-Repeal Union was founded early in 1886 with the support of the Orange Order to actively campaign against home rule. Loyalists across Ireland looked towards the Conservative Party for assistance. Conservative leaders attended and spoke at unionist demonstrations and it was Churchill who coined the phrase 'Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right', a clear threat of physical violence if loyal Ulster's demands were not met.

This period was also the beginning of the setting apart of Ulster from loyalists in other parts of Ireland. In the rest of Ireland loyalists were scattered, numerically weak and members of the upper and upper middle class. In Ulster alone there were areas with strong Protestant majorities and in Ulster loyalists came from every class. The suggestion of Ulster getting some form of separate treatment from the rest of Ireland was made as early as 1885, in a move that would have major implications in the early twentieth century. Ulster loyalist MPs decided to establish the Irish Unionist Party. This party and the Irish Parliamentary Party were to set the agenda in Irish politics for the next two decades.

CULTURAL NATIONALISM



Programme for the first inter-county contest held under GAA Rules, 1886.

Courtesy of GAA Library and Archive

While the political wing of the Irish Parliamentary Party was growing in support, there was also a growing sense of nationalism in Ireland. The idea that there was more to being Irish than living on an island began to spread. Groups developed around the idea of a unique Irish culture and heritage. These groups looked back into the distant Irish past, to a time

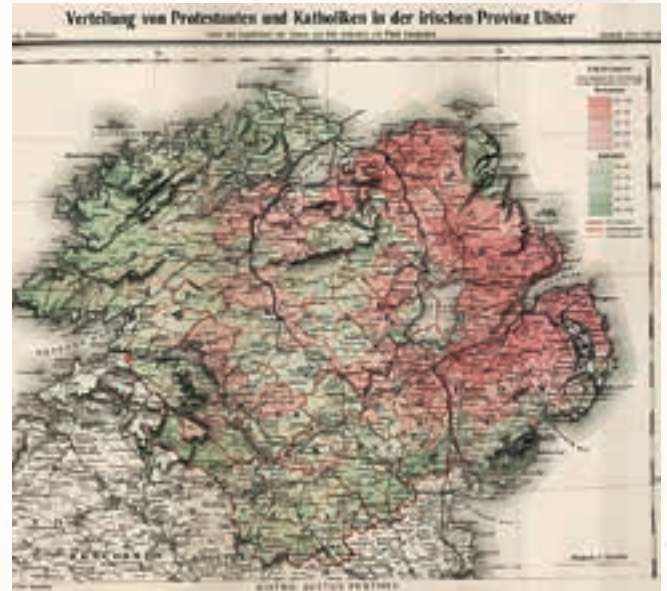
when the native Irish ruled the country, speaking the Irish language, playing Irish games, practising Irish song, dance and music. These distinct aspects of Irish culture were developed by a range of different groups including the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, the Gaelic Union, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), the Gaelic League, the Irish Literary Theatre and Cumann na nGaedheal. These groups grew in strength with the collapse of the Irish Parliamentary Party and were crucial in providing leadership and maintaining the momentum which the political campaign had developed.

By the early twentieth century it was clear that there was a growing sense of entitlement across Ireland to some form of independence from Britain. The reorganisation of the Irish Parliamentary Party under John Redmond gave renewed focus to the political campaign for home rule, despite the efforts of the Conservative government in the previous decade to 'Kill Home Rule with Kindness'. This policy had attempted to remove the need for home rule by tackling the issues that most excited Irish opinion – land and social reform. These measures were all successful, but they did not address the issue of self-government which would become the main Irish grievance throughout the early twentieth century.

Donegal in 1912

County Donegal's location covering approximately 1.2 million acres in the north west corner of Ireland makes it an interesting case study in any historical period. Donegal was one of the last strongholds of the Gaelic Irish Chieftains and in spite of the Ulster Plantation parts of the county remained untouched by major English influence until the middle of the nineteenth century. Although part of Ulster, the industrial revolution of the north east never extended as far west as the county. As a result, Donegal shared many characteristics with the western seaboard counties of Connacht. A significant portion of Donegal is composed of mountainous, boggy, infertile land, making for some of the poorest agricultural land in the country. The average size of land-holdings at the start of the twentieth century was only between ten and twenty acres.

According to the 1911 census the population of Donegal stood at 168,537 people. Of these 50% lived in houses with just two rooms, with only 18% of the county's residents living in houses with five rooms or more. Yet in this period standards of living were increasing across the county. The Congested Districts Board was working to improve conditions by developing cottage industries along the west coast, and its improvement of roads and railways allowed the easier access of produce to the markets. In addition, the county and local councils were engaged in providing social housing, clean water supplies, sewerage systems and attempting to control the spread of infectious diseases. Education was also improving and 80% of the population in Donegal over the age of nine could read and write. While the gap between rich and poor narrowed, politically Donegal was a deeply divided county.



Map showing the proportion of Protestants and Catholics in Donegal in 1901.

Source: Langhans, Peter, 1916

The 1911 census illustrated the religious composition of the county. Roman Catholics made up 79% of the county's population, a further 11% was composed of Church of Ireland members and 9% were Presbyterians. The majority of the Protestant population could be found along the eastern strip of Donegal, the area first confiscated during the Plantation, but there was also a scattering of Protestant families in clusters across the county, most notably around Horn Head, Carrigart and Creeslough. In political terms then, more than one fifth of the county's population opposed the home rule movement, a sizeable minority and one which would result in tensions and divisions throughout the period 1912 – 1923.

PART TWO: 1912 - 1923

SECTION 1:

The Third Home Rule Bill

The Irish Parliamentary Party reunited under John Redmond in 1900. During the split a new grassroots organisation, the United Irish League had been formed. This organisation was founded in response to an upsurge in unorganised agrarian violence in the west of Ireland. It commanded a following of some 100,000 people by 1901 and made for a very powerful support base for the newly reorganised Irish Parliamentary Party. Progress on home rule was slow initially as the Conservative Party held a parliamentary majority. Hope of development was once more restored when the Liberals returned to power in 1906, but with a large majority they did not need Irish support to form a government.



John Redmond addressing a public meeting at the Parnell Monument, Dublin, 1912.

Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

Luckily for the Irish Parliamentary Party the Liberal Party was about to face a political challenge that would have major consequences for the home rule campaign. In 1909 the House of Lords refused to pass the Liberal government's budget. The Liberals responded by limiting the Lords' powers. From then on they could only postpone a bill for a maximum of two years. Once a bill passed three successful readings in the House of Commons it would then become law.

Two general elections were held during this crisis which changed the balance of power in the House of Commons. The Liberals had lost their majority and were in need of support to form a government. They found this in the Irish Parliamentary Party. This new leverage and the legislative changes cleared the way for the introduction of home rule for Ireland. The Third Home Rule Bill was introduced on 11th April 1912. Unfortunately for the Irish Parliamentary Party and the home rule supporters much was to change before the bill finished its three readings in the House of Commons.

The population of Donegal, as in other areas of the country, had begun to grow weary of the wait for home rule. In 1908, when visiting Donegal for the first time in twenty years, John Redmond admitted that there was disappointment at the rate of progress. In a rallying call to the people of the county he urged them to pull together and focus on the campaign. He praised the efforts of the local branches of the United Irish League and commended the 'fidelity of the men of Donegal to the cause of the Irish nation'.¹

It would appear that the people of Donegal were indeed strongly committed to home rule. Since 1885

only home rule candidates had been elected as MPs for the county. In the county council elections of 1911, 26 out of a possible 32 seats were won by home rule candidates. Branches of the United Irish League operated across Donegal from Culdaff to Donegal Town and from Ardara to the Finn Valley. These branches held monthly meetings where support for the work of Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party was discussed and monetary subscriptions were collected from members to help fund the operation of the party.

These branches also organised larger public meetings and demonstrations illustrating the local support for home rule and attempting to gather further support. Important members of the party were invited to attend and speak at these gatherings. In addition to Redmond, these dignitaries included John Dillon and Joseph Devlin, prominent Home Rule MPs; Augustine Birrell, Irish Chief Secretary; and of course the Donegal Home Rule MPs – Philip O'Doherty, North Donegal; JG Swift MacNeill, South Donegal; Charles McVeigh and Edward Kelly, East Donegal; and Hugh Law, West Donegal.

Speakers at these meetings were keen to emphasise that in Donegal home rule was not a religious issue that pitted Roman Catholics against Protestants. Regular references were made to the founding of the party by the Protestant Isaac Butt and to the fact that both Swift MacNeill and Law were Protestant nationalists. At a meeting in Letterkenny in January 1912 a special mention was given to the 'fearless Presbyterian Home Ruler Mr Colhoun', chairman of Letterkenny Rural District Council.² The repeated sentiment from the home rule movement in Donegal was that the issue at hand was political not religious.

There was however a very strong link between the home rule movement in Donegal and the Roman Catholic Church. Parish priests and curates were vital participants at all home rule gatherings.

One of the most prominent members of the Roman Catholic clergy in Donegal was also heavily involved in the upper levels of the Irish Parliamentary Party – the Bishop of Raphoe (later Cardinal) Patrick O'Donnell. Although the Irish Parliamentary Party had reunited in 1900, there were a number of MPs who had remained separate and independent. A series of 'unity conferences' were held to reunite these factions. It was from one such conference that Bishop O'Donnell emerged as one of the main negotiators. Such was his importance that his letter of congratulations to the party was used to open the large public celebration held at the Mansion House in Dublin marking the introduction of the Third Home Rule Bill. In this letter he reached out to those who opposed home rule stating:

'It would be a great satisfaction to every true Nationalist if our fellow countrymen who hitherto have held aloof were at last to join in placing on the Statute Book a measure that will weld all Irishmen together in the noble occupation of co-operating on equal terms for the good of our common country.'³

Unfortunately this wish would not be fulfilled. As the Bishop wrote members of the unionist community across Ireland were planning to mount a campaign against home rule.

SECTION 2:

Resistance to Home Rule

With the return to power of the Liberal Party, unionists across Ireland realised that home rule might return to the political agenda at Westminster. As the budget crisis played out unionists rapidly began to organise opposition across the country. At this point their campaign centred on maintaining the Act of Union. Unionists were convinced that home rule would lead the way towards full Irish independence and that home rule would eventually mean 'Rome rule'. The unionist campaign of resistance from 1910 was led by Sir Edward Carson, a southern unionist and MP for Trinity College Dublin. It soon became clear that despite Carson's southern origins the unionist attack would focus on protecting Ulster. The first of Carson's anti-home rule meetings took place in Belfast where he encouraged unionists to prepare for home rule, stating: 'we must be prepared... the morning home rule passes, ourselves to become responsible for the government of the protestant province of Ulster'¹⁴. This speech clearly set the Ulster unionists apart from the southern unionists, essentially cutting them adrift to prepare for the coming of a nationalist government.

An Ulster Unionist Council was established as a direct result of this meeting to prepare a constitution for Ulster. A series of mass meetings were held across the province mobilising the unionist population. Prominent members of the Conservative Party attended these events. Andrew Bonar Law, the Conservative Party leader, went so far as to threaten resistance in any form when he stated: 'I

can imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster will go ... in which they will not be supported by the overwhelming majority of the British people'¹⁵.

These rallies culminated in the organisation of Ulster Day on 28th September 1912. On this day approximately 237,000 men and 234,000 women pledged their opposition to home rule by signing a pledge. The men signed the Ulster Covenant, while the women signed the Ulster Declaration. The main difference between the two documents was that the Declaration did not contain the threat of violence included in the Covenant to use: 'all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy'.

The signing of the Covenant and Declaration took place with much ceremony and symbolism. In Belfast Carson marched in military procession to City Hall where he signed the Covenant on a table covered by a Union Jack. The signing of these documents was not confined to Belfast. Events there were mirrored in towns and villages across the province where religious ceremonies and marching bands added to the local sense of occasion.

In Donegal signing events were held at approximately 115 locations right across the county, although the majority were organised for the unionist strongholds in east Donegal. 17,354 people (or 68.3% of Donegal's unionist population aged over 16) signed either the Covenant or Declaration. The largest single signing location was in St. Johnston where 895 men and women came together through the efforts of the local agent John McKean.

The most prominent landlords and members of the unionist community led the way in signing the



Members of the Donegal Ulster Volunteer Force stand in formation in Lifford Diamond (foreground) to mark the departure of the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers to fight in World War One.

Courtesy of the Deputy Keeper of the Records, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland

Covenant in their respective areas – the Earl of Leitrim, Lord Olphert and WH Boyd are just a few examples of those who started the signing proceedings. The signing of the documents was not just a public affair. In areas where the unionist population was more scattered agents travelled to private homes to encourage people to sign. It is also interesting to note that in many cases the men attended public functions in the town halls, while the women were more often organised in secondary locations like orange halls and many signed in the privacy of their own homes.

One of the women most prominent in organising the signing of the Declaration in Donegal was Mrs Charlotte Agnes Boyd of Ballymacool House in Letterkenny. Mrs Boyd was an active member of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council. This council was established in 1911 with the aim of assisting male unionists oppose home rule. They played a hugely significant role in electioneering, fundraising and propaganda for the unionist cause. Four branches were established in Donegal. The North Donegal, South Donegal and West Donegal Associations joined the provincial body on 19th November 1912, while East Donegal joined that December. By 1913

the women's council had a total membership of between 115,000 and 200,000 women. This was the largest female political organisation Ireland had ever seen.

In spite of the success of Ulster Day, by the end of 1912 Carson had moved from discussing how to block home rule to debating how many counties should remain outside of a home rule Ireland. This was the first time that consideration was given to splitting Ulster, by cutting off those Ulster counties which did not have strong unionist majorities. The unionists of Donegal, Monaghan and Cavan began to feel uneasy that they would be left to the same fate as their comrades in the other three provinces. Their lack of political representation clearly did little to help reduce their concerns. In Donegal the only seat contested by a unionist after 1895 was East Donegal where the candidate was easily defeated. Even with strong pockets of unionist support the party could only muster five county council seats out of the thirty two available in 1911.

At this point, however, these were only discussions and Ulster as a whole resolved to fight on. Events took a dangerous turn when on 31st January 1913 the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) was formed. The UVF was essentially a private army managed by Ulster unionists with the specific aim of preventing by military action any attempt to force home rule on the unionists of Ulster. Although uneasy with this turn of events the British government did not attempt to stop or abolish the new force. To the nationalists of Ireland this was unthinkable. By the time the UVF announced plans to establish a provisional government for Ulster it was clear to nationalists that they needed to respond. In November 1913 the Irish Volunteers were formed in Dublin. Two private

armies now existed in Ireland, and although both were initially poorly armed, the Larne and Howth gun running episodes ensured that the gun had very firmly entered Irish politics.

Donegal was by no means immune from these activities, although initial organisation of the local UVF was slow. There were only ten clubs with a membership of 350 people in the county by July 1913, but a visit by Carson to Raphoe in October gave the movement new momentum. By the end of the month there were nineteen clubs and 1,550 members. Across Donegal it was the largest landowners who took charge of the development of the UVF, with the Earl of Leitrim commanding the UVF for the county as a whole. He was also involved in the importation of arms and quantities of guns were known to be stored at his home.

With such activity by the UVF, it is not surprising that the Irish Volunteers grew rapidly in Donegal once they had been established. By 1914 there were forty seven branches with 7,800 members, and tensions between the two sides were high. A police report from June stated that: 'drilling is going on to such an extent that nearly all the able-bodied young men on both sides are being drilled two or three times a week'⁶. Members of the Donegal branch of the Irish Volunteers were also caught up in gun running activities. Two fishermen from West Donegal travelled to Bangor in Wales in 1914 where they boarded the ship the Asgard and set sail for the Belgian coast. They returned to Howth with 900 German rifles and 29,000 rounds of ammunition. The stage was set for civil war in Ireland.

SECTION 3:

World War One

The onset of World War One had a major impact on political events in Ireland. The Home Rule Bill passed its third reading in the House of Commons on 25th May 1914 and needed only the King's signature to become law. This bill did include a special clause for Ulster, but it offered the counties only the opportunity to opt out of home rule for a period of six years. This did not meet with unionist approval as it only postponed the inevitable. In order to find some middle ground a meeting, later referred to as the Buckingham Palace Conference, was called in July 1914. The sides failed to reach an agreement and with an international war on the horizon it was agreed to leave the 'muddy by-ways of Fermanagh and Tyrone'⁷ and focus on

the war effort. On 18th September 1914 home rule was passed for Ireland on the condition that it would be postponed for the duration of the war and that an agreement on Ulster would be reached before it could be introduced. By the time the war had ended events in Ireland had taken a very different turn and home rule was almost an irrelevance.

That was far in the future, however. After the postponement of home rule, John Redmond

pledged the support of Ireland to the allies and encouraged his followers to enlist in the army. This call split the Irish Volunteers. The majority of the organisation followed Redmond and there was an outpouring of enthusiasm as more than 50,000 men joined the army in the first six months. Those who followed Redmond became known as the National Volunteers. The remaining 10,000 members of the Irish Volunteers retained their name and their commitment to Irish independence. These were the



Postcard showing soldiers at Finner Camp, 1914 before they left to fight in World War One.

© Donegal County Archives Service

more militant elements in the Volunteer movement and included members of the secret society, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB). This group believed that 'England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity' and that the Irish population should prepare to fight for Ireland and not be distracted by events in Europe. Nonetheless, as in the rest of Ireland the vast majority of Volunteers in Donegal supported Redmond's call and joined the National Volunteers.

When they arrived on the battlefields they found themselves fighting alongside their former sworn enemies – Donegal members of the UVF who had been encouraged by Carson to enlist and fight for the United Kingdom. There was one major difference between the two groups, the UVF were given permission to form an Ulster division in the army, but the National Volunteers were refused permission to form an Irish division. Instead recruits were dispersed throughout a number of divisions. When the Ulster division were held back from entering the war sceptics began to suggest that they were being kept at home to keep them safe. This was quickly disproved as the Ulster division were sent to the Somme in July 1916, where large numbers were killed in just a few days.

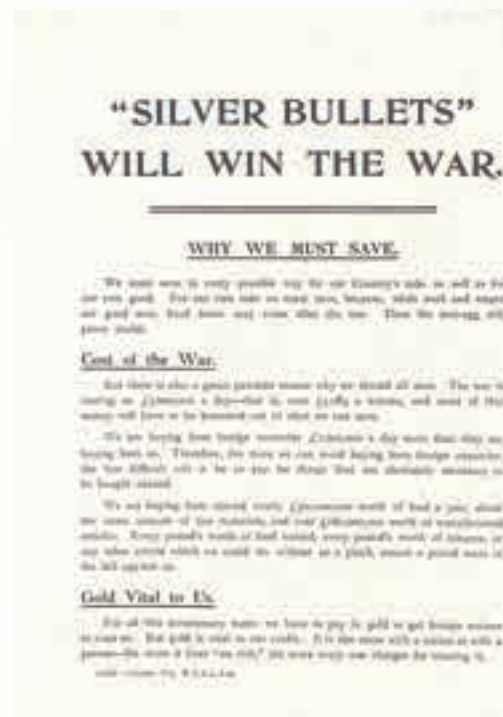
Estimates suggest that almost 3,000 Donegal men joined the army from both the nationalist and unionist communities. In addition to those who enlisted in Donegal others joined in Scotland, England, Wales, Canada, the United States of America, Australia and New Zealand. Patrick MacGill, the famous Donegal writer and poet, signed up with the London Irish Rifles, while in England. His time in the trenches inspired him to compose the following poem called 'Death of the Fairies':

'Before I joined the army I lived in Donegal,
Where, every night, the fairies would hold their carnival.
But now I'm out in Flanders where men like wheatears fall,
And it's Death and not the fairies who is holding carnival.'

Finner Army Camp was the focus of much activity in Donegal during the war. The camp acted as an initial training ground for troops before they departed for battle and a return base for those lucky enough to make it home alive. Of those who did return home, many were injured and required treatment,

which they received in the nearby hospital section of Ballyshannon workhouse.

The other portion of Donegal where the impact of the war was most immediately felt was around the coast. German submarines caused havoc with trade routes and traffic into and out of the area. The Congested Districts Board which had spent large sums of money improving the piers and harbours of Donegal had their new fishing boats commandeered



World War 1 government poster encouraging people to save, July 1915.

© Donegal County Archives Service

for use by the British Army and fishing largely stopped during the period. There were some economic benefits though as Lough Swilly provided a safe harbour for the British Navy on occasion and local shops profited from the increased business provided by the sailors!

The tragedies inflicted in the war countries came home to Letterkenny in a very real manner within the first few months of the war. People who had been forced to flee their homes in Belgium began to arrive in Letterkenny as refugees. At meetings of Letterkenny Rural District Council and Board of Guardians in November 1914 arrangements were put in place to make newly finished labourers' cottages available to the families. Plans were also put in place to provide additional accommodation within the workhouse if necessary. In addition, a group of wounded Belgian soldiers were housed at Glenveagh Castle.

Across Donegal one of the most important impacts of the war was the push towards increasing agricultural output. Farmers across the county were encouraged to increase the amount of land being used to grow crops and local councils were urged to have at least 15% of their land used. Loans were made available by the government for those who wished to increase their crop output, but who did not have the money to purchase seed oats, seed potatoes or manure (for fertiliser). As a result local agricultural employment increased as more and more farm labourers were required to tend to crop production. This proved a vital safety valve as emigration was stopped during the war.

Perhaps the issue to raise the most heated debate in Donegal and across the country was the threat of conscription. From the outbreak of war recruitment drives were held across the country. Initially these were well supported and very successful, but as the scale of death and injury in the trenches became apparent the tide began to turn. People became reluctant to encourage young men to risk so much. By 1918 the government was in desperate need of more manpower. When it suggested introducing conscription for Ireland to meet this demand

the outcry was immense. The government even considered introducing home rule as a compromise, but by that stage Irish nationalists were aiming for more independence than that offered. As a writer in *The Derry People and Donegal News* explained: 'no Irish Nationalist looks to any British manufactured measure of self-government at the present time as being likely to be acceptable in this country'⁸.

Anti-conscription marches and rallies were organised around the country. On Sunday 21st April 1918 a nationwide event was organised. On that day, at every parish in the country people signed an anti-conscription pledge denying the right of the government to force compulsory army service on Ireland and threatening to use any means to prevent its introduction. Men and women across Donegal signed the document outside their parish churches. The largest event was held in Letterkenny where 2,500 people attended. Every shade of nationalism was represented at this event from the United Irish League to the newly prominent Sinn Féin party. With the arrival of American troops into France in the summer of 1918 the tide turned in favour of the allies and conscription was dropped as a government policy.

By the end of the war in November 1918 approximately 210,000 men in Ireland had enlisted in the British Army. Somewhere in the region of 25,000 – 35,000 Irish men died in the conflict. These men came from across the political divide and fought beside one another for a shared cause. Across Donegal unionist and nationalist families were united in grief for lost loved ones. Unfortunately this joint experience did not develop into a deeper understanding or closer relations as the events of the next few years would demonstrate.

SECTION 4:

The 1916 Rising

While the National Volunteers went to fight in World War One, the Irish Volunteers remained at home to fight for Ireland under the leadership of Eoin MacNeill. Those who stayed were the most militant of the Volunteers' membership and included a number of members of the IRB who had secretly infiltrated the Irish Volunteers from their establishment. The IRB were the descendents of the physical force tradition nationalists whose last major event was a failed rebellion in 1867. Despite a fall in numbers and lack of revolutionary activity the organisation had maintained a presence across Ireland. Representatives of the organisation had secretly joined all the new cultural and political organisations that were established in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sensing an opportunity IRB members worked their way onto the central council of the Irish Volunteers.

Within the IRB the idea that 'England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity' was firmly established and plans were made to stage a rebellion. A military council was formed, composed of Patrick Pearse, Joseph Plunkett, Éamonn Ceannt, Thomas Clarke, Seán MacDermott, Thomas MacDonagh and James Connolly. These seven were to become the leaders of the Easter Rising. Connolly was a socialist and had been a leader of the workers in Dublin during the 1913 Lock Out. He had also become commandant of the Irish Citizens Army, which had been organised to protect the workers who had gone on strike. In this way the growing support for socialism and the Labour party was harnessed by the leaders of the Rising. The stage was set and orders were given for the mobilisation of the Irish Volunteers on Easter Sunday 1916.

A series of mishaps impacted terribly on the plans for a national rising. Firstly, the vast majority of the Irish Volunteers answered to their leader Eoin MacNeill and not the IRB. He could see no potential for a successful rebellion and refused to allow the organisation's membership to become embroiled in activities that would lead to unnecessary bloodshed. When he realised that a Rising was planned for Easter Sunday he quickly issued an order cancelling all volunteer activities. The army that Pearse and the others had hoped for would not appear. In addition, the arms they were waiting for from Germany did not arrive. The ship they were being transported in, the *Aud*, was intercepted by British warships. Rather than allow the British to gain control of the cargo the captain sank the ship and with it the hopes for a properly armed Irish force in Dublin. Roger Casement who had been involved in this operation was arrested when he arrived ashore in County Kerry.

In spite of these disasters the leaders pressed on with their plans and on Monday 24th April 1916, a day later than planned, Patrick Pearse read the Proclamation of the Irish Republic to a bemused group of onlookers outside the GPO in Dublin. The confusion over mobilisation ensured that the Rising was confined mainly to the city. The Rising lasted less than a week. Pearse surrendered the following Saturday, by which time much of the city of Dublin lay in ruins. People in Dublin were appalled. Widespread looting had occurred as law and order broke down and many of the ordinary civilians had been caught in the cross fire between the Irish and British forces. 318 Irish people (rebels and citizens) were dead and 2,217 were wounded.

The government reacted harshly and executed sixteen rebels including Roger Casement in London. A further ninety seven had their death sentence

reduced to imprisonment. In total over 3,500 people were arrested; almost 1,900 of these were interned and sent to prison camps in Britain. There the prisoners had the opportunity to discuss their political ideals and hopes for Ireland, educate themselves in the arts of war and practise drilling together. These camps became the universities for the revolution that was to come.



Soldiers holding a street in Dublin during the 1916 Rising.

© Donegal County Archives Service

But what had happened to the Donegal branches of the Irish Volunteers? Those who remained part of the Irish Volunteers after the split had little reason for activity and members began to fall away. As a result the active membership in Donegal was small to begin with and Eoin MacNeill's order not to mobilise on Easter Sunday had reached Donegal successfully. Nevertheless, a small group of thirty three Volunteers did meet at Creeslough on Easter Sunday to await instructions, which failed to arrive. This lack of activity did not spare the known leaders of the Irish Volunteers in the northwest, a number of whom were arrested and brought to Derry jail. They were transferred from there to Frongoch prison in Wales where they met with those who had fought in the Rising. During their time there plans were put in place to reorganise the IRB across Ireland

and Daniel Kelly was selected to take charge of the reorganisation in Donegal.

There were a small number of Donegal men actually involved in fighting in Dublin during Easter Week. Joseph Sweeney, Eunan McGinley and Conor McGinley were students in UCD at the time and took part in the Rising. There was one further Donegal participant in Dublin during Easter 1916: a former pupil of St Eunan's College, Letterkenny who was a member of the British Army Garrison that fought the rebels at the GPO – an indication of Donegal's political diversity.

Donegal was of course very far away from the action in Dublin on Easter Monday. So much so that Wednesday's edition of the *Londonderry Journal* could only report that there were 'rumours of disorder' in Dublin.⁹ By Friday news was still not getting through and the paper complained that the lack of telegrams was leading to 'alarmist and exaggerated reports' of the disturbances in Dublin! When news of the Dublin events did eventually reach Donegal the public reaction was negative. Local representatives voiced their disapproval, condemning 'the mad policy of a small minority of their countrymen'¹⁰, while others restated their loyalty to the Irish Parliamentary Party and the cause of home rule. However, the impact of the mass arrests and executions soon turned public opinion across Ireland and support for the rebels and their cause began to gather popular support. The movement for separation from Great Britain was gaining momentum.

SECTION 5:

The General Election of 1918

One of the major beneficiaries of the 1916 Rising was the political party, led by Arthur Griffith, called Sinn Féin. The Sinn Féin party had developed through the cultural nationalism movement as an alternative to home rule and the Irish Parliamentary Party. The party's main policy was the concept of 'dual monarchy'. This idea was developed by Griffith based on a system of government that operated in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It would see Ireland and Great Britain sharing a monarch, but remaining two equal and independent countries. In order to force this through Griffith wanted Irish MPs to abstain from Westminster and attend their own parliament in Dublin. While this idea had some supporters, the party had only limited success at local elections throughout the early 1900s.

The fortunes of the Sinn Féin party improved dramatically after the Easter Rising. The government was at a loss to name the group responsible and labelled it a Sinn Féin Rising. Suddenly the Sinn Féin party found itself at the centre of a rebellion it had not actively taken part in; a rebellion with aims which were completely different to the party's policies. For the majority of the Irish population these were only technicalities. As public opinion began to turn in favour of the rebels with the execution of the leaders and imprisonment of those involved, new Sinn Féin clubs were established across the country and the party's membership rose dramatically. By October 1917 there were 1,200 Sinn Féin clubs with a membership of about 250,000. In Donegal,

by December 1917 there were thirty four Sinn Féin clubs with more than 1,600 members.

The Sinn Féin party became the political focus of Irish republicanism. This caused turmoil within the party itself as its original members – the supporters of the dual monarchy principal – clashed with the new members and their republican ideals. Eventually, the two sides came to an agreement which saw Griffith step aside and allowed Éamon de Valera, the only commandant of 1916 who was not executed, to take over as party president. The Sinn Féin party was now officially the party of the Irish revolutionary movement. The following day de Valera became president of the Irish Volunteers. The political and military wings of Irish nationalism had joined forces.

At the same time disillusionment with home rule increased. The government, concerned with maintaining peace in Ireland after the Rising, considered bringing forward the introduction of home rule. In the discussions that followed the case of Ulster once more became the sticking point. Instead of pressing the advantage they had been given by the Rising, the Irish Parliamentary Party was forced into further concessions. They agreed to a temporary partition of Ireland during the War, which would see six of the Ulster counties excluded from the home rule area. The inclusion of Tyrone and Fermanagh in this area alongside the four counties with clear Protestant majorities (Derry, Antrim, Armagh and Down) marked a dramatic shift in the party's policy. Even with this compromise, agreement could not be reached and the discussions collapsed once more. Home rule had still not been achieved and Redmond's willingness to temporarily abandon even more nationalists in Ulster lost the Irish Parliamentary Party many followers.

The first indication that the Irish Parliamentary Party was no longer the central political party of the Irish population came with a series of by-election defeats in 1917. Most notable was the success of Éamon de Valera in winning the East Clare seat, previously held by John Redmond's brother Willie who had been killed in the War. Sinn Féin had successfully turned rebels into politicians. The party's support continued to rise as it campaigned against the introduction of conscription into Ireland and helped organise and co-ordinate anti-conscription meetings. The 'German plot' also helped boost party support. In an attempt by the government to halt the spread of the party, a number of Sinn Féin leaders were arrested on the grounds that they were conspiring with the Germans in opposing conscription. This turned the Sinn Féin leaders into living martyrs and it became clear that the Irish Parliamentary Party was facing an uphill battle in the next election.

The result of the election was a walkover for Sinn Féin in the nationalist areas of Ireland. In total Sinn Féin won 73 seats, the unionists won 26 and the Irish Parliamentary Party won only six. Of these six, four were in the border counties where Sinn Féin and the Irish Parliamentary Party had reached an agreement to prevent a contest between nationalist candidates. This avoided splitting the nationalist vote, which would have allowed the unionists to gain an extra seat.

One of these four was the seat in East Donegal. East Donegal was the only one of the four Donegal constituencies where a unionist candidate stood for election in 1918. With the prospect of a split vote, the Sinn Féin candidate S. O'Flaherty stood down to leave the way clear for the nationalist E. J. Kelly. Kelly defeated the unionist candidate Major R L Moore by 2,800 votes, earning one seat for the Irish Parliamentary Party in a county which had been a nationalist stronghold since 1885. In the other three Donegal constituencies Sinn Féin was successful. Joseph O'Doherty, from Derry, was elected in North Donegal, Joseph Sweeney, the veteran of 1916, was elected in West Donegal and PJ Ward succeeded to a seat in South Donegal. Interestingly neither Swift MacNeill nor Law, the sitting nationalist MPs in South and West Donegal before the election contested their seat.

The other interesting feature of 1918 was the election of the first woman MP to Westminster. Countess Markievicz, who had been second in command at St. Stephen's Green during the 1916 Rising, was elected as a Sinn Féin MP for St. Patrick's Division in Dublin. She, with the other seventy two Sinn Féin MPs made good their promise of abstention and refused to take their seats in Westminster. Instead, plans were put in place for the first meeting of an Irish parliament in Dublin.



That election occurred shortly after the end of the War, on 14th December 1918. This election was the first time that women were allowed to vote, provided they were over the age of thirty. The Irish electorate effectively doubled.

Patrick McDermott swears to maintain the secrecy of the ballot in a South Donegal polling station, 1918.

© Donegal County Archives Service

SECTION 6:

The War of Independence

On 21st January 1919 the newly elected Sinn Féin MPs put their policy of abstention into practice and created their own parliament for Ireland, Dáil Éireann, at the Mansion House in Dublin. There was a small attendance as thirty four of the Sinn Féin MPs were still in prison and neither the Unionist MPs nor the six Irish Parliamentary Party MPs accepted the invitation to attend. The members of Dáil Éireann were to take the title TD – Teachta Dála (deputy to the Dáil). At the first meeting the TDs declared Ireland's independence from Great Britain, adopted a constitution and set up ministries for finance, foreign affairs, home affairs and defence. An independent Ireland had been created, the only problem now was how to secure and maintain that independence.

On the same day, unknown to the new TDs, Irish Volunteers in County Tipperary launched an attack against members of the Irish police, the Royal Irish

Constabulary (RIC) at Soloheadbeg. Two policemen were killed in the incident, which later was defined as the first act of the War of Independence. Reaction to this attack was mixed; some TDs actively condemned the incident. With opinion split, the Dáil decided not to openly support these activities. Nevertheless, as the number of attacks increased and spread across the country, it became clear that for the first time since the Land War, the political and military wings of Irish nationalism were combining to exert pressure on the British government.

The person most responsible for this combination was Michael Collins. Collins had fought in 1916, but only took on a leadership role on his release from prison. He was a member of the Supreme Council of the IRB and therefore had the support of the most extreme nationalists, while his success as Minister for Finance won over more moderate nationalists. Collins was keenly aware that the Volunteers could not defeat the British in an all out war and favoured an ambush campaign, like that begun at Soloheadbeg.

As a result, initial Irish Volunteer attacks focused on the RIC. Members of the RIC were symbols of law and order in Ireland and they also had guns and ammunition stored in their barracks across the country. The capture of these weapons was vital for the campaign. The Irish Volunteers were organised into groups, known as 'flying columns', to organise ambushes locally. Despite a membership of some 15,000, Collins estimated that only about 3,000 Volunteers took part in military activities. As time went on the Volunteers were gradually recognised as the army of Ireland and became known as the Irish Republican Army or IRA.



Letter from two hostages describing their treatment by the IRA, 1921.

© Donegal County Archives Service

As public opinion continued to swing in support of the IRA, RIC members were boycotted and many began to step down. In order to counteract this and also to stem the increasing violence the British government introduced a new police force made up of ex-soldiers, known as the Black and Tans (so called because of their uniforms). Throughout 1920 the bloodshed increased and reached a climax in November and December. The most infamous day of the conflict was 'Bloody Sunday' (21st November), when Collins' specially trained 'Squad' shot a dozen British agents and two soldiers in the morning and the Black and Tans opened fire at a match in Croke Park in the afternoon killing fourteen people. Two of Collins' lieutenants were also shot trying to escape on the same day.

Across Ulster the IRA were less active than they were in the south of Ireland, but that did not prevent a backlash from unionists. In Belfast, Roman Catholic workers were thrown out of the shipyards, driven from their homes or had their homes burnt down. In response a boycott of goods produced by unionist firms in the northeast was launched by the Dáil. It was hoped that this might illustrate how dependent the north east was on the south for trade.

Donegal was one of the most active of the northern Ulster counties. Following the reorganisation of the IRA across the country, the Donegal companies became the 1st Northern Division composed of four brigades: West Donegal; North East Donegal; South West Donegal; and South East Donegal. While IRA activities in Donegal were not on the scale of those across the far south of Ireland, the War of Independence did have an impact on the county. Shortage of arms and ammunition was a problem, but the Donegal Volunteers made life difficult for the

RIC and the military by destroying railway lines and roads, preventing them from travelling around the county. Trains transporting mail were often held up and the Volunteers would remove all post destined for British government officials. Attacks on police stations were common and aided in arming the local forces. In April 1920, 14 unoccupied RIC barracks were burned by the IRA across the county. Volunteers in the east of the county were responsible for the first daylight arms raid in Ireland, when they crossed into County Tyrone and attacked the RIC barracks at Drumquinn. These were followed by attacks on the Fanad coastguard station and the RIC barracks in Belleek, County Fermanagh.

Of the brigades listed above, the West Donegal brigade, under the command of Joseph Sweeney TD, was by far the most active. By 1920 the RIC had abandoned their barracks in the Rosses and Gweedore and in 1921 they reported that the area seemed 'to have become a miniature republic'¹¹. This breakdown in British control was aided by the work of a flying column which was despatched to the area under the leadership of Peadar O'Donnell. With every attack by the IRA, the RIC and the military launched a round of arrests and counter-attacks. They threatened, intimidated and beat members of the public, they mounted searches, ransacked houses and farms and burnt private and public buildings and businesses.

It was not just the Donegal men who were involved in the fight for the Irish Republic. Branches of Cumann na mBan had been established across Donegal. Like their unionist counterparts the women involved were expected to support the men by raising funds, making uniforms and learning first aid. In fact many members of Cumann na mBan went a step

further during the War of Independence, playing an important role in transporting arms and information, acting as scouts and providing safe houses for those on the run in Donegal.

One of the more famous incidents in Donegal during the War of Independence has been preserved in the song 'Johnstons's Motor Car'.

'It was down by Brockagh corner, one morning I did stray;

I met another rebel lad, and this to me did say;

'I have orders from the Captain to assemble at Drumbar,

'But how can we get to Dungloe without a motor car?'

'O Barney dear, be of good cheer, I'll tell you what we'll do,

The Loyalists have plenty, altho' we have but few;

I'll wire to Stranorlar, before we march so far,

And we'll give the boys a jolly ride on Johnston's motor car'.¹²

Due to a large military presence in the area the South East Brigade had been inactive for a considerable period of time and had loaned men and arms to the more active West Brigade. When headquarters ordered a revival of action it was necessary to retrieve the arms, but the company had no form of transport to take them to the west of the county. They decided to hijack a car belonging to Dr Johnston of Stranorlar. They sent a telegram asking him to call on a patient and stopped him on his way, seizing his car. The car was taken to Burtonport and used for the activities of the West Donegal Brigade until it was eventually recovered during a British search.

Politically, it was September 1919 before the British government declared the Dáil an illegal organisation. From that point on the leaders of the Dáil were on the run, but that did not stop their efforts to create a fully functioning Irish state. In addition to the creation of the IRA as the state army, a new court system was also introduced. Sinn Féin courts were organised

with judges, new laws (based on the old Irish Brehon laws) and even a series of makeshift prisons located in various isolated and IRA controlled parts of the country. Local government was also taken over by the new state. After the local elections in 1920, many of the councils came under Sinn Féin control and swore their allegiance to Dáil Éireann. This gave the government another source of income as local taxes and fines were now paid to the Dáil and not the British government. British government control was slipping.

In Donegal, the 1920 local elections saw a large victory for the Sinn Féin party, but it was by no means unanimous as a number of nationalists and unionists retained their seats. As in other parts of the country, those councils controlled by Sinn Féin majorities passed resolutions swearing their allegiance to



Permit issued by the IRA during the War of Independence.

© Donegal County Archives Service

Dáil Éireann and Sinn Féin courts were also run successfully. In fact so successful were they that even the Protestant community brought their cases to them. Kevin O'Shiel, a travelling judge, recalled an occasion when a Protestant landowner from Ballyshannon attended a court in Sligo to have a land dispute resolved. O'Shiel actually found in favour of the landowner and perhaps more importantly his decision was respected.

While the War of Independence raged on, the British government still hoped that home rule would satisfy Irish demands and Prime Minister Lloyd George introduced a fourth home rule bill in 1920. The bill, which became law in 1921, established two home rule parliaments in Ireland, one for southern Ireland and one for the six counties of Northern Ireland. Partition and home rule had both become realities, but Irish nationalists were now on a quest for a much greater form of independence and so ignored the introduction of the act.

On the other hand unionists in the new Northern Ireland were satisfied with their achievement, even if it did mean that they had abandoned large numbers of their comrades on the other side of the border. The unionists of the three other Ulster counties felt betrayed. They pointed to the Ulster Covenant and accused their fellow unionists of breaking that Covenant in order to protect themselves. When it became clear that they would be deserted the unionists of Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan resigned from the Ulster Unionist Council and created their own 'Ulster Unionist Council for the Three Counties'. However, it was to no avail and they remained outside the boundary of Northern Ireland. For some of the unionist community life in nationalist Ireland was difficult in the first few years. More prominent unionists were viewed with suspicion by the IRA and this led to a number of attacks against members of the unionist community and their property.

As deaths on both the IRA and the British sides mounted throughout 1921, war weariness began to set in and moves were made to establish a truce. This was helped with the return of de Valera who had been in America fundraising since he had escaped from prison in 1919. It was also aided by a speech

made by King George V at the opening of the Northern Ireland parliament on 22nd June 1921 appealing for peace. After much negotiation a ceasefire began on 11th July 1921 and the following day de Valera and several ministers travelled to London to begin talks with the British government.

SECTION 7:

Truce and the Anglo-Irish Treaty

The ceasefire in July 1921 put an end to all military attacks by both sides. Volunteers who had been on the run for the duration of the war were allowed to return home. However, there was no time for complacency. The IRA leaders, concerned that there might well be a return to war if the truce was broken, established training camps throughout the country. These camps provided lessons in defence, attack, engineering and the use of explosives. As the population continued to ignore the RIC, the IRA was called on to play a role in maintaining law and order. In Donegal a good deal of their time in 1921 was spent trying to close down illegal poteen stills across Inishowen! Politically this period was used to improve the machinery of the Dáil. Sinn Féin courts began to operate publicly, while local councils returned to their main business of local administration. As far as the TDs and government officials were concerned Ireland was operating as a Republic. The British military could only watch as any attempt to interfere would represent a breaking of the Truce.

Despite this, as soon as the Dáil agreed to enter negotiations with the British government the Irish Republic was dead. Shortly after the Truce, negotiations began in London between Lloyd George and de Valera. An early offer of dominion status, the same status held by the former colonies of South Africa, Australia and Canada, was rejected by the Dáil. Although it offered a far greater degree of independence than home rule, it was an offer only for twenty six counties; the six counties of

Northern Ireland with its already established home rule government would remain as it was.

In October 1921 it was agreed that a delegation of five Irish TDs would go to London to further the talks. De Valera decided not to attend these meetings, sending Griffith as head of the delegation instead. They went with the understanding that no agreement would be signed without first discussing it with the other Ministers. Lloyd George was an able and experienced politician and the Irish delegates were no match for his skills. Two issues in particular dominated the talks; one was the status of the new Irish state: was it to be a Republic, a dominion or simply to have a home rule government like Northern Ireland; the second issue was partition. In December, following lengthy negotiations and the rejection by the Dáil of an earlier draft agreement, Lloyd George insisted that the delegates agree to a treaty by a set deadline. He stated that if the deadline passed full war would be resumed in Ireland. At 2.20am on 6th December 1921 the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed without having been approved by the Dáil cabinet.

On the same night, far away from London, members of the IRA planned to rescue prisoners held in Derry Jail. They were afraid that a return to war would occur if talks failed and the prisoners would be held indefinitely. The rescue failed, but in the process of the attempted escape two members of the RIC were killed. Thomas McShea and Patrick Johnston were arrested, charged with murder and stood trial where they were sentenced to death by hanging. They only survived because Collins later managed to negotiate a reduction in their sentences with the Northern Ireland government.

The Anglo-Irish Treaty had earned many allowances for Ireland, but it still contained conditions which more hard line republicans found impossible to accept. Northern Ireland would remain in existence, but a Boundary Commission would be established to review and revise the border. The Irish delegation believed that this would ultimately reduce Northern Ireland to such a small size that it would not be able to function as a separate government and would eventually result in a united Ireland. Perhaps much more controversial was the fact that the Republic had not been achieved. Ireland would be a Free State with the same rights as the other dominions, but an oath of fidelity to the King would have to be taken by all members of parliament.

These issues became the main stumbling blocks in the Dáil Debates which followed. The Ministers of the Dáil accepted the Treaty by four votes to three with de Valera leading the attack against it. TDs debated the Treaty until January 1922 when a vote of the Dáil was called. The Christmas period had changed the views of many TDs who discovered that in their constituencies the mood of the majority of the population was in favour of the Treaty. Many people were simply relieved that it offered an end to the violence of the War of Independence.

Like the Dáil as a whole the Donegal TDs split over the issue. During the debates Donegal was represented by six TDs – PJ McGoldrick (Buncrana), Joseph O'Doherty (Derry), JP McGinley (Letterkenny), Sam O'Flaherty (Castlefinn), Joe Sweeney (Burtonport) and PJ Ward (Donegal Town). Until he returned home at Christmas PJ Ward was determined to vote against the Treaty. As far as he was concerned it was not what he had stood for or fought for, but when he attended a meeting of the Sinn Féin groups in his

area they voted by seventeen to three to accept it. He told the Dáil: 'they are war-worn; they have come through a strenuous fight and they want peace'¹³. As a result he decided to support the Treaty. O'Doherty was firmly anti-Treaty regardless of the mood in his constituency, while McGinley was equally firmly pro-Treaty stating that: 'I, as one man, can't take the responsibility for committing the men and women who sent me here to a war of extermination which, I think, would result if this Treaty were rejected'¹⁴.

With the defection of Ward to the pro-Treaty side, the Donegal TDs voted four to two in favour of the Treaty. The two against were O'Doherty and O'Flaherty. When the voting was complete the Treaty was accepted by sixty four votes to fifty seven. Those who had voted against the Treaty were unwilling to give up the cause for the Republic. De Valera and the anti-Treaty TDs walked out of the Dáil. It appeared that the Sinn Féin movement was splitting in two, one side headed by Collins and Griffith and one headed by de Valera. Ireland was moving towards Civil War.



Dr JP McGinley and Joseph Sweeney arriving for the Treaty Debates, 1922.

Courtesy of Niall McGinley

SECTION 8:

The Civil War

On 16th January 1922 the British government handed over control of Dublin Castle to the Free State and its Chairman, Michael Collins. It was clear by this stage that Ireland was on the brink of Civil War. Differing opinions on the Treaty had led to rival groups appearing not just in the Dáil, but also in Sinn Féin and most worryingly in the IRA, where anti-Treaty members held a majority. An army convention in March formally announced that the army was independent of the government and in April the Four Courts in Dublin was taken over by the anti-Treaty forces. Attempts at reconciliation were made and Collins and de Valera agreed on a pact for the upcoming election which would prevent a vote on the Treaty. Despite this the election results showed a strong pro-Treaty majority across Ireland, indicating that the majority of the Irish population were satisfied with the settlement.

The only point on which both the pro- and anti-Treaty sides agreed was the need to assist the nationalist minority left north of the border who were suffering persecution at the hands of elements in the unionist population. The leaders hoped that a cross-border offensive would reunite the IRA and also prove to nationalists in Northern Ireland that they had not been abandoned by the Free State. Initial attacks on Belfast and east Ulster proved disastrous and were followed by swift arrests and attacks by the northern forces.

The campaign in Donegal was to be longer and more central to the aim of keeping the IRA united. Members of the anti-Treaty forces from Munster



Memorial card of the Drumboe Martyrs: Charlie Daly, Timothy O'Sullivan, Daniel Enright and Seán Larkin, who were executed in March 1923.

Courtesy of Jim Hannigan

travelled to Donegal where they joined with pro-Treaty forces (the vast majority of Donegal IRA members had declared their loyalty to the Free State) and then made contact with the IRA on the other side of the border. Attacks were launched into Derry and Tyrone, but perhaps the most notable incident took place in the area in and around the border towns of Pettigo and Belleek. There forces from the Northern and British governments, fearing an attack on Northern Ireland, entered into battle with the joint IRA forces and a five day gun battle ensued. The British forces managed to gain the upper hand, eventually forcing the IRA to retreat. This was the first time since the Treaty that British forces had intervened on behalf of the Northern government or crossed into Free State territory. It did little to help the delicate state of relations between Dublin and London.

The combination of pro- and anti-Treaty forces was to be short-lived, even in Donegal. The assassination of Sir Henry Wilson, security adviser to the Northern Ireland government, changed the situation

dramatically. The Free State government had made no serious attempt to remove the IRA forces from the Four Courts and the British had watched from the background to allow events to play out, but they could not ignore this. They forced the Free State government to take a stand against the IRA, threatening to return military forces to Ireland if they did not. The attack by the Free State forces on the Four Courts officially started the Civil War on 28th June 1922.

Within a short space of time the Free State forces had the upper hand as they drove the IRA out of the major towns and into the countryside. An ambush campaign, just like that put in place against the British, was now established against the Free State forces. This mainly took the form of the destruction of roads and railways and attacks on buildings. The houses of many southern unionists were also attacked in this period.

Across Donegal pro-Treaty forces soon had control of the county, but not without some resistance from the anti-Treaty forces. During the Northern offensive, the anti-Treaty forces from other parts of Ireland had positioned themselves in locations close to the border. As a result there was a strip of anti-Treaty forces along the Finn Valley and into Inishowen. When the Civil War began the anti-Treaty forces attempted to strengthen their position by joining together in a smaller number of locations. Glenveagh Castle became the headquarters of the anti-Treaty IRA in Donegal, but it soon became clear that even that location was no longer safe. The majority of the anti-Treaty troops moved out and went on the run, leaving behind a few men to guard the building and the women who were in charge of

publishing the *Tirconail War Bulletin*. At that point the group numbered eighty and the leaders quickly realised that such a number was too large to safely move around the county. The group split and spread out to different areas.

The biggest challenge facing the anti-Treaty movement in Donegal was the lack of support from the local population. Donegal was a pro-Treaty county. The extent of support for the new Free State was illustrated by the fact that only a small number of Donegal men joined the anti-Treaty forces. The rest were from other parts of Ireland who had been brought to Donegal for the northern offensive. Seán Lehane, leader of the anti-Treaty forces, was from County Cork and Charlie Daly, his second in command, was from County Kerry. Donncha MacNiallghuis, a Donegal man who had been living in Cork, returned to fight with the anti-Treaty forces in Donegal as he did not want to fight against his former comrades in Munster. The fact that they were outsiders and that they were fighting against the wishes of most of the local population meant that safe houses and supplies were difficult to come by and they were always in danger of their location being reported to the authorities. As conditions became more difficult Lehane reported to his superiors that: 'in my opinion we are only faking fight here and stealing about from place to place like criminals'.¹⁵

Perhaps the most successful anti-Treaty activity in Donegal related to the Belfast Boycott. Collins had called off the boycott against Belfast firms, but the anti-Treaty forces had restored it. This mainly took the form of preventing the sale of goods south of the border, which were produced by unionist firms. The

boycott in Donegal became a one woman crusade when it was taken on by a leader of Cumann na mBan in the county, Eithne Coyle. Coyle frequently held up trains carrying goods from these unionist merchants on her own, forcing the porters at gun point to remove the goods and setting fire to them as the train travelled on its way once more. Coyle was eventually arrested while transporting documents for Seán Lehane in September 1922 and spent the remainder of the war in prison.

As the 'war between brothers' continued atrocities were committed by both pro- and anti-Treaty forces. After Michael Collins was shot in August 1922 in an ambush in Cork, an Emergency Powers Act introduced the death penalty. Seventy seven executions took place during the Civil War; several of which were punishments for attacks on pro-Treaty forces or political figures. In Donegal, Drumboe Castle, headquarters of the pro-Treaty forces in east Donegal, was the site of one such execution. The anti-Treaty forces in the county received orders from their leaders to abandon Donegal in October 1922. As Daly and his men made their retreat they were captured by Free State forces and arrested. The eight men stood trial and in January they were sentenced to death by firing squad.

At that time discussions were being held to end the Civil War and the men may have survived if it was not for the shooting of a Free State Army Officer during an attack at Creeslough Barracks in March 1923. General Joe Sweeney conducted an investigation into the shooting and although he could not discover who carried out the attack he received orders from Dublin to have four of the eight executed: Charlie Daly, Timothy O'Sullivan, Daniel Enright and Seán Larkin. The first three of these

were all natives of Kerry, Larkin was from Derry. They were offered an opportunity to avoid execution if they signed a document stating that they would give up their anti-Treaty activities. They all refused. Despite attempts by church and political figures to prevent the executions, the four were shot on the 14th March 1923.

The large number of arrests, harsh treatment in jail and lack of support from the general public all led to a realisation by the anti-Treaty forces that they could not further their cause. In May 1923 Frank Aiken (who had taken over command of the troops after the death of Liam Lynch) issued an order to cease fire and dump arms. On the same day de Valera issued a notice stating that further sacrifice of life would be in vain. The Civil War had come to an end, but the bitterness and division that it had caused would remain a factor in Irish life for many decades to come.

SECTION NINE:

Aftermath and Legacy

The order to cease fire and dump arms ended the Civil War, but it was not an official surrender. This lack of an official end to the war delayed the release of prisoners and it was the summer of 1924 before all were freed and some level of normality began to return to Ireland. With peace finally achieved, attention turned to the next major issue – the boundary commission. When the Irish Free State was created Northern Ireland officially stated its intention to remain separate. This automatically meant that the boundary commission would have to be established and it would decide on the final and official border between Northern Ireland and the Free State. It was November 1924 before these discussions began.

The negotiations of the boundary commission were long and complicated. It quickly became clear that both the Free State and the Northern government had hopes of gaining territory. In fact, Craig (the then leader of Ulster unionism) warned the commission chairman that the unionists would defend their territory by all means necessary if any attempt was made to take it. Early in the discussions the idea of the Free State gaining all of Fermanagh and Tyrone was dismissed and concerns were raised that rather than gaining territory the Free State was in danger of losing it.

When the commission eventually reported it suggested that the Free State would gain 23,500 people and over 200 square miles, but it would lose



Poverty in Donegal made the national news in 1924 as seen in this clipping from the Irish Independent.

Courtesy of Irish Independent

substantial areas in Donegal. In Donegal the unionist strongholds along the east of the county would be transferred to Northern Ireland. The outcry which followed the publication of this proposal south of the border ensured that the Free State government

had to agree to leave the border as it was. The unionists on the Donegal side of the border would now permanently be part of the Free State.

In political terms, the multi-seat constituency of Donegal offered the possibility of electoral representation for Donegal unionists when the War of Independence ended. In 1923 the Protestant World War One veteran Major J Sproule Myles stood for election. He appealed to all unionists in the county. He had fought for the Empire, his family were not part of the landed gentry, but did have substantial business interests in the county and he had been kidnapped by republicans in February 1922. With the nationalist vote split between pro- and anti-Treaty candidates Myles topped the poll and entered Dáil Éireann as a Donegal TD. The fact that he was the first unionist representative elected in Donegal since 1880 proved to Donegal unionists that they could have a voice in political affairs in the Free State.

The 1923 election also proved that Ireland was operating as a democratic country. Nineteen candidates were nominated in Donegal, quite a change from the unopposed Sinn Féin nominations of 1921 and 1922. There were representatives from seven different parties. The final results illustrated the political diversity of the county. Alongside Myles who had run as an Independent, the Donegal population had elected four Cumann na nGaedheal TDs, one Farmers' Party TD and two anti-Treaty Civil War veterans Joseph O'Doherty and Peadar O'Donnell.

However, for many Donegal people in the 1920s, political parties and border negotiations faded to insignificance compared with the challenges of

poverty that they faced. Ireland's political issues might have been in some part solved, but the major social issues of poverty, unemployment and emigration were still live topics. In addition to widespread poverty there was a poor potato harvest in 1923 and a shortage of turf as a result of bad weather. This, combined with a reduction in available employment in Scotland, meant that starvation and famine were very real possibilities particularly in the poorest parts of the county. The state of affairs in Donegal was so shocking that the Irish Independent newspaper sent a reporter to investigate the levels of distress which were relayed to the nation in a column called 'On the borderline of starvation'.¹⁶ Conditions like these ensured that emigration was the only option for many people in the county.

Thus, while the period from 1912 -1923 brought about revolutionary changes in Irish politics and succeeded in delivering Irish independence, life for many ordinary Irish people continued unchanged. Socially World War One had brought increased demands for agricultural products, increased employment and better prospects, but as soldiers returned and Ireland slid into first the War of Independence and then the Civil War hardships were restored. For some it was simply a case of one type of government being replaced by another. People in Donegal often felt as distant from the government in Dublin as they had from Westminster.

Politically though, Ireland was unrecognisable. The biggest change was the creation of two separate states on the island – the Free State and Northern Ireland. Tensions between republican claims for a united Ireland and unionist claims for unity with Great Britain would set the trend for Anglo-

Irish relations for many years to come. Ireland did eventually achieve the status of a Republic in 1949, but it was for twenty six counties and not thirty two. In the twenty six counties the division of the population into unionist and nationalist slowly faded, being replaced with the much more bitter divisions caused by the Civil War. Families, friends, neighbours and communities had fought against one another in pursuit of their ideals and many atrocities had occurred. It would take decades for these wounds to heal.

Those divisions created the Irish political party system that exists to the present day. The pro-Treaty forces formed the Cumann na nGaedheal party, which later became Fine Gael, while de Valera eventually re-entered parliamentary politics in 1927 with his newly formed Fianna Fáil party. These two parties remain the two major forces in Irish electoral politics and it is only in the very recent past, as those old enough to remember the Civil War have passed away, that these parties' relationships to the Civil War has begun to be forgotten. The period from 1912 - 1923 might be a century distant, but its impact is still very much felt across the island and in Donegal in particular where the descendents of those unionist and nationalist communities continue to live side by side as they have done for centuries.

PART THREE: BIOGRAPHIES

The National Leaders

Edward Carson, b 1854

Courtesy of the Deputy Keeper of the Records, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.

Edward Carson was born in Dublin into a family of liberal, southern unionists. He studied law at Trinity College Dublin and Kings Inn. He became solicitor-general for Ireland and was elected as an MP for Trinity

College Dublin. He moved to London in 1893 where he quickly developed his reputation through his work in both the courts and the House of Commons. He was a defender of Irish landlordism and of southern unionism and strongly opposed home rule. He became leader of the Irish Unionist Parliamentary Party in 1910. When he realised that home rule was going to become a reality he took charge of the Ulster unionist movement and attempted to prevent home rule for Ulster at least. In 1918 he left his Dublin seat and stood for election for the Duncairn division of Belfast. He remained as leader of the Unionist party until 1921. When he died in 1935 he received a state funeral. A statue was erected in his honour outside Stormont House.

Michael Collins, b 1890

Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

Michael Collins was born in County Cork into a family of tenant farmers. He left Cork in 1906 and travelled to London where he began working in the

Post Office. While there he became involved in the Irish emigrant community and joined the GAA, Gaelic League, Irish Volunteers and the IRB. He returned to Ireland in 1915 and fought in the GPO during the 1916 Rising. He was imprisoned for his efforts until December 1916 and on his return he became increasingly involved with Sinn Féin and was elected as MP for South Cork and Tyrone in 1918. He was first appointed Minister for Home Affairs and then Minister for Finance in the first Dáil. At the same time he was president of the supreme council of the IRB. By combining the political and military wings of Irish nationalism he became one of the most significant figures during the War of Independence. He was responsible for intelligence operations and had his own specially trained group of assassins known as the 'Squad'. He objected to being included in the delegation that went to London to negotiate the Treaty, but defended the settlement in full when he returned. He was clear that the Treaty was simply a stepping stone to further independence. He became commander-in-chief of the Free State Army during the Civil War, but continued to try and find a settlement with the anti-Treaty side. He was killed on the 22nd August 1922 at Béal na mBlath in County Cork.

James Craig, b 1871

Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

James Craig was born in Belfast. His father was a wealthy distiller. He opposed home rule and became leader of the Ulster Unionist Council in 1905. In 1906 he was elected MP for East Down, a position which he held

PART THREE: BIOGRAPHIES

until 1918 when he became MP for Mid Down. With Carson he co-ordinated the unionist offensive against home rule and became leader of the Ulster Volunteer Force in 1913. He was hugely influential in framing the Government of Ireland Act, 1920. He took over as leader of the Unionist party when Carson resigned and became Prime Minister of the first Northern Ireland parliament in 1921. He held this role until his death in November 1940, during which time he worked tirelessly to maintain Northern Ireland as a Protestant state. He famously proclaimed 'Ours is a Protestant government and I am an Orangeman'.

Éamon de Valera, b 1882



© Donegal County Archives Service.

Éamon de Valera was born in New York, but brought up in Limerick by his grandmother. He became a mathematics teacher in Dublin. In joining the Irish Volunteers in 1913 he became part of the revolutionary nationalist movement.

He also joined the IRB. During 1916 he led the battalion stationed at Boland's Mills and was sentenced to death for his part in the Rising. This was later changed to life in prison. On his release from prison in 1917 he took over the presidency of the reorganised Sinn Féin party. He was one of the leaders imprisoned during the 'German Plot' arrests and while in prison was elected as leader of the first Dáil. Following his escape from prison he spent a considerable period of time in America fundraising and gathering support for the Irish cause. He did not take part in the Treaty negotiations in London and led opposition to the Treaty when the delegates

returned. When the Treaty was accepted he resigned as president. De Valera refused to take the oath to the British King and remained outside the Dáil until 1927 when he led the newly formed Fianna Fáil party back into the Dáil chamber stating that the oath was simply 'an empty formula'. As leader of the government from 1932 de Valera dismantled the Treaty and presided over Irish neutrality during the Second World War. He formed his last government in 1957 and retired as Taoiseach in 1959. He served two terms as President of Ireland from 1959 – 1973.

Arthur Griffith, b 1871



Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

Arthur Griffith was born in Dublin into a working class family. He was a printer by trade, but quickly turned to writing and journalism. He edited several radical newspapers including

the *United Irishman* and *Sinn Féin*. He believed in the concept of a dual monarchy based on the Austro-Hungarian Empire and his *'The Resurrection of Hungary: A Parallel for Ireland'* sold more than 30,000 copies in 1904. He was a co-founder of the Sinn Féin party, which had limited success until it was wrongly blamed for the 1916 Rising. Although Griffith rejected the use of force and took no part in the Rising he was arrested and imprisoned with the rebels. With the growing popularity of Sinn Féin after the Rising Griffith stepped aside, allowing de Valera to take charge of the party, thereby uniting all shades of nationalism under one umbrella. Griffith was elected as MP for East Cavan while he was in prison, having been arrested again as part of the 'German Plot'. He became acting president of the Dáil while

de Valera was in America and in 1921 was selected as head of the Treaty negotiation delegation. When de Valera resigned the presidency after the vote in favour of the Treaty, Griffith became president of the Dáil. He died of a brain haemorrhage on 12th August 1922. He was the first Irish leader to be buried as Head of State.

John Redmond, b 1856



Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

John Redmond was born in County Wexford and educated at Trinity College Dublin. His father had been a Nationalist MP for Wexford and Redmond followed in his footsteps when he became MP for Waterford. After the Parnell split in the Irish Parliamentary Party, he led the parnellite MPs and took charge of the reunited party from 1900. It was under Redmond's leadership that the party entered coalition with the Liberal Party and succeeded in having the Third Home Rule Bill introduced in 1912. Redmond agreed to postpone the introduction of home rule until after World War One and urged the Volunteers to join the British war effort, a move which caused a split in the movement. The majority of Volunteers joined the National Volunteers under Redmond and signed up to the British Army. The losses incurred during the war, combined with the harsh British reaction to the 1916 Rising, the increasing popularity of Sinn Féin and the lack of progress on home rule, meant that the Irish Parliamentary Party was losing support. Redmond died in March 1918 just months before the party was almost entirely wiped out by Sinn Féin at the polls.

The Local Leaders

Charlotte Agnes Boyd, b c1861

Charlotte Agnes Boyd was born in Dublin City. She married William Henry Porter around 1873 and they had eight children. William Henry was the nephew of John Boyd of Ballymacool, Letterkenny and next in line to the estate, but he had to change his surname to Boyd in order to complete the inheritance. William and Charlotte took over Ballymacool House in 1891. The Boyds were among the leaders of the Protestant landed class in Donegal and as such were active in the unionist movement. Charlotte Agnes was active in the Ulster Women's Unionist Council and was one of the most energetic organisers of the signing of the Ulster Declaration in Donegal. Unlike many of the other organisers she made sure to include the lower classes of unionists. Many of the forms she gathered had been marked with an X by people who could not write. Mrs Boyd was also involved in a number of charities. She was President of the Letterkenny branch of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and was involved with the Refugee Committee set up to deal with the Belgian refugees in Donegal. She died in 1933.

Charles Clements, b 1879



Courtesy of The Inniskillings Museum.

Charles Clements became the 5th Earl of Leitrim when he was just thirteen years old. He was educated at Eton and Oxford. As Earl of Leitrim he had control of almost 55,000 acres of land in Donegal and a further 2,500 in Leitrim. He joined the

army and served in the Boer War, but returned to Donegal afterwards. He was a staunch unionist and was instrumental in organising and leading the Ulster Volunteer Force in the county. He organised a gun purchase scheme and transported guns into Ireland aboard his yacht the *SS Ganiamore*. Police reports from the period estimated that he stored at least seventy rifles at his home in Mulroy Castle for the UVF. He travelled to various Orange Halls across Donegal with a gun, giving instructions to UVF members on how to use it. He led the members of his UVF Company to fight in World War One, where he was a major in the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. He had no children and the Earldom of Leitrim died when he did in 1952.

Eithne Coyle, b 1897



Courtesy of UCD Archives (P61/9 Eithne CoylePapers).

Eithne Coyle was born near Falcarragh. Her family were farmers and were strongly republican. She is widely recognised as being the most active Cumann na mBan member in Donegal. She became a member of Cumann na mBan in 1917 and in early 1918 co-founded a branch in Cloughaneely. She became an organiser for the Gaelic League and travelled to different counties using this work to establish new branches of Cumann na mBan. In 1920 the RIC in Roscommon became suspicious of her activities in the county. At this point she was acting as a courier, fundraiser and spy and was also the author of articles for the *Irish World* in New York. Her house was raided on several occasions before she was finally arrested and imprisoned in Mountjoy Jail. She escaped from there in October 1921.

She returned to Donegal after the Truce and was appointed Cumann na mBan organiser for Donegal, Derry and Tyrone. Like the majority of Cumann na mBan members she was staunchly anti-Treaty and played an active part in Donegal's Civil War. She was stationed at Glenveagh and from there again acted as courier, fundraiser, spy, publicity officer and ran an IRA hospital. She was arrested in September 1922, having been caught returning from Sligo with IRA correspondence. She spent the remainder of the war in jail. After the war she was appointed to the national executive of Cumann na mBan and served as its president from 1926 – 1941. She died in 1985.

Thomas McShea, b c1882



Courtesy of Gráinne Jones and John Campbell.

Thomas McShea was born into a farming family in Ardfarna, Bundoran. After national school he trained and worked locally as a carpenter. He joined the nationalist Ancient Order of Hibernians around 1910 and the Irish Volunteers and Sinn Féin in 1913. He was appointed O/C of the South Donegal 1st Battalion and was active in raids, ambushes and cutting roads and telephone wires in the area during the War of Independence. He was arrested with Patrick Johnston in 1921 and imprisoned in Derry Jail. On 6th December 1921 the prisoners in Derry jail planned an escape. As part of the plan Johnston and McShea dosed two policemen with chloroform and tied them up. The escape attempt was foiled, but when the two RIC men were found they were dead. McShea and Johnston were charged with

their murders. They were sentenced to death by hanging and only had their sentences reduced after Michael Collins negotiated with the authorities in Northern Ireland. They were eventually released in 1926 and welcomed back to Bundoran as heroes. The address presented to the men on their return by Bundoran Urban District Council has been loaned to Donegal County Archives Service by McShea's family and is reproduced with their kind permission in this pack.

Joseph Murray, b 1893



© Donegal County Archives Service.

Joseph Murray was born in Park Street, Monaghan. He studied at St. Patrick's Training College, Dublin and taught in Loughrea before moving to Bundoran in 1915. He was a fluent Irish speaker and had been actively involved in the GAA and Gaelic League in County Monaghan.

When he arrived in Donegal he began to organise the GAA and Gaelic League in areas where it had not existed and also assisted in establishing a company of Irish Volunteers in Bundoran. He was appointed as Intelligence Officer for the 1st Battalion but also spent time with the Cloughaneely Company. In both these locations he played an active part in ambushes and raids during the War. He became Vice O/C of the South East Donegal Brigade in 1921. A pro-Treaty supporter, he was involved in the joint northern offensive in Pettigo and Belleek. He joined An Garda Síochána in October 1922 and was promoted to Superintendent in 1924. He was stationed at various locations across Ireland where he continued his involvement with the GAA and the Gaelic League. He retired to Donegal in 1958. His son donated his papers to Donegal County Archives

Service and several samples from them have been reproduced in this pack.

Peadar O'Donnell, b 1893



© Donegal County Archives Service.

Peadar O'Donnell was born on a small farm in Meenmore, Dungloe. He studied at St. Patrick's College, Dublin and returned to Donegal to teach on Arranmore Island. He was a socialist and a republican activist. He travelled to Scotland to campaign for better rights for migrant

workers and was an organiser in the Irish Transport and General Workers Union. During the War of Independence he led the flying column that operated in Donegal and was made commander of the North East Donegal Brigade. He was strongly anti-Treaty and was a member of the garrison which occupied the Four Courts in April 1922. He was elected as a Republican TD for Donegal in 1923 and was a founder of the socialist-republican group Saor Éire in 1931. He edited *An Phoblacht* and formed or joined a number of other revolutionary groups. His belief in socialism and republicanism is reflected in his novels and short stories, many of which are based on the harsh realities of rural life in Donegal.

Joseph Sweeney, b 1897



Courtesy of Niall McGinley.

Joseph Sweeney was the son of Johnny and Margaret Sweeney of Sweeney's Hotel, Burtonport. He studied briefly at St. Eunan's College, Letterkenny, before transferring to the school

run by Patrick Pearse in Dublin – St. Enda's College, Rathfarnham. He went on to study in UCD, but maintained his links with Pearse, joining his company of the Irish Volunteers, being sworn into the IRB by him and acting as a courier for him. In this capacity he got to know many of the leaders of the 1916 Rising and he was the only Donegal man to fight inside the GPO during Easter Week. As a result he was arrested and imprisoned with the other rebels. On his release he joined the Dungloe branch of Sinn Féin and ran for election as a Sinn Féin candidate in West Donegal in 1918. He became the youngest MP elected to Westminster, but did not take his seat, joining the other Sinn Féin TDs in Dáil Éireann instead. He remained as a Donegal TD until 1923. During that time he successfully combined politics with his military exploits. He was appointed O/C of the West Donegal Brigade and in this position coordinated and led training exercises, attacks and raids throughout the War of Independence. Under his command West Donegal was the most active area in the county. Sweeney was appointed as divisional commandant of the 1st Northern Division in 1921. He voted in favour of the Treaty and became Commandant General Joseph Sweeney when he took charge of the Free State Army in Donegal. As head of the army in Donegal, Sweeney received the order from Dublin to execute the four men who became known as the Drumboe Martyrs. After the Civil War Sweeney rose through the ranks of the army and was appointed Chief of Staff in 1929. He retired in 1940 and died in 1980. Despite spending most of his adult life in Dublin he was buried in Dungloe in the family burial plot.

PART FOUR: DEALING WITH DOCUMENTS

Dealing with Documents What are Archives?

Archives are documents that contain important information about our past. They include items like letters, diaries, photographs, accounts of meetings, maps, plans and sound or video recordings. They are primary sources, because they are created at the time an event occurred and contain first hand accounts from the people who lived through the actual events. These items have been preserved because they contain unique and important information that we can use to recreate and better understand our past.

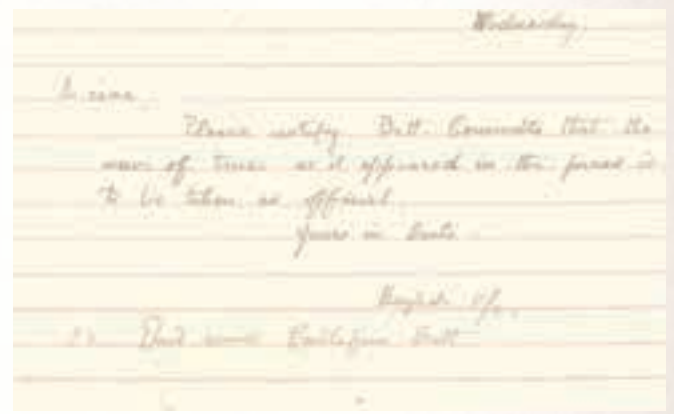
Working with historical documents

You must be careful when using information contained in archives. These records offer only one side of a story or one person's account of a particular occasion. Other people might have selected different aspects to record or have given different opinions on what was happening. It is sometimes useful to combine archives from two different sides to draw up an accurate account of what really occurred. For example, a historian might use the diary of an IRA member and a letter written by one of the Black and Tans to develop a better understanding of what actually took place during a certain ambush or raid. History books, articles and documentaries which use archives to give an account of an event are classed as secondary sources.

Some archives are handwritten and depending on the type of paper, pen and skill of the author they can

often be difficult to read. If you are having difficulty with a word see if you can match up some of the letters with letters in words you have already worked out. A magnifying glass can often be very useful in helping to identify letters and also to help you view details in the background of photographs or maps. Also, you should remember that writing letters was almost the only form of communication in early twentieth century Ireland. People could write many letters in one day and as a result they shortened many words to save time and paper (which was often scarce). Can you identify any instances of these within the documents?

Your Document Pack



Letter informing IRA members in Donegal that a truce has been called, July 1921. Notice how certain words have been shortened. Can you figure out the full text of the document?

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The archives chosen for your document pack come mainly from the collections of Donegal County Archives Service. We have chosen a number of items from other Libraries and Archives and we have also been loaned some items from people locally. Most families have some archives – does yours? What are they? Do any of them relate to the period 1912 – 1923?

We have selected a number of documents for you to examine. We have chosen these carefully to allow you to experience a range of different types of sources and also to get different perspectives on events. We hope these will help bring to life the events that occurred and allow you to view these key historical moments through the eyes of people who lived through the period 1912 – 1923. In case you find the handwriting too difficult to read we have provided typed up versions of the handwritten items. You will find these on the back of the documents along with a number of exercises.

While exploring the documents in this pack, you should try to:

- Identify the type of document you are looking at – is it a letter, report, minutes of a meeting, or a photograph?
- Consider why the document was produced, who was intended to see or read it.
- Establish the most important facts and information contained in the document.
- Think critically about the information the document is giving – how accurate is it, do you think the author is trying to convince the reader of something, what could the author be leaving out?

We hope you enjoy exploring the documents that follow and if you wish to view other items in our collection you are welcome to make an appointment to come and visit Donegal County Archives Service (contact details below).

References:

1. *The Derry People and Donegal News*, 31st August 1907, p 8
2. *The Derry People and Donegal News*, 20th January 1912, p 6
3. *The Derry People and Donegal News*, 27th April 1912, p 8
4. FSL Lyons, 'The developing crisis, 1907 – 1914', in W.E. Vaughan (ed), *A New History of Ireland, vi. Ireland under the Union, 11. 1870 – 1921* (Oxford, 1996), p 131
5. *The Times*, 29th July 1912 quoted in M. Laffan, *The partition of Ireland, 1911 – 1925* (Dundalk, 1983), p 27
6. RIC County inspector's confidential monthly report on Donegal, June 1914, quoted in T. Dooley, 'The organisation of unionist opposition to home rule in Counties Monaghan, Cavan and Donegal, 1885 – 1914' *Clogher Record* 1997, 16(1) p 69
7. Winston Churchill, 1923, quoted in M. Laffan, *The partition of Ireland, 1911 – 1925* (Dundalk, 1983), p 46
8. *The Derry People and Donegal News*, 27th April 1918, p 2
9. *Londonderry Journal*, 26th April 1916, p 3
10. *Londonderry Journal*, 1st May 1916, p 4
11. Inspector General's report, 1921 quoted in M. Laffan, *The partition of Ireland, 1911 – 1925* (Dundalk, 1983), p 75
12. Excerpt from Johnston's Motor Car quoted in N. Mac Fhionnghaile, *Dr McGinley and his times: Donegal 1900 – 1950* (Letterkenny, 1985), p 40
13. PJ Ward, *Dáil Éireann Debates*, 7th January 1922, pp 320 - 321
14. JP McGinley, *Dáil Éireann Debates*, 7th January 1922, pp 323 - 324
15. Seán Lehane quoted in L. Ó Duibhir, *Donegal and the Civil War: the untold story* (Cork, 2011), p 191
16. *Irish Independent*, 19th January 1924, p 7

Additional Reading:

If you are interested in discovering more about the period 1912 – 1923 the following provide good introductions:

- Garvin, T. (1996) *1922: The Birth of Irish Democracy*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan
- Garvin, T. (2005) *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland, 1858 – 1928*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan
- Hopkinson, M. (2002) *The Irish War of Independence*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan
- Hopkinson, M. (2004) *Green against Green: the Irish Civil War*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan
- Laffan, M. (1983) *The partition of Ireland, 1911 – 1925*. Dundalk: Dundalgan Press [for the Dublin Historical Association]
- Laffan, M. (1999) *The Resurrection of Ireland, The Sinn Féin Party, 1916 – 1923*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Vaughan, W.E. ed. (1996) *A New History of Ireland, Vol. VI, Ireland under the Union, 1870 – 1921*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Walker, B.M. (1978) *Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland, 1801 – 1922*. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy

The following works provide more detail on Donegal in the period 1912 – 1923 and have been heavily relied on in the compilation of this pack:

- Mac Fhionnghaile, N. (1985) *Dr McGinley and his times: Donegal 1900-1950*. Letterkenny: An Crann
- Mac Fhionnghaile, N. (2005) *Donegal, Ireland and the First World War*. Letterkenny: An Crann
- Nolan, W., Ronayne, L. & Dunlevy M. eds (1995) *Donegal History and Society*. Dublin: Geography Publications



- O'Carroll, D. (2007) *Finner Camp: A History*. Dublin: Defence Forces
- Ó Duibhir, L. (2009) *The Donegal Awakening: Donegal and the War of Independence*. Cork: Mercier Press
- Ó Duibhir, L. (2011) *Donegal and the Civil War: the untold story*. Cork: Mercier Press
- Sweeney, A. (Undated) *My Memoirs looking back and remembering People, events, things, 1885 – 1986*. Typescript held in the Central Library Letterkenny

The following are just a sample of the wide range of online sources relating to the period 1912 – 1923:

- 1916 Rising Exhibition: www.nli.ie/1916/
- Ask About Ireland: www.askaboutireland.ie
- Bureau of Military History, Witness Statements: www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/
- Census Online: www.census.nationalarchives.ie/search/
- Century Ireland, 1913 – 1923: <http://www.rte.ie/centuryireland/>
- Irish Revolution Lecture Series: <http://historyhub.ie/theirishrevolution>
- National Photographic Archive: www.nli.ie/en/national-photographic-archive.aspx
- Treaty Exhibition: <http://treaty.nationalarchives.ie/>
- Ulster Covenant and Declaration: <http://applications.proni.gov.uk/UlsterCovenant/Search.aspx>

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GAA Library and Archive
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Donegal County Council is managing the Hands of History project, which aims to develop and deliver an innovative programme exploring how we remember key events in our history.

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