



The War of Independence in County Kilkenny: Conflict, Politics and People

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Abstract

The array of publications relating to the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) has, generally speaking, neglected the contributions of less active counties. As a consequence, the histories of these counties regarding this important period have sometimes been forgotten. With the recent introduction of new source material, it is now an opportune time to explore the contributions of the less active counties, to present a more layered view of this important period of Irish history. County Kilkenny is one such example of these overlooked counties, a circumstance this dissertation seeks to rectify.

To gain a sense of the contemporary perspective, the first two decades of the twentieth century in Kilkenny will be investigated. Significant events that occurred in the county during the period, including the Royal Visit of 1904 and the 1917 Kilkenny City By-Election, will be examined.

Kilkenny's IRA Military campaign during the War of Independence will be inspected in detail, highlighting the major confrontations with Crown Forces, while also appraising the corresponding successes and failures throughout the county.

The Kilkenny Republican efforts to instigate a 'counter-state' to subvert British Government authority will be analysed. In the political sphere, this will focus on the role of Local Government, while the administration of the Republican Courts and the Republican Police Force will also be examined.

Finally, the oft-forgotten 'ordinary people' in Kilkenny will be considered, to understand how the War affected their daily lives.

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Abbreviations

ASU	<i>Active Service Unit.</i> Also known as a 'Flying Column'.
BMH WS	<i>Bureau of Military History Witness Statements.</i> Statements given by participants in the Irish Revolutionary period during the 1940s and 50s. Stored in the Military Archives.
CSORP	<i>Chief Secretary of Ireland Registered Papers.</i> Records of the Chief Secretary who was based in the administrative centre of British authority in Dublin Castle. These papers are now located in the National Archives of Ireland.
DELG	<i>Dáil Éireann Department of Local Government</i>
DI	<i>District Inspector</i> of the RIC
DMP	<i>Dublin Metropolitan Police.</i> Police force for the Dublin area.
GAA	<i>Gaelic Athletic Association</i>
GHQ	<i>General Headquarters.</i> Refers to IRA headquarters in Dublin.
IPP	<i>Irish Parliamentary Party</i>
IRA	<i>Irish Republican Army.</i> Referred to as the 'Irish Volunteers' before August 1919.
IRB	<i>Irish Republican Brotherhood.</i> Clandestine, oath bound republican organisation.
ITGWU	<i>Irish Transport and General Workers Union</i>
MP	<i>Member of Parliament.</i> Refers to members of the House of Commons in Westminster.
MSPC	<i>Military Service Pensions Collection.</i> Files relating to the pension applications for Military service in both the IRA and Free State Army. Located in the Military Archives of Ireland.
NA	<i>National Archives of the United Kingdom</i>
NAI	<i>National Archives of Ireland</i>
NLI	<i>National Library of Ireland</i>
RIC	<i>Royal Irish Constabulary.</i> Police force of Ireland prior to 1922.
TD	<i>Teachta Dála.</i> A member of Dáil Éireann
UCDA	<i>University College Dublin Archives</i>
UCDSC	<i>University College Dublin Special Collections</i>

Introduction

County Kilkenny was slack. It was difficult to meet officers; dispatches took a long time to travel...Poor material I thought. No direction from above and no drive.¹



Map showing the villages and towns of County Kilkenny that are mentioned in this dissertation

The above quote is taken from Ernie O'Malley's celebrated publication *On Another Man's Wound*, which primarily relates to his experiences during the Irish War of Independence. Upon reading these words some years ago, this writer was curious to ascertain if this was indeed an accurate reflection of County Kilkenny's contribution to this pivotal period in Irish history. The above statement, however, is taken from the chapter that deals with O'Malley's infamous arrest by Auxiliaries in County Kilkenny in December 1920. Could this event have tainted his entire image of Kilkenny during the period? When O'Malley's book was originally published in 1936 it caused enormous offence to the leading Kilkenny participants

¹ Ernie O'Malley, *On Another Man's Wound* (Dublin, 2013), p. 279

in the War of Independence, as is demonstrated by their numerous letters to the local and national media in which they accuse O'Malley of seeking a 'brighter halo on other men's wounds'.² In contrast, historian Michael Hopkinson is more generous with his analysis of the county's contribution, stating that 'the reputations of the brigades and columns of the IRA in Kilkenny have suffered by comparison with nearby Tipperary'.³

Another question that will be raised is how the arrest of important Kilkenny IRA leaders in December 1920 affected the county's involvement for the remainder of the conflict. Kilkenny Battalions had an impressive military start to the war, with one of the first RIC Barracks in Ireland to surrender during the conflict being that of Hugginstown, Co. Kilkenny in March 1920. So after such a promising start why did this success not continue? The effectiveness of the British counter-response from the autumn of 1920 will also be investigated.

In summary, this paper will aim to determine where the truth lies regarding Kilkenny and its contribution to the War of Independence. Scrutinising successes and failures throughout County Kilkenny will establish if Ernie O'Malley's statement is an accurate reflection or not.

By way of introduction, the decades prior to the War of Independence in County Kilkenny will be examined generally, to determine the atmosphere in the lead up to this revolutionary period in Irish history. The War of Independence in Kilkenny will then be investigated in the military, political and civil spheres. The major exchanges that occurred between the British Crown Forces and the IRA in Kilkenny will be examined in detail. Ascertaining the number of deaths, both combatant and civilian, caused as a direct result of the war will be another aim of the research. The administration of the 'Sinn Féin Courts' and Local Government in Kilkenny will also be included in the scope of the analysis. Finally, how the lives of ordinary people in Kilkenny fared through these two turbulent years will be examined.

With the advancement of digital research methods, along with the release of new important sources such as the 'Bureau of Military History Witness Statements' (BMH WS) and the 'Military Service Pension Collection' (MSPC), this is an opportune time to reevaluate Kilkenny's contribution to the Irish War of Independence. Focusing on a county, as opposed to a national narrative, allows for a more nuanced view of this period. Historian Niall Whelehan has emphasised the value of county histories stating that 'exploring the manifold

² *Irish Press*, 19 December 1936. *Kilkenny People*, 26 December 1936

³ Michael Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence* (Dublin, 2004), p. 123

aspects of the Irish Revolution necessitates some transnational frame of reference that balances larger contexts with the rich detail excavated by the county study'.⁴

With regards to the historiography of this period of Kilkenny's past, there has not yet been a definitive publication that deals with the whole of the county. The most important publication to date is Jim Maher's seminal work entitled *The Flying Column – West Kilkenny 1916-1921*, published in 1987.⁵ Maher provided a valuable service to the county when he spent over 20 years recording interviews with the surviving members of the 7th Battalion Kilkenny IRA. The scope of Maher's book included any engagement that members of the highly active 7th Battalion participated in. Jim Maher has this year launched an updated version of his book.⁶ This new edition contains seven new or updated chapters with the majority of the additional research focusing on events in Kilkenny prior to the outbreak of the War of Independence.

Declan Dunne published a biography on one of the most important figures in Kilkenny during this era, Peter DeLoughry, entitled *Peter's Keys, Peter DeLoughry and the Fight for Irish Independence (2012)*.⁷ DeLoughry is probably most famous for fashioning the key that led to the escape of Eamon De Valera and others from Lincoln jail in 1919. DeLoughry had many different roles during his life including 'head centre' of the IRB in Kilkenny, a member of the Corporation, Mayor of Kilkenny City, IRA Brigade Commandant, TD and Senator. The fact DeLoughry died relatively young in 1931 makes this publication all the more significant, given his story was not recorded for posterity in the Bureau of Military History or other publications. The book is well researched and balanced, particularly as the author is DeLoughry's grandson.

Another noteworthy, and exceedingly rare publication which relates to this period is the memoir of James J. Comerford entitled *My Kilkenny I.R.A. Days 1916-22*, published in 1978.⁸ Comerford was a member of the 3rd Battalion Kilkenny IRA and subsequently became a high court judge in New York City. Although this was not one of the most active battalions, Comerford's story includes a very robust account of local rural life in North Kilkenny (it runs to over 1000 pages), and how the political dynamics changed in Kilkenny during this revolutionary era.

⁴ Niall Whelehan, 'The Irish Revolution, 1912-23' in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish History*, ed. Alvin Jackson (Oxford, 2014), p. 638

⁵ Jim Maher, *The Flying Column – West Kilkenny 1916-1921*, (Dublin, 1987)

⁶ Jim Maher, *In the Shade of Slievenamon, The Flying Column West Kilkenny, 1916-1921* (Dublin, 2015)

⁷ Declan Dunne, *Peter's Key, Peter DeLoughry and the Fight for Irish Independence* (Cork, 2012)

⁸ James J. Comerford, *My Kilkenny I.R.A. Days, 1916-22* (Kilkenny, 1978)

Although not specifically focused on the War of Independence period, Jim Walsh's biography of Kilkenny man James Nowlan, who was President of the GAA from 1901 to 1921, offers an insight into one of the early players in the Kilkenny nationalist movement.⁹ He was a member of the IRB in Kilkenny City and, although not directly involved in the War of Independence, was arrested twice as a suspect, in 1916 and 1919.

The Military Archives BMH WS's contains a total of 18 witness statements relating to participants from County Kilkenny.¹⁰ One point of note is that there are no female witness statements relating to Kilkenny during the War of Independence, although Florence Hackett, a member of the Kilkenny White Cross, donated articles.¹¹ The only female voices in the collection relating to Kilkenny correspond to the 1916 period. Of the nine Battalions in the Kilkenny Brigade, there is at least one witness statement for eight of the Battalions. The omission is the 9th Battalion based in the far south of the county, although this is somewhat supplemented by the aforementioned Jim Maher who recorded interviews with two of its members in the 1960s. The witness statements include depositions given by the main Kilkenny Brigade Commandant, Thomas Treacy, and Vice Commandant James Lalor.¹² Treacy's witness statement is the most detailed. He actually gave two separate statements and would also appear to have collated and cross referenced his contribution with a number of different people before submitting.¹³ In addition, James Lalor's papers are deposited in the UCD Archives with the material covering his long life as one of Kilkenny's leading republicans.¹⁴ It is important to note however, that he was arrested in November 1920 and remained incarcerated for the remainder of the War, with the result that his private papers do not cover the fundamental final six months of the war in any detail. The most valuable material relating to the War of Independence period are the records regarding the 'Dáil Loan' subscriptions for Kilkenny City.

Over the years, local history publications have included specific aspects of the War of Independence in the county. The most notable are John Fitzgerald's *Kilkenny...Blast from the*

⁹ Jim Walsh, *James Nowlan, The Alderman and the GAA in his Time* (Kilkenny, 2013)

¹⁰ BMH WS: 590 and 1,093 (Thomas Tracey), 1271 (Patrick Dunphy), 1006 (Martin Kealy), 1006 (James Lalor), 1614 (Timothy Hennessy), 1101 (Martin Cassidy), 1642 (Edward Halley), 1705 (Nicholas Carroll), 1335 (James Leahy), 980 (Edward J Aylward), 1672 (Thomas Meagher), 1618 (Michael Connolly), 966 (John Walsh), 1609 (Michael O'Carroll), 1601 (Garrett Brennan), 1102 (James Brennan), 1586 (James Holohan), 1208 (Daniel J Stapleton).

¹¹ BMH, CD 285

¹² BMH WS 590 and 1,093 (Thomas Tracey), BMH WS 1006 (James Lalor)

¹³ BMH WS 699 (Dr Josephine Clarke née Stallard) – Appendix A: Letter from Tom Stallard.

¹⁴ UCD Archives, IE UCDA P133, *James Lalor Papers*

Past (2005) which contains detailed accounts of the Hugginstown RIC Barracks attack and the Friary Street ambush,¹⁵ and Tom Lyng's *Castlecomer Connections (1984)* which includes a comprehensive synopsis of the infamous Coolbawn Ambush.¹⁶

In the coming years, the digitisation and online publication of the Military Service Pension Collection will offer even more detail on the individual contributions of the Kilkenny participants during the Irish War of Independence.

¹⁵ John Fitzgerald, *Kilkenny...Blast from the Past* (Cork, 2005)

¹⁶ Tom Lyng, *Castlecomer Connections* (Kilkenny, 1984)

Chapter 1: Before the Troubles



King Edward VII and Queen Alexandria's carriage on the Parade, in Kilkenny City, 1 May 1904.¹⁷

County Kilkenny in the first two decades of the twentieth century was a relatively prosperous area, with a primarily rural and agricultural based populace. The population of the County in 1911 stood at 75,962.¹⁸ Kilkenny City was the largest urban area with a population of 10,514, followed, by the much smaller towns of Callan, Thomastown, Castlecomer and Graiguenamanagh respectively.¹⁹ Writing in the 1940s, Seán Ó'Faoláin could not help noticing the 'Norman influence' on County Kilkenny and eloquently wrote:

...the farmhouses have an air rather of Wessex than of Ireland, solid cut stone barns, finely arched, with all the marks of a tradition of good husbandry...there is all over the land the fragrance of a long memory of stable conditions, so different to the harsh south and west [of Ireland].²⁰

Farming, along with the ownership of land, is a recurrent theme in the history of County Kilkenny. The exceptional quality of the land meant that local people were relatively

¹⁷ *National Library of Ireland, Poole Collection, Royal Group, going to Church Kilkenny, Ref: 19011954.*

¹⁸ W.E. Vaughan and A.J. Fitzpatrick (eds), *Irish Historical Statistics, Population 1821-1971* (Dublin, 1978), p.4

¹⁹ Vaughan and Fitzpatrick (eds), *Irish Historical Statistics* (Dublin, 1978), p.31

²⁰ UCD Special Collections 51.O.1/9 (Seán Ó'Faoláin, *The Irish* (London, 1947) , p.57)

prosperous when compared to other counties, which contributed to very low unemployment in Kilkenny City and County at the beginning of the twentieth century.²¹ Over 50% of the soil in the county was classified as ‘grade A’.²²

The series of Land Acts from 1870 to 1903 caused a vast social revolution in Kilkenny as thousands of Kilkenny farmers gained ownership of their farms for the first time. In 1873, 98% of the land in County Kilkenny was owned by just 828 landlords,²³ but this would change radically by the time of the War of Independence. If land transactions are analysed from the Registry of Deeds following the five year indexing format it uses, the peak period of land transfers in Kilkenny occurred in the period 1910-1914. During those years alone, 4,347 land transactions occurred, with the vast majority assigned land folio numbers,²⁴ meaning that the land transactions were with the Land Commission. By January 1916, the County Inspector made the following observation:

*The greater portion of the county has been sold under the Land Purchase Acts and the results have been excellent. The relationship between landlord and tenant on the few estates remaining unsold are good.*²⁵

At the end of April 1904, King Edward VII, Queen Alexandria and Princess Victoria spent two days in Kilkenny on a Royal visit, residing with the Butler family at Kilkenny Castle. Kilkenny had a long tradition of Unionism and had been ‘famously Anglicized’ at an early period, principally because of the close connections between the Butlers and the Royal family over the centuries.²⁶ Over 150 soldiers provided a guard of honour for the Royal visitors, while a substantial crowd gathered to view the procession, although ‘not as large as generally was anticipated’.²⁷ ‘Decorations of every kind’ graced the ‘principle thoroughfares’ including bunting, Union Jack flags and a number of triumphal arches.²⁸ Not all people in Kilkenny were enthralled with the Royal visitors however, particularly members of the Corporation. Nominally ‘nationalist’ councillors occupied all but one of the council seats.²⁹ The nationalist members came from a number of parties but, predominantly, the United Irish League and the

²¹ Niall Brannigan and John Kirwan, *Kilkenny Families in the Great War* (Thomastown, 2012), p. xii

²² William Walsh, *Kilkenny, The Struggle for Land 1850-1882* (Kilkenny, 2008), p. 48

²³ Local Government Board, *Return of Owners of Land of One Acre And Upwards* (Dublin, 1878), p. 42

²⁴ Registry of Deeds, Kings Inn, Dublin 1. *Kilkenny 1910-1914*, Index Volume 1139.

²⁵ NA CO 904/99, January 1916

²⁶ Roy F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London, 1989), p. 19

²⁷ *Freemans Journal*, 2 May 1904

²⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 2 May 1904

²⁹ *Anglo-Celt*, 18 April 1899

Irish Parliamentary Party. The shades of nationalism obviously varied as the Corporation approved an ‘address of welcome’ for the Royal Party by 12 votes to 7.³⁰

Notwithstanding the loss of life, the Great War had a lesser effect on Kilkenny City and County compared to other areas of Ireland, primarily due to low recruitment figures. The principle reason for the low recruitment was that farming experienced a boom during the war years which greatly benefited Kilkenny’s agrarian based economy, while the local Woollen Industry, Woodworkers factories and horse breeders also benefited from army contracts during the war years.³¹

Nationalism in Kilkenny

The IRB had a tradition in Kilkenny dating from the early years of its foundation in 1858, which is not surprising considering the founder, James Stephens, was born in Blackmill Street in Kilkenny City. A total of 82 men with an address in county Kilkenny were arrested as part of a roundup of Fenian suspects between 1861 and 1871.³² In 1912, Thomas Furlong, an IRB member who was a native of Wexford but who had moved to Kilkenny, was asked by Seán MacDiarmada about the possibility of restarting the IRB in Kilkenny City. MacDiarmada, an IRB organiser who would later become famous as a signatory of the 1916 Proclamation, contacted an ‘old IRB man’ named Peter DeLoughry. DeLoughry subsequently called a meeting for the reestablishment of the IRB in Kilkenny City, at which MacDiarmada himself spoke ‘a few words’.³³ The strength of the IRB after its revival was ‘about 20 members’ where the principal business was ‘organisation and the admittance of new members’.³⁴

On the 5 March 1914, a local company of the Irish Volunteers was established in Kilkenny at City Hall, with the main speakers on the day including Sir Roger Casement and Thomas MacDonagh.³⁵ The Volunteer movement spread throughout the county, and by June 1914 British Intelligence reports estimated the total number of Volunteers in the County to be 2,000.³⁶

³⁰ *Cork Examiner*, 14 April 1904

³¹ Brannigan and Kirwan, *Kilkenny Families in the Great War* (Thomastown, 2012), pp x,xii,xiv

³² NAI C.S.O. ICR/14

³³ BMH WS 513 (Thomas Furlong)

³⁴ BMH WS 1,032 (James Lalor)

³⁵ BMH WS 1614 (Timothy Hennessy)

³⁶ NA CO 904/120/4, Crime Branch

Thomas MacDonagh's presence at the launch of the Volunteers was an obvious choice given his close association with Kilkenny, having taught there previously. It was at a meeting of the Kilkenny Gaelic League at the end of 1901 that he was first introduced to the Irish language and literature.³⁷ His purpose in attending the meeting was actually to ridicule the attendees, but he had a complete change of heart. He subsequently became a passionate member and secretary of that branch.³⁸ In notes he wrote for a speech given in Kilkenny a number of years later, he recorded the following: 'Personal: My debt to Kilkenny. My baptism in Nationalism. My first experience'.³⁹ More recently, his granddaughter Muriel McAuley referred to his time in Kilkenny as his 'road to Damascus moment'.⁴⁰

The political scene in County Kilkenny was dominated by John Redmond's Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP). They occupied all three Kilkenny seats in the House of Commons unopposed since 1900, while they also had the majority of seats in the local Corporation, although this was more finely balanced as there were a number of unionist and advanced nationalist members.⁴¹ The proximity of Kilkenny to Redmond's home county of Wexford, and constituency of Waterford City, was a large factor in the popularity of the party.⁴² In September 1914, a full parade of all Kilkenny City Volunteer Companies convened in the market place to hear speeches regarding the 'split' in the movement after John Redmond called on the Volunteers to enlist in the army. In total there were around 650 men on parade. A number of people addressed the crowd. The majority of the speakers 'favoured the policy of the Redmondites and Ancient Order of Hibernian's', including two local clergymen Rev John Rowe and Rev Philip Moore.⁴³ Thomas Treacy gave an account of what occurred during the split of the Volunteers in September 1914:

'Peter DeLoughry then called on all those who stood for Ireland and the Green flag to fall out and line up at a point indicated by him...and all those who stood for England and the Union Jack to stand where they were. Twenty-eight men left the

³⁷ Rothe House, Kilkenny City. Minutes of the Gaelic League, Kilkenny Branch.

³⁸ Shane Kenna, *16 Lives, Thomas MacDonagh* (Dublin, 2014), pp 40,44

³⁹ Edd Winfield Parks and Aileen Wells Parks, *Thomas MacDonagh, The Man The Patriot, The Writer* (Athens, Georgia, 1967), p. 8

⁴⁰ Muriel McAuley. Book launch of 'In the Shade of Slievenamon, The Flying Column West Kilkenny'. Speech. MacDonagh Junction, Kilkenny City. 4 June 2015.

⁴¹ *Irish Independent*, 17 January 1914

⁴² Dunne, *Peter's Key* (Cork, 2012), p. 63

⁴³ BMH WS 590 (Thomas Tracey)

ranks and lined up at the point indicated...the balance on parade (over 600) stood on the Redmondite side'.⁴⁴

The figures in the above statement demonstrate just how much of a minority the new 'Irish Volunteers' were in Kilkenny. Just 4.3% joined their ranks on that day, which was below the reported 10% figure of the split nationally.⁴⁵ By dividing in such a public manner and in very small numbers, it was very clear for the public, including the RIC, to identify which families would be considered 'Sinn Féiners'. Local District Inspector Power later referred to the Irish Volunteers in Kilkenny as a 'small clique in the City' and called them a 'rabble'.⁴⁶ In January 1916, the same Inspector referred to them as 'mostly irresponsible youths without influence'.⁴⁷

The Kilkenny City Volunteers were extremely well organised with regular drilling (with wooden rifles), manoeuvres and field training, along with classes in history and the Irish language. The dedication involved them paying for their own ammunition for rifle practice and they also purchased their own copies of the official newspaper *The Irish Volunteer*. The Volunteers also contributed money to the cost of procuring a dozen new Lee Enfield rifles and a dozen small revolvers, which they purchased from Volunteer GHQ.⁴⁸

Easter 1916 in Kilkenny – The Fight That Never Was

'Sure an old woman could take Kilkenny to-day'⁴⁹

The interaction between Volunteer headquarters in Dublin and the Kilkenny City Battalion continued into 1916. One of the reasons for the close connection may have been because of the profession of the main local leader, Peter DeLoughry, who owned a small foundry and motor car rental business on Parliament Street in Kilkenny City. He subsequently used his premises and skills to produce homemade grenades, while his car rental business was useful for communications and transportation.⁵⁰

Considering this investment in the Kilkenny Volunteers, it is no surprise that they featured very much in the plans for a national Rising in Easter 1916. Cathal Brugha, in his capacity as

⁴⁴ BMH WS 590 (Thomas Tracey)

⁴⁵ Diarmaid Ferriter, *A Nation and Not a Rabble, The Irish Revolution 1913-1923*(London, 2015), pp 143-44

⁴⁶ NA CO 904/95 and 97

⁴⁷ NA CO 904/99, January 1916

⁴⁸ BMH WS 590 (Thomas Tracey)

⁴⁹ BMH WS 258 (Mrs McDowell (Maeve Cavanagh)) – Courier Easter Week 1916

⁵⁰ Dunne, *Peter's Key* (Cork, 2012), p. 64

an IRB organiser, arrived in Kilkenny about two weeks before Easter. He met Thomas Treacy the Kilkenny City Company captain outside the Volunteer Hall on Kings Street, now Kieran's Street, Kilkenny. It was the first time Treacy heard that the Rising was to take place on Easter Sunday and Brugha gave him the plans for Kilkenny. Firstly, Treacy was to arrange 'general manoeuvres for Easter Sunday'. On that day the whole company, with 'whatever arms and equipment' they possessed, were to proceed to the Scallop Gap on the Carlow/Wexford border passing through Borris, with the aim of meeting the Wexford Battalions there. Captain Ginger O'Connell from GHQ would be 'in command of all units in the city and county and all orders...were to be taken from him'.⁵¹

The number of active Irish Volunteers in Kilkenny City at this time was about 60. If the whole of county Kilkenny is included, there were approximately 120 in total, although the majority of the men outside Kilkenny City were less well trained.⁵² The local RIC had reasonably accurate information with regard to the number of Irish Volunteers in Kilkenny. In February 1916, it suggested a membership of 105 men, which was very close to the actual figure. The police intelligence was lacking however when it came to the IRB. In the same month they estimated there were only three members of the IRB, and that these three individuals were 'old men of no importance'.⁵³ It suggests that they were oblivious to the rejuvenation of the IRB that happened some years previously.

Upon receiving these instructions from Brugha, Treacy was quick to point out that he had only enough 'rifles and revolvers' to 'poorly arm' 25 of his men. Brugha told him a quantity of arms would be collected at Dr. Edward Dundon's, an IRB member and Volunteer organiser from Borris in Carlow, hence the reason for passing through it.⁵⁴ Following Cathal Brugha's visit, it was decided by the Kilkenny IRB committee that some members would travel to Dublin to meet Eoin MacNeill, to clarify aspects of the plans. In relation to the planned Rising, MacNeill said 'the first he knew about it himself was when a few more lads from other parts of the country went to him on the same mission'. They agreed that the Kilkenny Volunteers were to only follow orders that came directly from him.⁵⁵

There was much activity in Kilkenny in the week prior to the Rising. Three Bureau of Military history witness statements from female couriers mention trips to Kilkenny in that

⁵¹ BMH WS 590 (Thomas Tracey)

⁵² BMH WS 1,093 (Thomas Tracey)

⁵³ NA CO 904/99, February 1916

⁵⁴ BMH WS 590 (Thomas Tracey)

⁵⁵ BMH WS 699 (Dr Josephine Clarke née Stallard) – Appendix A: Letter from Tom Stallard.

week. In the middle of the week prior to Easter, Claire Gregan, fiancé of Bulmer Hobson, was sent to Kilkenny with a dispatch from her future husband that contained a letter along with a copy of ‘the famous document’,⁵⁶ meaning the ‘Castle document’. This was forged intelligence that incorrectly suggested that the British Authorities were planning an imminent arrest of Volunteer organisers and a capture of arms. The following day on Holy Thursday, a messenger, Kitty O’Doherty, was sent by Tom Clarke to deliver a letter to DeLoughry in Kilkenny with Clarke stating; ‘don’t say that either Seán [MacDiarmada] or myself sent you. Say Pearse sent you’. She was to pick up ‘messages’ which were in fact homemade grenades made by DeLoughry. When she arrived in Kilkenny on Holy Thursday morning and gave DeLoughry the message, the following exchange occurred:

*‘Who sent you? I said “Pádraig Pearse”. He said: “It was not. It was Clarke and MacDermott. I have my instructions and I am going to act on them”.’*⁵⁷

At the bare minimum, it can be surmised from these exchanges that DeLoughry was aware of the power struggle that was taking place in Dublin over the Rising. As he had received instructions from Hobson the day before, along with MacNeill’s instructions previously, it is fair to assume that he was looking to them as the main authority.

On Easter Sunday morning, the entire Kilkenny Company ‘without exception’ mobilised at Volunteer Hall at 12 noon.⁵⁸ The company was then dismissed at 2pm with orders to mobilise again at 8pm that evening. When the company reconvened later, they waited for Ginger O’Connell and Pat Corcoran to return from Dublin who informed them that the Rising was ‘off’.⁵⁹

On Easter Monday morning, Peter DeLoughry and Pat Corcoran retrieved 30 guns that the Volunteer Company was supposed to have collected the previous day.⁶⁰ If these numbers are accurate, it would give the company around 55 weapons in total for the circa 60 members, although of ‘poor’ quality, as previously outlined.

The Volunteers surprisingly mobilised on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of Easter week at 8pm, with the discussing of rumour and counter rumour being the only thing that was achieved. On Wednesday, Ginger O’Connell sent James Lalor by motorcycle to

⁵⁶ BMH WS 685 (Mrs Bulmer Hobson)

⁵⁷ BMH WS 355 (Mrs Kitty O Doherty)

⁵⁸ BMH WS 1,032 (James Lalor)

⁵⁹ BMH WS 590 (Thomas Tracey)

⁶⁰ BMH WS 1,101 (Martin Cassidy)

Limerick to find out if ‘the landing of the German arms on the Kerry Coast had been successful’.⁶¹

Two contradictory narratives appear in the witness statements in relation to the dynamic between DeLoughry and Ginger O’Connell on Easter Week, specifically in regard to why Kilkenny did not play an active part in the Rising. One account by Dr Josephine Clarke (née Stallard) suggests that on Easter week ‘Commandant O’Connell restrained them from going out to fight, while Peter and the others [Kilkenny IRB] were anxious to do their part in the Rising’.⁶² This information also features in historian Charles Townshend’s definitive account of the Rising.⁶³ However, what is not noted is that Mrs Clarke was a long standing friend of the DeLoughry family and her brother Tom Stallard was DeLoughry’s business partner in a cinema venture in Kilkenny. When she gave her statement, DeLoughry was deceased; consequently the motivation for a defence of her friend’s part in the Rising should not be discounted.

The conflicting statement comes from Ms Maeve Cavanagh who travelled from Waterford to Kilkenny on Wednesday of Easter week with a message from Robert Brennan, captain of the Wexford Volunteers, to Ginger O’Connell. The message ‘was to the effect that the Kilkenny and Waterford Volunteers should take combined action for a Rising’. On locating DeLoughry and O’Connell, she states the following occurred:

*‘He [DeLoughry] was very truculent and angry and began to give out about Seán McDermott coming down to Kilkenny and getting entertained and then pulling this off in Dublin. I felt that he was completely antagonistic to the Rising...I gave him [O’Connell] the message. “They should have waited till there was conscription”... I said “Sure an old woman could take Kilkenny to-day”’.*⁶⁴

The last statement was very disingenuous considering the strength of the military and RIC in Kilkenny at that time was about 440.⁶⁵ The RIC Inspector had also drafted in 70 officers during the week, with ‘most of them assigned to the protection of bridges in the district’.⁶⁶

⁶¹ BMH WS 1,032 (James Lalor)

⁶² BMH WS 699 (Dr Josephine Clarke née Stallard)

⁶³ Charles Townshend, *Easter 1916* (London, 2005), p.238

⁶⁴ BMH WS 258 (Mrs McDowell (Maeve Cavanagh))

⁶⁵ BMH WS 1,032 (James Lalor)

⁶⁶ *Irish Independent*, 29 May 1916

Judging by the evidence available, DeLoughry would appear to have been more aligned to the Ginger O’Connell and Eoin McNeill faction, which was understandable given he had a much stronger relationship with them.

Despite meeting every day from Sunday to Friday of Easter week, the Kilkenny Volunteers played no active role in the Rising. It is not clear, however, what kind of action they would have been involved in if they had mobilised to the Scallop Gap. It is quite possible the military and RIC would not have engaged them there and they would simply have surrendered once the Dublin Rising ceased. Perhaps the major achievement of the Kilkenny Volunteers was that, unlike Cork, who had a similar experience during the week, they lost none of their arms, having hidden the majority of them on the grounds of a local convent.⁶⁷

A large number of arrests followed in the aftermath. On Wednesday 3 May, Ginger O’Connell was arrested, followed the next day by Peter DeLoughry. James Nowlan, President of the GAA, was also arrested, having just arrived from Dublin. By coincidence, he had been in Dublin since the Easter weekend for the GAA Congress held on Easter Sunday.⁶⁸ The local RIC evidently had outdated information. Nowlan was a member of the IRB, but had played little part in the Volunteers, most likely due to his advanced age. That evening, around 1,100 extra soldiers were drafted into Kilkenny. The following morning, on Friday 5 May, Kilkenny was patrolled by about 800 military and a large roundup of men and arrests followed.⁶⁹ Considering the scale of the reinforcements, the authorities clearly felt that Kilkenny was a key location for the movement.⁷⁰

In all, a total of about 35 men were arrested and detained in Kilkenny jail. On 9 May, they were marched under heavy guard to Kilkenny train station for transportation to Dublin. The reaction of the general public was ‘silence and indifference’.⁷¹ On this march, one of the prisoners John Kiely collapsed and died, just yards from his home on John Street. He had been ill when arrested. His death certificate gives his place of death as ‘John St’ and his cause of death ambiguously as ‘Heart Disease Probably – No medical attention’,⁷² but does not mention anything about the circumstances surrounding his death.

⁶⁷ BMH WS 1,101 (Martin Cassidy)

⁶⁸ Walsh, *James Nowlan* (Kilkenny, 2013), p.85

⁶⁹ BMH WS 590 (Thomas Tracey)

⁷⁰ NA CO 904/99, May 1916

⁷¹ BMH WS 1,093 (Thomas Tracey)

⁷² General Register Office. Index Reference: Jul-Sep 1916, Kilkenny, Volume:3, Page: 293.

1917 - 1918; By-Election, Conscription and the 'Big Flu'

Resembling the rest of southern Ireland after the Rising, the pendulum now swung firmly in favour of the 'Sinn Féin movement'. Sinn Féin clubs were established throughout the county. In Callan, an influential young priest named Fr Patrick H. Delahunty set up a club there, along with re-establishing a company of Irish Volunteers.⁷³ Fr Delahunty later used his friendship with Michael Collins to purchase arms for his local Callan Volunteer Company from Volunteer GHQ.⁷⁴ Referring to Fr Delahunty in 1916, one local sergeant reported that he saw:

'[Volunteers] digging a trench on the Fair Green at Callan and firing volleys in the air. They were led by Father Delahunty C.C. and I am informed proclaimed their sympathy for John [Eoin] McNeill as opposed to Mr John Redmond...the steps I was able to take apparently checked the zeal of the Rev'.⁷⁵

The 'zeal' of the said Fr Delahunty was not 'checked' for long however, as he made efforts to spread the Sinn Féin organisation throughout the south of the county.⁷⁶ Fr Delahunty went on to become president of the southern Kilkenny Executive of Sinn Féin. A rare occurrence transpired when, through Fr Delahunty's diplomacy, the local National Volunteers in Callan disbanded and linked up with the local Irish Volunteers, bringing their guns with them.⁷⁷

In May 1917, following directions from GHQ, a meeting was called by the leaders in Kilkenny City, for the purpose of forming Battalions. Four Battalions were initially formed, roughly dividing the county into North, South, Kilkenny City, and the Callan area in the west of the county.⁷⁸

This basic reorganisation of the Volunteers arrived just in time for a by-election in the Kilkenny City constituency in August 1917. Kilkenny City was then the smallest constituency, in terms of the electorate, in the United Kingdom and there had been no election in the district in nearly 22 years, as the sitting MP was always returned unopposed.⁷⁹ The Sinn Féin party chose William T Cosgrave as their candidate. He was the first official Sinn Féin candidate to run in the recent by-elections, as in the other by-elections candidates

⁷³ Maher, *The Flying Column West Kilkenny* (Dublin, 1987), p.1

⁷⁴ Maher, *In the Shade of Slievenamon* (Dublin, 2015) p. 62

⁷⁵ NA CO 904/99, June 1916

⁷⁶ Maher, *The Flying Column West Kilkenny* (Dublin, 1987), p.2

⁷⁷ BMH WS 1,093 (Thomas Tracey)

⁷⁸ BMH WS 1,032 (James Lalor)

⁷⁹ Michael Laffan, *Judging W.T. Cosgrave* (Dublin, 2014), pp 57-8

were just affiliated with Sinn Féin. It was also the first urban area the party had contested.⁸⁰ As Michael Laffan has noted, Cosgrave's 'connection with the constituency began...by accident. He had no Kilkenny links'. His 1916 credentials, namely his participation in the fighting in the South Dublin Union and his subsequent death sentence, appear to be the main reasons for his selection. He was also a 'city man' having been raised in Dublin, which was an additional factor.⁸¹

The *Kilkenny People* newspaper was suppressed by the military authorities at the beginning of the campaign in July.⁸² The Paper had been a major factor in the spread of the Sinn Féin organisation throughout the county. The founder and editor of the paper, Edward T. Keane, was president of the Kilkenny City Sinn Féin club. Future IRA Kilkenny Brigade Commandant Thomas Treacy noted the paper's importance in the 'moulding of public opinion' and stated that:

*'The Kilkenny People...[was] full blooded in its support for Sinn Féin. It carried articles written by its editor in his own peculiar hard hitting style, interspersed with wit of a devastating quality all his own, which was a holy horror to, and the envy of, his opponents'.*⁸³

A notable aspect of the campaign was the widespread interest in the election throughout the country with editorials written in the *Ulster Herald*, the *Meath Chronicle*, the *Skibbereen Eagle* and the *Kerryman* to name but a few. Cosgrave's campaign was launched with a great publicity coup at the investiture of Countess Markievicz with the Freedom of Kilkenny City on the 19 July. Eamon De Valera and Eoin MacNeill also made speeches during the campaign.⁸⁴

On polling day, Friday 10 August, an *Irish Times* reporter 'could not fail but notice' the 'business method of the Sinn Féiners...they brought up their supporters in motor cars and conveyed them back to their homes with wonderful regularity'. One Sinn Féin voter was said to have travelled from Donegal, and another from Yorkshire. The same reporter also stated that he saw no intimidation with 'nothing more harmful than occasional shouts of "Up

⁸⁰Anthony J. Jordon, *W.T. Cosgrave 1880-1965* (Dublin, 2006), p.39

⁸¹*Kilkenny People*, 26 December 2014

⁸²Stephen Collins, *The Cosgrave Legacy* (Dublin, 1996), pp 14-15

⁸³BMH WS 1,093 (Thomas Tracey)

⁸⁴*Cork Examiner*, 20 July 1917

Cosgrave”⁸⁵ During the campaign Cumann na mBan were employed to hand out literature and canvas for Cosgrave.⁸⁶

The result was a resounding victory for Cosgrave on a poll of 772 votes to 392.⁸⁷ The opposing candidate was John Magennis of the IPP, or, as the *Sunday Independent* referred to him, ‘the anti-Sinn Féin candidate’. One of his main campaign slogans was ‘Kilkenny for a Kilkenny man’, an obvious sneer at Cosgrave’s lack of Kilkenny credentials.⁸⁸ Ungracious in defeat, Magennis called the result ‘a victory for intolerance, low, mean, lying and scurrilous abuse, intimidation of the grossest type’.⁸⁹

The acts of rejoicing throughout the country were also unprecedented for an election in Kilkenny. The *Irish Independent* noted that ‘a number of women were bound to the peace for disorderly conduct in Athlone in connection with the celebrations after the Kilkenny election’.⁹⁰ There was a parade in Derry, ‘bonfires blazed’ in West Donegal, while in Kiltyclogher Co Leitrim, the home parish of Seán MacDiarmada, a torch light procession took place.⁹¹ The publicity garnered from the election campaign was very beneficial to the local Volunteer movement with many new recruits and the formation of Volunteers in districts where they previously had not existed.⁹²

When the Conscription crisis hit in April 1918, it had the effect in Kilkenny of uniting Sinn Féin, the IPP, the labour movement and the clergy under one cause, similar to what occurred throughout Ireland. In May 1918, some 1,500 women proceeded from the Callan road to the Dominican Black Abbey before signing the conscription pledge at the town hall.⁹³ The number of Irish Volunteers in Kilkenny City alone quadrupled in the month of April. The numbers throughout the county experienced a similar spike, where ‘new companies sprang up mushroom like’, increasing from 700 members before the Conscription crisis to around 3,500 by the summer of 1918.⁹⁴ However, although Conscription had ‘brought new life and energy’

⁸⁵ *Irish Times*, 11 August 1917

⁸⁶ Comerford, *My Kilkenny I.R.A. Days* (Kilkenny, 1978), pp70-1

⁸⁷ *Ulster Herald*, 18 August 1917

⁸⁸ *Sunday Independent*, 29 July 1917

⁸⁹ Collins, *The Cosgrave Legacy* (Dublin, 1996), p.15

⁹⁰ *Irish Independent*, 15 August 1917

⁹¹ *Ulster Herald*, 18 August 1917

⁹² BMH WS 1,093 (Thomas Tracey)

⁹³ *Irish Independent*, 12 June 1918

⁹⁴ BMH WS 1,614(Timothy Hennessy)

to the Volunteers movement, many of the new recruits simply faded away once the threat had passed.⁹⁵

The year 1918 ended with a general election, the first in eight years due to the Great War. All the drama in Kilkenny was focused on the south of the county as William T. Cosgrave was the only candidate selected to run in the new North Kilkenny constituency. The Sinn Féin candidate in South Kilkenny, James O'Mara, beat his IPP opponent Matthew Keating by nearly four times the votes, with a poll of 8,685 to 1,855.⁹⁶

The excitement of the general election at the end of 1918 was tempered by the 'great flu' that swept through Ireland. The second wave hit Kilkenny City badly, and it registered the third highest proportion of flu deaths of any town in Ireland in 1918.⁹⁷ On 2 November the *Kilkenny People* described the impact of the flu:

*'The influenza epidemic made its appearance in Kilkenny about 10 days ago. At first it contained itself to the younger people but after a few days it claimed old as well. The death rate in Kilkenny is increasing daily. There is scarcely a family in the city that has not been touched...Several business premises have been shut...All the streets of the city have been washed with carbolic acid.'*⁹⁸

On the eve of the War of Independence in Kilkenny, therefore, there were many preoccupations on the minds of the local populace and the struggle for Independence was perhaps not the primary concern for most. The following letter sent at Christmas 1918 between two former classmates, one now a nun, the other a farmer's wife in Kilkenny, highlights that the War of Independence was not something they thought was imminent, or possibly did not want to consider:

⁹⁵ BMH WS 1,006 (Martin Kealy)

⁹⁶ Maher, *The Flying Column West Kilkenny* (Dublin, 1987), p.4

⁹⁷ Caitriona Foley, *The Last Irish Plague, the Great Flu Epidemic in Ireland 1918-19* (Dublin, 2011), p.14

⁹⁸ *Kilkenny People*, 2 November 1918

*Convent of Our Lady of Mercy
St Marys – Callan – Co Kilkenny
23rd December [19]18.*

My dearest Kattie,

Thanks very much for your good wishes for Xmas, which I heartily reciprocate...

T.G. [Thank God] there is peace in the world after the horrors of the past four years. I was very glad to hear from Josie that you escaped the Influenza, it is a dreadful disease and leaves such a weakness after it...Fondest love and received good wishes my dearest Kattie,

Yours sincerely in J.C. [Jesus Christ]

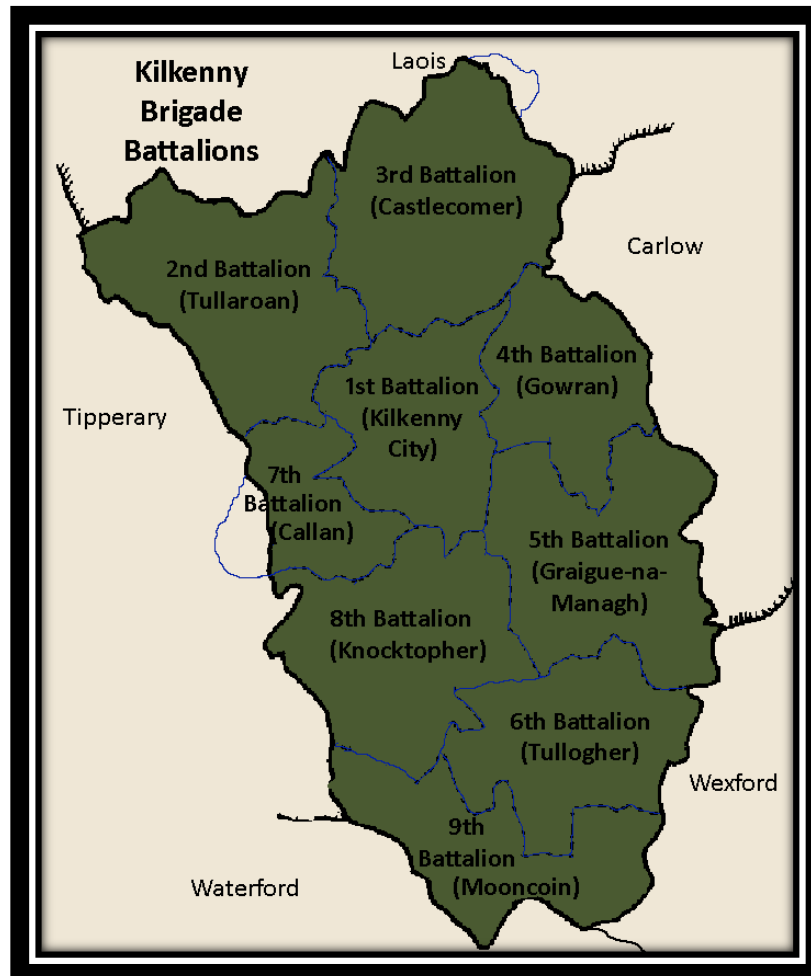
Sr. M. Bernard⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Private Papers, Kathleen Long, Mooncoin, Co Kilkenny. Letter from Sr Bernard, Callan, Co Kilkenny to Mrs Katie Long, Vinesgrove, Dunnamaggin, Co Kilkenny.

Chapter 2: The IRA Military Campaign

*'Cathleen Ni Houlihan is very different now to the woman who used to play the harp an' sing, "Weep on, weep on, your hour is past", for she's a ragin' devil now.'*¹⁰⁰

-The Shadow of a Gunman by Seán O'Casey



*Kilkenny Battalion Areas, including HQ of each Battalion, 1921.*¹⁰¹

In March 1920, Hugginstown village in south County Kilkenny was the scene of a successful RIC Barracks attack, which was only the third IRA victory of that kind up to then in Ireland. It was also the first RIC barracks surrender recorded in Leinster.¹⁰² However, the remainder of the military campaign in Kilkenny did not continue in this 'winning' vein.

¹⁰⁰ Seán O'Casey, *The Shadow of a Gunman*, (Dublin, 1950), p.132 (First published 1923)

¹⁰¹ Map created by this writer using information sourced from the MSPC (MSPC/RO/154-163A) and BMH WS; 1586 (James Holohan), 1006 (Martin Kealy), 1609 (Michael O'Carroll), 1705 (Nicholas Carroll) and 1271 (Patrick Dunphy). Majority of Battalion areas are defined using the same boundaries as the Catholic Parishes. Exceptions are Kilmanagh & Ballycallan divided between 7th/1st Battalions & Ballyhale and Knockmoylan divided between 8th/5th Battalions.

¹⁰² Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence* (Dublin, 2004) , p.123

In terms of the military structure, County Kilkenny had just one Brigade made up of nine Battalions. The Brigade essentially encompassed the entire county with a small number of additional companies from bordering counties, most notably Mullinahone in County Tipperary which was part of the 7th Kilkenny Battalion.¹⁰³ The 1st Kilkenny Battalion was centred on Kilkenny City and surrounding areas, with the other Battalions radiating from there. By the end of the War of Independence there were two Active Service Units (ASU) formed in the Brigade, one located around the north and east known as the ‘North Kilkenny ASU’ or ‘1st Kilkenny ASU’, while the second, focused in the south and west was known as the ‘7th Battalion ASU’.¹⁰⁴

The Kilkenny Brigade Commandant from its formation in August 1918 until December 1920 was Thomas Treacy, a member of the 1st Battalion based in Kilkenny City.¹⁰⁵ After Treacy’s arrest in November 1920, Peter DeLoughry, the Mayor of Kilkenny City, served briefly as Brigade Commandant until he was also arrested. George O’Dwyer, a former DMP Constable who was based in the Castlecomer area and a member of the 3rd Battalion, served as Kilkenny Brigade Commandant from January 1921 for the remainder of the War.¹⁰⁶ If all IRA members from Kilkenny Battalion Companies are aggregated using the Military Service Pensions Collection (MSPC) records, the total number in the county was 2,988 at the time of the Truce.¹⁰⁷ This does not necessarily imply they took an active part in military actions against the Crown Forces, it simply means they were part of a Company attached to a Kilkenny Battalion. At the time of the War of Independence, the RIC County Inspector estimated membership of the IRA to be 2,370 which was reasonably accurate.¹⁰⁸

Regarding the social background of the IRA Volunteers, the synopsis of historian Peter Hart that they ‘were neither very poor nor very well off, but came from the central stratum of “plain people” in between’, is applicable to Kilkenny.¹⁰⁹ The occupations of the Kilkenny IRA members who completed witness statements included chemists, corporation employees, shop assistants, small farmers and brewery employees.¹¹⁰ In historian Joost Augusteijn’s study of IRA members, he highlighted that IRA Officers ‘tended to be older, more urban

¹⁰³ BMH WS 1,335 (James Leahy)

¹⁰⁴ Military Archives, MSPC/RO/163A

¹⁰⁵ BMH WS 1,093 (Thomas Tracey)

¹⁰⁶ BMH WS 1,601 (Garrett Brennan)

¹⁰⁷ Military Archives, MSPC/RO/154-163A

¹⁰⁸ NA CO 904/116, July 1921

¹⁰⁹ Peter Hart, *The I.R.A. & Its Enemies, Violence and Community in Cork 1916-1923* (Oxford, 1999), p.163

¹¹⁰ BMH WS 1,093 (Thomas Tracey), BMH WS 1208 (Daniel J Stapleton)

based, and of a higher status – better educated, more skilled and financially better-off¹¹¹. This is also an accurate reflection of the Kilkenny officers. Focusing on the Kilkenny Brigade leaders, their occupations included; owning a drapery business, owning a foundry and motor car hire firm, a factory manager and a baker. All, except one, of the Brigade leaders were over the age of 30, and all were based in Kilkenny City.¹¹²

The Cumann na mBan Brigade in Kilkenny was formed into nine matching Battalions, although the number of companies attached to each Battalion was less. The Brigade Commandant throughout the War of Independence was Hanna Murphy (née Dooley). In the MSPC the total number of members recorded in Kilkenny at the time of the Truce was 821.¹¹³ The RIC vastly miscalculated their influence, giving an estimate of just 70 women in Cumann na mBan in the whole of county Kilkenny, in July 1921.¹¹⁴

In February 1919, at the initial stage of the War of Independence, the new mayor of Kilkenny Peter DeLoughry played an integral part in the escape of Eamon de Valera, Seán Milroy and Seán McGarry from Lincoln prison. He used his metalwork skills to master a key to allow his fellow prisoners to escape.¹¹⁵ The military campaign in Kilkenny got off to a rather inauspicious start. In early 1919 the Sinn Féin organisation had imposed a ban on foxhunting in protest over the incarceration of the ‘German Plot’ prisoners.¹¹⁶ In February, members of the 7th Battalion IRA caused consternation in the locality when they prevented Isaac Bell, ‘Master of the Kilkenny Foxhounds’ and the hunting club from passing through Windgap, stating that they were ‘against foxhunting while man hunting was the game of the British Government in Ireland’.¹¹⁷

One of the main goals of the Kilkenny Brigade during 1919 was the procurement of arms. The Kilkenny City based 1st Battalion managed to acquire nine Lee Enfield rifles by buying them from a corrupt soldier named ‘Williams’, based in the Kilkenny military barracks. The arrangement came to an abrupt end when the soldier’s actions were discovered, and he was sentenced to two years imprisonment.¹¹⁸ Denis Lahart, of Dunnamaggin Company IRA,

¹¹¹ Joost Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare: The Experience of Ordinary Volunteers in the Irish War of Independence, 1916-1921* (Dublin, 1996), p.175

¹¹² NAI 1911 Census: Peter DeLoughry, James Lalor, Ned Comerford and BMH WS 1,093 (Thomas Tracey)

¹¹³ Military Archives, MSPC/CMB/153-162

¹¹⁴ NA CO 904/116, July 1921

¹¹⁵ Dunne, *Peter’s Key* (Cork, 2012), pp 154-55

¹¹⁶ Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 311

¹¹⁷ *Irish Independent*, 24 February 1919. *Cork Examiner*, 26 February 1919.

¹¹⁸ BMH WS 1,032 (James Lawlor)

became the first casualty of the War when he received a gunshot wound from a 'loyalist' in Kells who refused to part with his firearm.¹¹⁹

Besides these activities, the military aspect remained calm throughout 1919 with some Battalion officers referring to 1919 as 'a slack year' and a 'quiet period'.¹²⁰ The vast majority of the IRA members were associated with their local Sinn Féin club, and a large amount of their time was taken up collecting money for arms and fundraising for the 'Dáil Éireann Loan Fund'.¹²¹

Beginner's Luck – March 1920

In January 1920, Thomas Treacy, the Kilkenny Brigade Commandant, was summoned by GHQ to St Enda's in Rathfarnham where he met Richard Mulcahy, IRA Chief of Staff. He received instructions that a RIC Barracks was to be 'taken'. The Kilkenny Brigade eventually decided upon Hugginstown RIC Barracks, 14 miles south of Kilkenny City.¹²²

Joe McMahon, an IRA organiser from Kilmaley, County Clare, played a vital role in the preparations as he created bombs that were to be used in the attack. Luckily for the Kilkenny Battalion, McMahon escaped arrest just a week previously. The RIC had arrested him in his bedroom but while they waited for him to dress himself he escaped through a window.¹²³

The night of Monday the 9 March 1920 was chosen for the attack. Arguably, it was the Kilkenny IRA Brigades most organised and effective attack of the whole War of Independence era. It was entirely planned by the Brigade GHQ in Kilkenny City, with members of the 1st and 7th Kilkenny IRA Battalions comprising the attack party.¹²⁴

Arrangements were made for telegraph wire cutting, while a motor car was commandeered to transport combatants in the event of casualties.¹²⁵ Luck also played a part in the success of the attack, as coincidentally one of the RIC officers from the barracks, Constable Dockery, was having a retirement gathering in Cleary's public house in the village. Thomas Treacy noted

¹¹⁹ Maher, *The Flying Column West Kilkenny* (Dublin, 1987), pp 12-13

¹²⁰ BMH WS 1,586 (James Holohan), BMH WS 1,006 (Martin Kealy),

¹²¹ BMH WS 966 (John Walsh), BMH WS 1,335 (James Leahy), BMH WS 1,006 (Martin Kealy),

¹²² BMH WS 1,093 (Thomas Tracey)

¹²³ *Cork Examiner*, 3 March 1920

¹²⁴ BMH WS 1,032 (James Lawlor)

¹²⁵ BMH WS 1,614 (Timothy Hennessy)

that the only negative that night was the ‘bright moonlight which lit up the village’,¹²⁶ as the full moon had occurred a few nights before.¹²⁷

Around 35 men took part in the actual attack. Beforehand, the attacking party symbolically congregated for a final meeting in the nearby townland of Carrickshock, the site of a previous Tithe War altercation in 1831 where 17 people were killed.¹²⁸

The attack commenced as planned at 11.30pm. Brigade Commandant Treacy, using an ‘improvised megaphone’, informed the occupants they would be given ten minutes to surrender and also to leave any women and children out. Along with the six RIC men, the sergeant’s wife and five young children were in the building at the time.¹²⁹ As there was no response after ten minutes the attack then commenced. Joe McMahon, in charge of the ‘bombing section’, climbed onto the roof, and managed to drop his homemade bombs into the building.¹³⁰ Many of the IRA that participated in the attack mentioned the tremendous volume of noise produced as most had never heard a bomb explode before.¹³¹ After about 45 minutes, the RIC surrendered and brought their arms outside.¹³² The RIC sergeant requested the assistance of a doctor and a priest which was acceded to. Constable Thomas Ryan, originally from Limerick, had his arm seriously damaged by a grenade. The captured weapons and ammunition were transported to the nearby village of Ennisnag¹³³ and subsequently Clara for hiding.¹³⁴ The IRA men dispersed and returned to their homes without difficulty and without suffering any casualties.

Constable Ryan died at 6.30am the following morning, leaving a wife and two children.¹³⁵ The subsequent reports stated that ‘200 men’ had attacked the barracks,¹³⁶ which was quadruple the actual figure. The Coroner’s inquest was held in the village of Hugginstown two days later. The Coroner, Dr Denis Walsh, had ‘difficulty in securing a sufficient number of jury men’. In his summation the coroner stated that:

¹²⁶ BMH WS 1,093 (Thomas Tracey)

¹²⁷ www.fullmoon.info/en/fullmoon-calendar/1920, Accessed 25 May 2015.

¹²⁸ BMH WS 1,093 (Thomas Tracey)

¹²⁹ *Kilkenny People*, 13 March 1920

¹³⁰ BMH WS 1,032 (James Lawlor)

¹³¹ BMH WS 1,335 (James Leahy)

¹³² BMH WS 1,705 (Nicholas Carroll)

¹³³ BMH WS 1,614 (Timothy Hennessy)

¹³⁴ BMH WS 1,006 (Martin Kealy)

¹³⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 10 March 1920

¹³⁶ *Cork Examiner*, 11 March 1920

*'this man died of shock and haemorrhage...forget that this man was a policeman...Just consider him as an ordinary neighbour...his house was attacked...and like everyman he had the right to defend his house'*¹³⁷

Whether through fear or loyalty to their local area, the jury gave a verdict that prevented a murder investigation commencing:

'Thomas Ryan died from shock and haemorrhage caused by a high explosive and there is no evidence to show where the explosive came from'.¹³⁸

Along with excellent planning, it was chiefly the element of surprise that was the biggest contributing factor to the success of the attack by the Kilkenny Brigade. The fact that it was in a very remote and rural area allowed a large number of men to converge without being reported. Joe McMahon's actions on the night were as invaluable as his explosives. His bravery in attacking the roof under heavy fire was a strong factor in the success. Unfortunately for the Kilkenny Brigade, McMahon had to leave the county and go 'on the run' as he was a wanted man. He was subsequently killed less than six months later while demonstrating explosives in Cavan.¹³⁹ The Kilkenny Brigade IRA would not have such an uncomplicated success again. Within a few months the Auxiliaries and what the *Kilkenny People* called the 'embryo policemen',¹⁴⁰ commonly known as the Black and Tans, arrived in the county.

'An Air of Peace' in the County – Summer 1920

*'The withdrawal of the police from so many barracks has handed over stretches of the county to the disaffected' –DI Whyte*¹⁴¹

IRA volunteer Nicholas Carroll noted that in the summer of 1920 there was 'an air of peace and independence in the district'.¹⁴² The primary reason for this was that many RIC barracks were evacuated in rural parts of County Kilkenny. Following orders from GHQ, much of the activity for the local IRA Battalions during April, May and June 1920 was concerned with the

¹³⁷ *Kilkenny People*, 13 March 1920

¹³⁸ *Kilkenny People*, 13 March 1920

¹³⁹ *Kilkenny People*, 28 August 1920

¹⁴⁰ *Kilkenny People*, 28 August 1920

¹⁴¹ NA CO 904/112 June 1920

¹⁴² BMH WS 1,705 (Nicholas Carroll)

burning of over 20 Barracks and Courthouses.¹⁴³ In Graiguenamanagh, the local IRA showed consideration to local businesses that were attached to the barracks by not burning it and instead destroyed the building by hand.¹⁴⁴ In Templeorum, in the south of the county, the local curate moved into the evacuated barracks in an apparent attempt to prevent it from being destroyed.¹⁴⁵ Piltown Courthouse¹⁴⁶ and Stoneyford Courthouse were burnt down also, while raids took place on the Callan, Graiguenamanagh and Kilkenny City Income Tax offices, where all records were amassed and burnt.¹⁴⁷ The military seized Callan and Thomastown Courthouses, preventing similar fates.¹⁴⁸

Intimidation of the RIC force also increased dramatically. The District Inspector noted that ‘often even his friends would not be seen talking to a policeman’.¹⁴⁹ This intimidation had many varying guises, and included new cadets receiving threatening letters,¹⁵⁰ while in Mullinavat the local sergeant’s goat was killed maliciously.¹⁵¹ By the end of October 1920, the Graiguenamanagh RIC were petitioning the Chief Secretary to replace two RIC constables who had resigned.¹⁵²

In the summer of 1920, another drive for the collection of arms was ordered, which was carried out diligently throughout the county.¹⁵³ A Kilkenny man named James Delaney, who was living in London, managed to post nearly 20 revolvers to Kilkenny during this period with the help of a London Cumann na mBan member.¹⁵⁴ The 5th Battalion, based in Graiguenamanagh in the east of the county, purchased ten guns from GHQ in Dublin and transported their new weapons discreetly to Graiguenamanagh using a barge as their mode of transport, which took over a week to arrive.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴³ BMH WS 1,642 (Edward Halley), BMH WS 1,335 (James Leahy), BMH WS 1,618 (Michael Connolly), BMH WS 1,609 (Michael O’ Carroll), BMH WS 1,006 (Martin Kealy), BMH WS 1,271 (Patrick Dunphy), BMH WS 1,601 (Garrett Brennan), BMH WS 1,614 (Timothy Hennessy), BMH WS 1,586 (James Holohan), *Irish Independent*, 10 February 1921, *Kilkenny Journal*, 10 November 1920.

¹⁴⁴ BMH WS 1,609 (Michael O’Carroll)

¹⁴⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 23 July 1920.

¹⁴⁶ Military Archives, MSPC/34/SP/35524, James Walsh (Mooncoin)

¹⁴⁷ BMH WS 1,614 (Timothy Hennessy), BMH WS 1,335 (James Leahy), BMH WS 966 (John Walsh)

¹⁴⁸ Chief Secretary of Ireland Registered Papers, November 1920 – ‘Callan and Thomastown courthouses commandeered by military’. CSORP/CR/331/1920/19298

¹⁴⁹ NA CO 904/112 June 1920

¹⁵⁰ NA CO 904/111 March 1920

¹⁵¹ NA CO 904/112 August 1920

¹⁵² CSORP, 30 October 1920, ‘Staff–Two RICs Graigue-na-Managh’. CSORP/CR/329/1920/2352-7

¹⁵³ BMH WS 1,093 (Thomas Tracey)

¹⁵⁴ BMH WS 1,360 (Colonel James Delaney)

¹⁵⁵ BMH WS 1,614 (Timothy Hennessy)

In response to the pilfering of arms throughout the county, an ‘anti-I.R.A. unit’ was set up in Piltown by a small group of Protestant families. Some members of the 7th Battalion launched a pre-emptive strike on these families and captured a number of weapons, although they did not secure the much sought after machine gun, which had been moved to a relative’s house for safe keeping.¹⁵⁶

Following the success of the Hugginstown attack in March, and up to the autumn of 1920, there is no evidence to suggest that the Kilkenny Brigade was planning any further large scale attacks.¹⁵⁷ Some Battalions used their own initiative in progressing the military campaign. In June 1920, Jim Roughan Commandant of the 7th Kilkenny Battalion, supplied rifle men and scouts for the Drangan Barracks attack in neighbouring County Tipperary. Roughan did not look for, or ask permission from, any Kilkenny Brigade superiors.¹⁵⁸ The 7th Battalion were the only Battalion to complain about the lethargic progress of the military campaign during the summer of 1920. For their part, the Kilkenny Brigade leaders did not appear perturbed by the independent actions of the local battalions, although this was to change in the coming months as Dublin GHQ attempted to seize more control.¹⁵⁹

The Fight Becomes Bloody – British Authorities hit back

*‘The morale of this County Force is excellent thanks largely to the vigour and utility of the Auxiliary Division’*¹⁶⁰ – DI Whyte (November 1920)

In late summer 1920, the British Authorities launched their counter-offensive. The very first Auxiliary Company in Ireland, ‘A Company’, were placed in Woodstock House in Inistioge in August 1920.¹⁶¹ In Graiguenamanagh, a party of 50 soldiers of the Devonshire Regiment moved into the town in July 1920. A local man, and ex-British soldier, named William Kenny aided the military in their raids in that district.¹⁶² The local IRA eventually captured the informer and sentenced him to death.¹⁶³ On 31 August 1920, he suffered an unusual and presumably harrowing execution by drowning in the river Barrow. The reason given for drowning, as opposed to shooting, was due to the proximity of the IRA’s location to British

¹⁵⁶ BMH WS 1,335 (James Leahy)

¹⁵⁷ BMH WS 1,609 (Michael O’Carroll)

¹⁵⁸ BMH WS 1,642 (Ned Halley)

¹⁵⁹ BMH WS 1,335 (James Leahy)

¹⁶⁰ NA CO 904/113 November 1920

¹⁶¹ Joseph McKenna, *Guerrilla Warfare in the Irish War of Independence, 1919-1921* (Jefferson, 2011), p.155

¹⁶² NA CO 904/113 November 1920

¹⁶³ BMH WS 1,609 (Michael O’Carroll)

Crown Forces, as a gunshot would be heard.¹⁶⁴ The event had a follow-up as the family of William Kenny continued to aid the authorities with the hope of locating their brother whom they did not know was dead. Some six months after Kenny's death, his sister and 'blind father' were attacked and their cart destroyed by 'Sinn Féiners'.¹⁶⁵

In November 1920, Dublin GHQ informed the Kilkenny Brigade that they wanted an attack initiated on the Auxiliaries in Inistioge, which had become the Auxiliary headquarters of the whole Southeast region.¹⁶⁶ Ernie O'Malley from GHQ was to lead the attack.¹⁶⁷ When O'Malley arrived in Kilkenny City in early December 1920, the Kilkenny Brigade had suffered a number of setbacks with the arrests of the Brigade Commandant and Vice Commandant the previous week. Surprisingly, Peter DeLoughry, who had not taken an active part in any fighting to date, was elected Commandant. The most apparent reason for his selection would appear to be his longevity and prominence in the national movement in Kilkenny, which stretched back to a protest against the Royal visit in 1904, as well as being one of the founding members of the local Sinn Féin club in 1907.¹⁶⁸ His role as head centre of the IRB in Kilkenny was also another likely factor in his selection.

O'Malley arrived opportunely when a Brigade meeting was taking place which allowed him to record all company captains and the available weapons in the entire Kilkenny Brigade. After some days he travelled to Inistioge where the attack was to take place, and stayed with local Battalion Commandant, James O'Hanrahan, in Cappagh. The following morning O'Hanrahan informed O'Malley on 'three occasions' that Auxiliaries were raiding houses in the area.¹⁶⁹ Although he had been warned of the raids, O'Malley wrote in his autobiography that when the Auxiliaries eventually arrived they were as 'unexpected as death'. When they questioned him, O'Malley said he was visiting his aunt and that his name was 'Bernard Stewart'.¹⁷⁰ This was an unusual choice of pseudonym to use in rural Kilkenny and the selection of such a 'foreign' surname in a known republican household would have automatically raised suspicion. In addition to this lack of judgement, O'Malley also left his grenades on the windowsill and his notebook on the desk. After glancing through O'Malley's

¹⁶⁴ BMH WS 966 (John Walsh)

¹⁶⁵ *Kilkenny People*, 20 April 1921

¹⁶⁶ Thomas J Whyte, *The Story of Woodstock in Inistioge* (Dublin, 2007), p.303

¹⁶⁷ BMH WS 1,093 (Thomas Tracey)

¹⁶⁸ Dunne, *Peter's Key* (Cork, 2012), p. 38

¹⁶⁹ *Kilkenny People*, 26 December 1936

¹⁷⁰ O'Malley, *On Another Man's Wound* (Dublin, 2013), pp 281-83

notebook one of the Auxiliaries stated ‘we have the lot’.¹⁷¹ O’Malley was immediately arrested and taken to Woodstock, ironically the place he was attempting to attack. All inhabitants of O’Hanrahan’s were removed, including his elderly mother who was dying, and the house was set on fire.¹⁷² The main calamity from a Kilkenny Brigade point of view was that the Auxiliaries obtained from O’Malley’s notebook the full list of names of the captains of all Kilkenny Companies along with the number of weapons and ammunition they had. As O’Malley sourced the information from the Battalion leaders it is safe to assume it was accurate. The County Inspector reported to his superiors, using these captured statistics, that the Kilkenny IRA Brigade were in possession of 103 rifles with 4,900 rounds of ammunition and 471 shotguns with 3,490 cartridges of varying quality.¹⁷³

The net effect of O’Malley’s capture was that during following days there was a major round up of IRA members including a number of Battalion leaders.¹⁷⁴ On 20 December 1920, just two weeks after the O’Malley setback, the Kilkenny Brigade received a morale boost when the 7th Kilkenny Battalion, acting on its own initiative, attacked a party of Auxiliaries and RIC on a road near the village of Ninemilehouse. Due to premature gunfire they did not cause many casualties. However, during the retreat, RIC Constable Thomas Walsh was accidentally shot dead by a soldier of the Devonshire Regiment.¹⁷⁵ Media reports directly after the Ninemilehouse ambush widely exaggerated the casualties, asserting that there were ‘many killed and wounded’.¹⁷⁶ In more recent times, the importance of this attack continues to be exaggerated, as historian Michael Hopkinson stated that ‘in all eight soldiers were killed’.¹⁷⁷ However, all available evidence suggests that just one soldier was killed, with another badly wounded, losing an eye.¹⁷⁸ The *Times* (London) would seem to be responsible for the inaccurate and widely exaggerated reporting. The newspaper gave a large amount of coverage on the front page on 22 December 1920 to the ‘hill battle’ and the ‘many ambushes’ that took place, and even including maps of the area.¹⁷⁹ Many other newspapers throughout Ireland would appear to have covered the story subsequently. It is not clear, however, who was the original source of the grossly overstated information.

¹⁷¹ *Irish Press*, 19 December 1936

¹⁷² *Kilkenny People*, 26 December 1936

¹⁷³ NA CO 904/113 December 1920

¹⁷⁴ BMH WS 1,601 (Garrett Brennan)

¹⁷⁵ BMH WS 980 (Edward J. Aylward), BMH WS 1,335 (James Leahy)

¹⁷⁶ *Kilkenny Journal*, 24 December 1920, *Irish Independent*, 24 December 1920

¹⁷⁷ Michael Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence* (Dublin, 2004), p. 123

¹⁷⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 18 April 1921

¹⁷⁹ *The Times*, 22 December 1920

Success and Failure

Early 1921 brought Martial Law to County Kilkenny, with the crime of ‘wearing or the unauthorised possession of uniforms’ punishable by the death penalty.¹⁸⁰

On 5 January 1921, Michael Cassidy, a 35-year-old farm labourer, was brought out from his place of work near Castlecomer and shot dead by ‘masked men’.¹⁸¹ The victim was described as a ‘down-and-out’ who had annoyed the IRA. Cassidy had ‘boasted’ that he would inform on the IRA. A placard was placed on his body stating ‘Spies beware – killed by the IRA’. However, no Company of the local 3rd Battalion IRA had any knowledge of the killing, thus it was probably an outside IRA unit who carried out the execution, sanctioned by IRA GHQ.¹⁸²

Following some restructuring of the Brigade by the new Brigade Commandant, George O’Dwyer, it is notable that, on the night of 12 February 1921, the first Brigade coordinated attacks took place, when separate Battalions attacked police barracks in Gowran and Callan at a predetermined time. Although the attacks were small in nature and no reported injuries were caused to the Crown Forces, it was nevertheless a propaganda coup for the IRA as it appeared as their numbers were numerous and well organised.¹⁸³

The only attack that took place in Kilkenny City during the war occurred on Friary Street on the 21 February 1921. The plan was to ambush a patrol of six soldiers who transported supplies daily from the Military Barracks to Kilkenny Jail. Surprisingly, given the violent ambushes that had occurred recently in Ireland, the IRA men were ordered not to shoot the soldiers but to attack and disarm them.¹⁸⁴ This was something the *Kilkenny People* newspaper was keen to point out afterwards, noting that ‘it was a rather significant feature that no shots were fired by the attackers’.¹⁸⁵ The IRA men outnumbered the soldiers two to one.¹⁸⁶ The intervention of a screaming woman put their plans into disarray.¹⁸⁷ Two of the military, from the front of convoy, shot two IRA Volunteers who were wrestling with soldiers at the rear of

¹⁸⁰ *Irish Independent*, 5 January 1921

¹⁸¹ *Irish Independent*, 6 January 1921

¹⁸² BMH WS 1,601 (Garrett Brennan)

¹⁸³ *Irish Independent*, 15 February 1921, BMH WS 1,335 (James Leahy)

¹⁸⁴ BMH WS 1,614 (Timothy Hennessy)

¹⁸⁵ *Kilkenny People*, 26 February 1921

¹⁸⁶ *Irish Independent*, 22 February 1921

¹⁸⁷ *Kilkenny People*, 26 February 1921

the convoy. The two IRA men subsequently died, while a civilian was also killed by a ricocheting bullet during the attack.¹⁸⁸

The beginning of 1921 also saw the formation of two Active Service Units (ASU) in the Brigade area. Similar to what was occurring in the broader conflict in Ireland, the establishment of the ASU's in Kilkenny was instigated by GHQ, but had also become a practical necessity more than a choice, as many of the IRA men were now wanted and would be arrested if they returned to their homes.¹⁸⁹ On 12 March 1921, a dramatic shootout occurred between four members of the 7th Battalion ASU and a number of soldiers and Black and Tans at Garryricken House in the west of county Kilkenny.¹⁹⁰ Surrounded by over 30 members of the Crown Forces, the ASU members managed to shoot their way out of the house and escape into nearby woods, killing one Black and Tan, named Constable Riley, and injuring two RIC men in the process. This feat in escaping against overwhelming odds was complimented by Richard Mulcahy, IRA Chief of Staff, which was conveyed to the Kilkenny Brigade Commandant.¹⁹¹

In April, one of the 7th Battalion ASU members, Jackie Brett, was accidentally killed. He was billeting at a house near the village of Castlejohn and a teenage member of the household named Jack Donovan unintentionally fired Brett's revolver while he was in the process of cleaning his other weapons. The bullet passed through Brett's chest and he died shortly afterwards. Brett had been part of the Tipperary team that played in the infamous 'Bloody Sunday' football match just five months previously, when 12 civilians were killed by Crown Forces.¹⁹²

On the 23 April 1921, the 7th Battalion ASU moved to the south of County Kilkenny where there was a failed ambush of a Black and Tan patrol near Piltown.¹⁹³ The threat was evidently discovered as a large number of soldiers arrived from Carrick-on-Suir and Waterford.¹⁹⁴ Although this planned ambush was a failure, geographically the ASU were spreading attacks throughout the county which alarmed British authorities. This part of south County Kilkenny was also one of the quietest up to that point in the war. The RIC erroneously reported to Dublin Castle that the failed Piltown ambush was carried out by the famous republican Dan

¹⁸⁸ Fitzgerald, *Kilkenny...Blast from the Past* (Cork, 2005), pp 325-28

¹⁸⁹ BMH WS 980 (Edward J. Aylward)

¹⁹⁰ *Kilkenny People*, 19 March 1921

¹⁹¹ BMH WS 980 (Edward J. Aylward)

¹⁹² Maher, *In the Shade of Slievenamon* (Dublin, 2015), pp 178-80

¹⁹³ BMH WS 1,642 (Ned Halley)

¹⁹⁴ BMH WS 1,705 (Nicholas Carroll)

Breen.¹⁹⁵ There is no evidence to suggest why the RIC made such a connection. It may have been local gossip, or perhaps the fact that no IRA men were captured after so many troops were deployed from different towns led them assert it was enigmatic Breen.

The 7th Battalion ASUs were to garner even more publicity from its next engagement. The ASU moved northwards to the village of Kilmanagh joining with Sean Hogan's West Tipperary ASU along the way, which made a combined force of about 70 men. This link up was not premeditated and was decided by the Commandants of the ASUs after having arrived in the same area at the same time.¹⁹⁶ It was during these large movements of men that the local Cumann na mBan Companies came to the fore. Without regard for their own safety they arranged accommodation, acted as messengers between safe houses, cooked meals and delivered first aid to the travelling IRA men.¹⁹⁷

The combined ASU forces, under the command of Ned Aylward and Sean Hogan, were at their most audacious yet as they took possession of the entire village of Kilmanagh at 6am on 12 May 1921.¹⁹⁸ Men were positioned at all entry points into the village. A number of the local houses were occupied, while the IRA even erected posters declaring the village a 'military zone'.¹⁹⁹ British Forces did not rise to their bait and by evening the ASU felt obliged for safety reasons to withdraw northwards. It was a great publicity coup for the IRA with the *Irish Independent* headlining the event as 'The Invasion of Kilmanagh' with '300 Sinn Féiners' occupying the village,²⁰⁰ which was over three times the actual number.

Large sections of British Forces pursued in their wake and the following day, two ASU members, Seán Quinn and Pat Walsh were mortally wounded when the ASU columns were escaping from a safe house in the townland of Knocknagress near Tullaroan.²⁰¹ Pat Walsh, from the village of Dunnamaggin, had completed a jail term for the possession of 'seditious documents' the week previously,²⁰² and had only been a member of the flying column for four days.²⁰³ He was shot in the legs, and possibly could have survived if he had received earlier medical intervention, but the Crown Forces stopped at a public house for two hours on

¹⁹⁵ NA CO 904/115, April 1921

¹⁹⁶ BMH WS 980 (Edward J. Aylward)

¹⁹⁷ BMH WS 1,271 (Patrick Dunphy) – Addendum Statement

¹⁹⁸ BMH WS 1,642 (Ned Halley)

¹⁹⁹ NA CO 904/115, May 1921

²⁰⁰ *Irish Independent*, 25 May 1921

²⁰¹ *Irish Independent*, 16 May 1921

²⁰² *Kilkenny People*, 21 May 1921

²⁰³ *Cork Examiner*, 24 June 1921

their way to Kilkenny City from Knocknagress. The captured and badly injured men were denied food or water which the locals attempted to provide them with.²⁰⁴ Pat Walsh was popular in GAA and Sinn Féin circles. The two fatalities were widely reported, and were even raised on the floor of the House of Commons when James Kiley, the Liberal MP for Whitechapel in London, queried the circumstances surrounding the men's deaths. The question occurred during a debate on the military campaign in Ireland, with Kiley even being critical of his own party's role in the war in Ireland.²⁰⁵ In the aftermath of the IRA fatalities in Knocknagress, two ex-British soldiers, Martin Dermody and Michael O'Keefe, who aided the Crown forces in locating the ASU, were executed by the local IRA three days later.²⁰⁶

The 5th Battalion, based around the Graiguenamanagh area, had its most important military success on 10 June 1921 when two Auxiliaries were captured.²⁰⁷ One escaped and the other, Constable James French,²⁰⁸ was shot dead while trying to escape.²⁰⁹ In reprisal, the Auxiliaries burnt the home and grocery business of IRA member Tom Butler in The Rower with his wife and young children given just five minutes to leave their home.²¹⁰

The 1st Kilkenny ASU, under the command of George O'Dwyer, planned their largest engagement for 18 June 1921 at Coolbawn just north of Castlecomer.²¹¹ Over 60 men took part and the plan was to ambush military lorries that were due to leave Castlecomer barracks that morning. The day of the ambush was mart day in Castlecomer, so an elaborate plan had to be enacted to hold all the travelling farmers in a field so as to not disturb arrangements at the ambush site where a mine had been placed.²¹² This arrangement backfired when a farm labourer was allowed through the barricade. He subsequently told his employer Florrie Dreaper about what had occurred and she duly walked into Castlecomer to inform the military. Unbeknownst to the ASU, the military made an encircling movement and engaged the column from behind.²¹³ Two column members, Seán Hartley from Glenmore and Nicholas Mullins from Thomastown were killed in the resulting altercation, while the British

²⁰⁴ Maher, *In the Shade of Slievenamon* (Dublin, 2015), pp 197,225

²⁰⁵ House of Commons Debates, 23 June 1921, '*Military Operations*'. Mr Denis Henry in response to question of Mr James Kiley. vol:143 cc:1518-20

²⁰⁶ *Cork Examiner*, 18 May 1921

²⁰⁷ NA CO 904/115, June 1921

²⁰⁸ www.theauxiliaries.com/companies/a-coy/a-coy-kilkenny.html, accessed 1 March 2015

²⁰⁹ BMH WS 966 (John Walsh)

²¹⁰ *Nenagh News*, 18 June 1921. *Kilkenny People*, 18 June 1921

²¹¹ BMH WS 1,601 (Garrett Brennan)

²¹² BMH WS 1,102 (James Brennan)

²¹³ Lyng, *Castlecomer Connections* (Kilkenny, 1984) pp 163-65

forces suffered no casualties.²¹⁴ Ms Dreaper's home was burnt later in reprisal for her pivotal part in the failure of the ambush.²¹⁵ The Kilkenny IRA Brigade received something of a confidence boost however, when, on the very same day as the failed Coolbawn ambush, the 9th Kilkenny IRA Battalion successfully ambushed a patrol of Black and Tans at Sinnott's Cross in Mooncoin in south Kilkenny.²¹⁶ One Black and Tan was killed and one was injured.²¹⁷

There was one final attack before the Truce on 11 July 1921. This attack was controversial as it occurred the evening before the Truce, with all combatants aware that a ceasefire would come into effect the following day as it had been announced the week previously. The attack occurred on a patrol in the village of Mullinahone, County Tipperary by members of the local IRA Company (who were members of the 7th Kilkenny Battalion).²¹⁸ Sergeant Reynolds, a member of the Lincolnshire Regiment, died from wounds sustained in the altercation. He was the first (and only) member of the military to be killed in the Kilkenny Battalion area during the War of Independence. The *Cork Examiner* referred to it as a 'dastardly action of rebels', referring to the ceasefire that was due to begin a few hours later.²¹⁹

With regard to the number of what the RIC termed 'political outrages', which were crimes reported as a direct result of the ongoing hostilities, the number of offences peaked in September 1920 before decreasing by nearly 80% the following month. However, crimes reached nearly the same levels as September by May and June 1921.²²⁰ This highlights the success of the British military authorities after the arrival of the Auxiliaries and Black and Tans, but also emphasises that by the spring of 1921 the IRA successes, although mostly minor in nature, were very much on an upward trajectory. This pattern in Kilkenny was broadly similar to that which occurred in general in Ireland from September 1920 to July 1921.²²¹

A number of reasons can be suggested as to why the IRA was not more successful in Kilkenny during this period. As with the IRA in other counties, many planned ambushes did

²¹⁴ *Irish Independent*, 20 June 1921

²¹⁵ NA CO 904/116, July 1921

²¹⁶ Interview notes; Jim Maher in conversation with Jack 'na Coille' Walsh, O/C of 9th Battalion Kilkenny IRA, 1968.

²¹⁷ *Cork Examiner*, 20 June 1921

²¹⁸ Maher, *In the Shade of Slievenamon* (Dublin, 2015), p. 250

²¹⁹ *Cork Examiner*, 13 July 1921

²²⁰ NA CO 904/113 Oct 1921, NA CO 904/114 May 1921, NA CO 904/115 June 1921

²²¹ Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare* (Dublin, 1996), p.15

not take place as the Military did not arrive, or took a different route. With the mass closing of RIC barracks in March 1920, and the movement towards strongly fortified locations, 'softer' targets were not as available for the IRA. One theme that permeated the military campaign in Kilkenny was the lack of quality intelligence on the IRA side. The height of their intelligence gathering would appear to be the fairly regular capture of mails throughout the period with an aim of gaining information on the Crown Forces. However, there is no evidence to imply that the Kilkenny IRA Brigade tried or succeeded in infiltrating the Crown Forces in the county at any stage. This is something that Ernie O'Malley strongly criticised when he returned to Kilkenny to review the Brigade in May 1921, but there was no excuse given except to say that the local IRA 'had no contacts within the enemy ranks'.²²² The Crown Forces on the other hand appeared to have been a step ahead of the IRA in many cases. Whether through fear, or disapproval of IRA actions, the Crown Forces had an accurate supply of information from locals about IRA members and their activities, which led to the capture of IRA men and the failure of some ambushes. In Callan, for instance, on one occasion in February 1921 the local priest had even heard of the planned attack on the local Barracks before it was due to occur.²²³ Furthermore, the engagements where Kilkenny IRA Brigade men died were all due to the British military being informed of the presence of the IRA in the area by locals.

Ned Aylward, one of the leaders of the most successful 7th Battalion and ASU, offered his own verdict on Kilkenny's lack of success. Highlighting tensions within the Kilkenny IRA, he stated that the Brigade Headquarters leaders in Kilkenny City were made up of 'older men' and that the Brigade leaders lacked 'the necessary ruthlessness'.²²⁴ The Kilkenny City based Brigade leaders gave the impression of trying to avoid killings for the majority of the war. The 'no kill' policy of the ill-fated Friary Street Ambush was the most glaring evidence of that.²²⁵

Historian Jim Maher refers to the Kilkenny Brigade Commanders earlier in war as 'gentle revolutionaries',²²⁶ which is perhaps an apt description of the attitude that prevailed within the Kilkenny Brigade GHQ. In Castlecomer, for example, the 3rd Battalion there also decided not to attack the Castlecomer mines for fear of the workers losing their jobs, even though the

²²² BMH WS 1,642 (Edward Halley)

²²³ BMH WS 1,642 (Edward Halley)

²²⁴ BMH WS 980 (Edward J. Aylward)

²²⁵ BMH WS 1,093 (Thomas Tracey)

²²⁶ Maher, *In the Shade of Slievenamon* (Dublin, 2015), p. 66

mines had a large supply of explosives.²²⁷ Garrett Brennan, who was O/C of the 3rd Kilkenny Battalion at the time of the Truce, was of the opinion that many of the RIC were of the ‘harmless type’ and subsequently that ‘one coffin going back to England would be worth hundreds of police shot’.²²⁸ The effect was that County Kilkenny had a relatively smaller number of fatalities in contrast to other counties.

An obvious exception was the 7th Battalion who were hardened by the last months of the War and certainly contained the ruthless streak which was more in common with their neighbouring Tipperary counterparts. By June of 1921 however, some of the other Battalions in Kilkenny, such as the 5th and 9th Battalions were showing increasing signs of moving towards a more aggressive course of action. It is not implausible to surmise that if the War had continued for some months longer, that some of these Battalions would have made further and more effective contributions to Kilkenny’s military effort.

Finally, the capture of Ernie O’Malley, with the listing of all the Kilkenny officers was a major setback for the Kilkenny Brigade, especially as it occurred at such a pivotal point in the war in December 1920. The main leaders of the Brigade were arrested while, more importantly, a number of the Battalion Commandants were also captured. The effect this had on the organisation and morale of the Kilkenny IRA Brigade was profound.

Writing in May 1921, the County District Inspector Whyte offered his synopsis and solution to the state of affairs in county Kilkenny:

*‘I beg to report that this county continues in a lawless state...about five per cent of a population of some 90,000 are active members of Sinn Féin...chiefly composed of young farmers sons. The ever present problem in Ireland is to find an outlet for the energies of this five per cent surplus’.*²²⁹

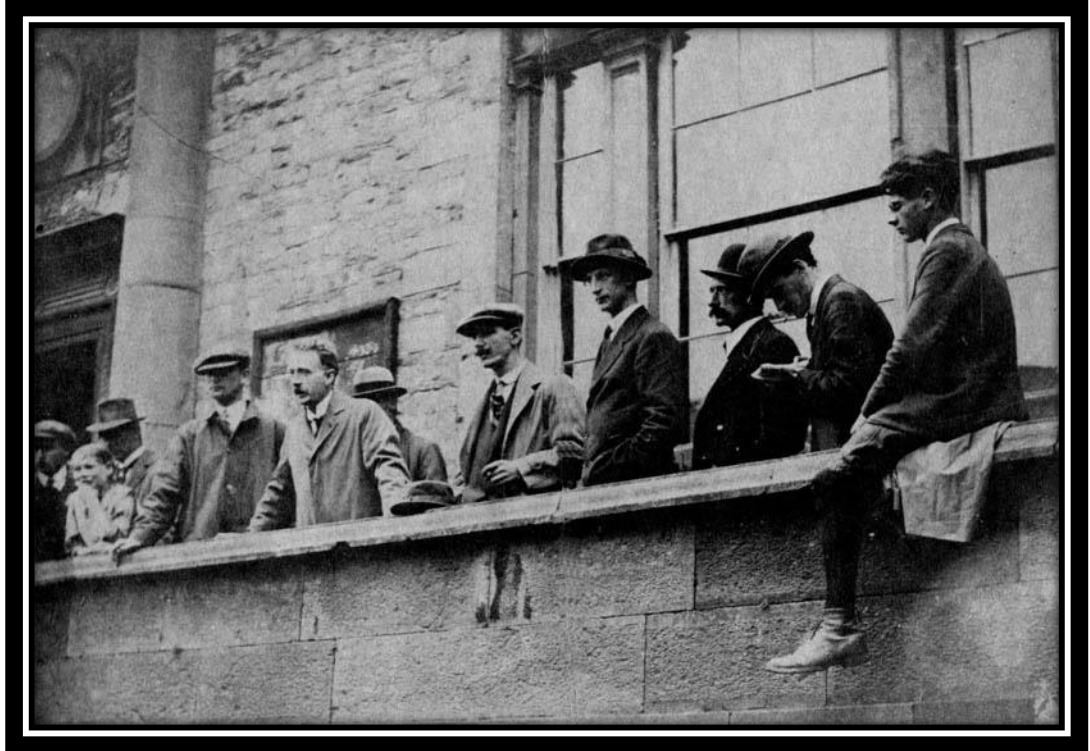
²²⁷ BMH WS 1,601 (Garrett Brennan)

²²⁸ BMH WS 1,601 (Garrett Brennan)

²²⁹ NA CO 904/115, April 1921

Chapter 3: Kilkenny's Political and Civil Counter State

'It is fairly obvious that an Irishman cannot serve two masters'.²³⁰



Kilkenny North TD and Minister for Local Government, William T. Cosgrave, making a speech at Graces Castle/Kilkenny Courthouse before the outbreak of the War of Independence.²³¹

Kilkenny's contribution to the War of Independence in matters of Local Government and Civil Authority followed a similar pattern to the military side, in that adherence to republican efforts to establish a counter state was inconsistent and varied throughout the county. This chapter specifically examines the administration of law and order by the Republican Police and the Republican Courts, while also investigating the area of Local Government in Kilkenny.

Following instructions from Dáil Éireann, the Kilkenny republican movement was quick to respond to the establishment of Republican Courts, or 'Sinn Féin Courts' as they were also known, in May 1920.²³² The Republican Police Force was also set up at this time to aid the work of the courts. Thomas Treacy stated that the Republican Courts were 'more concerned

²³⁰ NAI DELG 14/5. Letter from Minister of Local Government to Denis O'Carroll, 9 September 1920

²³¹ BMH P-11-001. W.T. Cosgrave August 1917, Kilkenny By-Election speech

²³² *Irish Independent*, 1 June 1920

with dispensing justice than with dispensing law'. Regarding the new police force, Treacy gave details on how individuals were recruited, stating that 'all members of the Republican Police Force were IRA men specifically selected for the work',²³³ which was not unusual when compared to other counties. It has not been possible to discern the exact number of Republican Police in Kilkenny. All Battalions appear to have chosen men specifically for the task from the ranks of the local IRA when the need arose, which was usually related in some way to the workings of the Republican Courts.

The success in establishing the courts and police force was greatly aided by the power vacuum that existed in Kilkenny due to the closure of the majority of rural RIC barracks in March 1920. This was also evident in Kilkenny City where the first Republican Court officiated there was held in City Hall, most likely due to it being presided over by the Mayor Peter DeLoughry.²³⁴ In Callan, the initial court sessions in May 1920 were held in the local town hall, with even the RIC turning a blind eye.²³⁵ As can be deduced, there was an obvious lack of distinction between the varying strands of the Republican Movement at the time. Thomas Treacy acted as Kilkenny IRA Brigade Commandant, and by extension head of the Republican Police, while also being a clerk of the courts. Peter DeLoughry was a member of the IRA, Mayor of Kilkenny and presiding officer in republican parish and district courts, while also leading the local Motor Drivers Union.²³⁶

The Republican Courts and Police

The most common cases heard in the Republican Courts in Kilkenny involved larceny of some form or other.²³⁷ This was one of the negative effects of the decline in law and order. Unlike other counties in Ireland, land disputes were not a common feature of trials heard in County Kilkenny.²³⁸ The most valid reason for this, as discussed in chapter one, was the success of the land acts in transferring ownership of the majority of the land to the tenants during the previous decades. The high quality of land and the economic upsurge for farmers during the Great War years also meant that the bulk of farmers were not disaffected and lived in relative prosperity.²³⁹ The first cases in Kilkenny City were somewhat surprisingly

²³³ BMH WS 1,093 (Thomas Tracey)

²³⁴ BMH WS 1,093 (Thomas Tracey)

²³⁵ Maher, *In the Shade of Slievenamon* (Dublin, 2015), p.104

²³⁶ NA CO 904/110 December 1919

²³⁷ BMH WS 1,586 (James Holohan)

²³⁸ Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence* (Dublin, 2004), p.44

²³⁹ Hart, *The I.R.A. & Its Enemies* (Oxford, 1999), p.143

initiated by ‘Unionist’ members of the local community. Two former British Majors had ‘jewellery stolen from their houses’ which was recovered by the Republican Police. Another case dealt with the ‘stealing of cattle from the lands of Sir Wheeler-Cuffe Lyrath’, with the end result being the recovery of the animals. There was a ‘gang of burglars’ operating in Kilkenny at the time who were responsible for many robberies and the Republican Police/IRA eventually apprehended and jailed them at a deserted house for a set period of time.²⁴⁰

Similarly, in Callan, one of the first cases heard was brought by Unionist Major McCalmont who owned the large Mount Juliet Estate near Thomastown. His case was against a farmer whom he had purchased a ‘bull-calf’ from. The animal had not been castrated, which was part of the agreement. McCalmont won his case, with the seller having to fulfil his original obligation. Many other cases in this district dealt with the stealing of farm stock, with the animals usually returned.²⁴¹ The sentences for the culprits included fines, banishment from the county or imprisonment for a number of weeks where the ‘prison’ was an abandoned house.²⁴²

In Moneenroe, near Castlecomer, the local curate presided at the court, which gave weight and respectability to the proceedings. The courts were generally held in a disused blacksmith’s forge.²⁴³ Offenders that were found guilty were usually ‘sentenced to work at turf cutting, hay saving or harvesting work for so many days’.²⁴⁴ In Graiguenamanagh, a local Justice of the Peace was brought before the Republican Court for threatening to use his influence to bring back the RIC and military to the local area. However, during the trial the case against the man was deemed weak as the majority of evidence was based on hearsay and gossip. In an indication of the even-handedness of the court, the presiding officer dismissed the case. The fair and balanced manner of the Republican Courts was a propaganda bonus for Sinn Féin in the local area. The fact that several traditionally Unionist families were utilising the Republican Courts and ignoring the British courts system enshrined general acceptance amongst much of the populace.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁰ BMH WS 1,093 (Thomas Tracey)

²⁴¹ BMH WS 980 (Edward J. Aylward)

²⁴² Maher, *In the Shade of Slievenamon* (Dublin, 2015), pp 104-5

²⁴³ *Kilkenny Journal*, 5 June 1920

²⁴⁴ BMH WS 1,271 (Patrick Dunphy)

²⁴⁵ BMH WS 1,006 (Martin Kealy)

A witness statement by a Kilkenny IRA member gives a rare mention of sexual violence during this era (referred to as ‘an attack on a girl’). The victim identified the accused man in court and his punishment involved being tied to the gates of the local church in Clogh so he could be seen, and presumably be shamed, by the local people attending mass.²⁴⁶

The most public engagement for the Republican Police Force was at the Gowran Park Races in June 1920 where the new Police Force marshalled the grounds during race day, having been invited by the management committee. The Police apprehended a pickpocket, fining him £2 for his misdemeanour, while they also arrested a man selling tickets for admittance that had been stolen. The Police Force garnered very positive publicity for the manner in which they conducted themselves. Under the headline ‘Delinquents Summarily Dealt With at the Gowran Park Races’ the *Kilkenny Journal* complemented the Police under ‘whose supervision the best of good order prevailed’.²⁴⁷

Local Government – Not So Loyal Supporters

One of the major themes in the rise of Sinn Féin and challenging of British government authority in Ireland was the takeover of Local Government by Sinn Féin at the urban elections in January 1920, and the county and district council elections in June 1920. For Kilkenny, this had an added weight as the Dáil Minister for Local Government, William T. Cosgrave, was also the TD for Kilkenny North. In the urban elections, the Sinn Féin victory in Kilkenny was not the rampant success that had occurred in other areas of the country.²⁴⁸ Sinn Féin was the largest single party but did not have a majority, winning just 9 of the 24 seats available.²⁴⁹ The remaining seats were taken by Nationalists/Independents who also won 9, Labour who won 5, with a Unionist taking the last seat.²⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Sinn Féin nominally controlled the council, relying on an informal pact it had with the Labour councillors. The precarious nature of the Sinn Féin majority prompted Cosgrave to write to the local Sinn Féin branch secretary, James Lalor, to insist on all Sinn Féin councillors writing a ‘form of resignation’ but to ‘leave blank the date of [the] resignation’. The letters were only to be availed of in the event of the arrest of one or more of the councillors. Another

²⁴⁶ BMH WS 1,271 (Patrick Dunphy)

²⁴⁷ *Kilkenny Journal*, 12 June 1920

²⁴⁸ Marie Coleman, *The Irish Revolution, 1916-1923* (London, 2013), p.61

²⁴⁹ *Irish Independent*, 17 January 1920

²⁵⁰ NA CO 904/111, January 1920

Sinn Féin candidate could then be co-opted into the seat with the effect that Sinn Féin would hold its majority.²⁵¹

The coupling of the Labour Party and Sinn Féin was not without its tension as in May 1920, prior to the council elections, a labour candidate was asked to stand down in favour of a Sinn Féin candidate. Sinn Féin described their candidate as ‘a labour man as well as Sinn Féin’, but eventually both candidates ran.²⁵² There is some evidence of class tensions between the parties. A number of the Sinn Féin councillors in situ in 1920 had declined to support Jim Larkin and the ITGWU during the ‘1913 Lockout’, a period when Dublin employers refused to allow their workers to be affiliated with the ITGWU.²⁵³ All the Labour councillors elected to the Kilkenny Corporation in 1920 had leadership roles in the local branch of the ITGWU.²⁵⁴ Similarly, in October 1919, Sinn Féin and Labour councillors took different stances regarding the sale of the local O’Sullivan’s Brewery to the Smithwicks family, with Sinn Féin supportive of the sale.²⁵⁵ The manager of the Smithwicks brewery was a local Sinn Féin Councillor and when subsequently many of the employees of O’Sullivan’s were dismissed, it caused a great deal of tension between the parties in the lead up to the local elections.²⁵⁶

The Council and District elections in June were much more successful for Sinn Féin. If all electoral districts are aggregated together, Sinn Féin won 77% of the seats, Labour won 13%, Independents won 5%, while candidates under the ‘Sinn Féin-Labour’ banner also won 5%.²⁵⁷ As Labour and Sinn Féin had an agreement at the time, the national media reported Kilkenny as having over 95% ‘Republican’ candidates.²⁵⁸

This emphatic victory for Sinn Féin was something the RIC District Inspector was keen to emphasise as he underlined part of his report to Dublin Castle:

²⁵¹ UCD Archives, P133-4, James Lalor Papers. Letter from Minister for Local Government to James Lalor, 30 March 1920.

²⁵² *Kilkenny Journal*, 5 May 1920

²⁵³ Dunne, *Peter’s Key* (Cork, 2012), p. 47

²⁵⁴ *Kilkenny Journal*, 5 May 1920

²⁵⁵ Dunne, *Peter’s Key* (Cork, 2012), p. 182

²⁵⁶ *Freemans Journal*, 23 October 1919

²⁵⁷ *Kilkenny Journal*, 12 June 1920. *Munster Express*, 12 June 1920. *Freemans Journal*, 10 June 1920

²⁵⁸ *Irish Independent*, 14 June 1920

*'The recent L.G. [Local Government] Elections have put all the public boards in the hands of Sinn Féin. At all the meetings of such new bodies resolutions pledging their adherence and support to Dáil Éireann have been passed.'*²⁵⁹

Matters were not as clear cut as this would suggest, however. Resolutions pledging support did not necessarily translate to total adherence. Although ostensibly supportive of Dáil Éireann, this loyalty had varying degrees and was inconsistent throughout the county. The principle evidence for this were delays in the District and Rural Councils communicating with the Dáil Éireann Department of Local Government (LGB) and more importantly, the time associated with the severing of all ties with the British Local Government Board (BLGB). The table below outlines the dates of the first communication with the Dáil Éireann LGB by each of the 15 civil electoral divisions in County Kilkenny, and when they confirmed that they ceased communicating the BLGB:²⁶⁰

	Council/Union Areas	Date of First Communication with Dáil Éireann Local Government	Date that citation of communication with British LGB confirmed
1	Callan Poor Law Union	15-Jul-1921	July 1921
2	Callan Rural District Council	12-Aug-1921	July 1921
3	Carrick-on-Suir Rural District - No 3 (Piltown, Fiddown)	08-Jan-1921	February 1921
4	Castlecomer Poor Law Union	30-Sep-1920	July 1921
5	Castlecomer Rural District Council	02-Sep-1920	July 1921
6	Kilkenny Poor Law Union	12-Dec-1920	April 1921
7	Kilkenny Rural District Council	17-Jun-1920	May 1921
8	Ida Rural District Council	25-Sep-1920	October 1920
9	Thomastown Poor Law Union	07-Aug-1920	November 1920
10	Thomastown Rural District Council	13-Aug-1920	November 1920
11	Urlingford Poor Law Union	21-Oct-1920	April 1920
12	Urlingford Rural District	30-Sep-1920	October 1920
13	Waterford No 2 - Rural Kilkenny District (Kilmacow, Mooncoin)	28-Aug-1920	
14	Kilkenny Urban District Council	26-Jul-1920	June 1921
15	Kilkenny County Council	25-Sep-1920	June 1921

²⁵⁹ NA CO 904/112 June 1920

²⁶⁰ NAI DELG 14/1-15

The most notable aspect is the gap of over a year between the first communication of Kilkenny Urban District Council in July 1920 and Callan Rural District Council, which did not send its first communication to the Dáil LGB until August 1921.²⁶¹ Following a decree by Dáil Éireann in September 1920, councils were told to cease communication with the BLGB. As can be deduced from the table, Castlecomer and Callan Councils and Kilkenny County Council did not break their connections until the summer of 1921, making them among the last in the country to do so.

There are a number of explanations for the disparity in the approaches of the different councils. Judging by the available evidence, one of the most glaring reasons lies in the personalities that made up the various councils. If the chairperson or clerk was opposed to breaking off communications with the BLGB, this usually caused dissension and prevented a decision from being taken, which occurred in the case of Castlecomer. Initially it seems ironic that Callan, which was to the fore in terms of the military campaign against British Rule, should have one of the worst records in relation to the political aspect. However, the two were linked. Many of the members of both Callan councils were either ‘on the run’ or in jail for IRA activities. This meant that the council meetings were usually held without these ‘die-hards’ in attendance and so less devoted members made up the majority.²⁶² This was another reason why some councils appear not to have been fully supportive of the Dáil LGB.

The final reason for the bureaucratic foot-dragging on the part of the Councils was centred on money, specifically the receiving of grants from the British LGB. This was the main reason Kilkenny County Council did not fully sever links until June 1921. Sinn Féin relied on Labour for its majority on the County Council. When the pressure was on to respond to the Dáil LGB, labour councillor Alderman Upton stated that the BLGB ‘owe us some money’. He also said that the council ‘were defending malicious injury claims in the courts’ and so would require as much money as possible. The majority of the Council eventually relented and agreed to sever its connection as the money did not seem forthcoming, and also presumably because of mild embarrassment as they were one of the last ‘public bodies in the county’ to do so.²⁶³ In March 1921, during a speech in Dáil Éireann, Kevin O’Higgins, the Assistant Minister for Local Government, used the news that Kilkenny County Council had

²⁶¹ NAI DELG 14/2 and DELG 14/14

²⁶² BMH WS 980 (Edward J. Aylward)

²⁶³ *Kilkenny Journal*, 25 June 1921

finally ‘decided to break’ with the BLGB to emphasise the achievements of his Department that month.²⁶⁴

After declaring allegiance to Dáil Éireann, the guardians of the Callan Union ‘got the bright idea’ to recommence communication with the British LGB at the beginning of 1921 as they were ‘short of money’.²⁶⁵ The Dáil LGB had to write to them as late as September 1921 to remind them they had ‘definitively declared their allegiance to Dáil Éireann.’²⁶⁶ Callan District Council, which had a number of overlapping members with Callan Union Council, was equally unresponsive to instructions to break with the BLGB, and after submitting its records for audit in late 1920, was visited by the IRA who ‘carried away their books’.²⁶⁷

Although Castlecomer Rural District and Union Council initiated contact with the Dáil LGB at an early date, they too had council members who only gave nominal support to Dáil Éireann. There was a long running saga with regards to Denis O’Carroll who was the clerk of both the Union and the Rural District Councils in Castlecomer. He was determined to keep both the British and Dáil Éireann LGB’s on side. He was supported by other members of the council including the Unionist wife of Captain Wandesforde, the largest landowner in the area. After Dáil Éireann decreed that all district Magistrates should resign, he sent a letter to William T. Cosgrave asking him was it necessary to follow his own council’s resolution and resign his position as Justice of the Peace. O’Carroll received a curt response from Cosgrave, which was perhaps not aided by O’Carroll referring to him as ‘Mr Cosgrave MP’:

*‘I have to state that for those who accept the will of the nation there should be no necessity for the occasion of such a resolution. It is fairly obvious that an Irishman cannot serve two masters’.*²⁶⁸

O’Carroll did not follow Cosgrave’s advice of ‘not serving two masters’ as, somewhat unusually, over the following months he sent the minutes of the Council meetings to both the British LGB and the Dáil LGB, while also reading and actioning communications from both Boards. In October 1920, O’Carroll allowed the British LGB official to audit the books. However, members of the IRA intervened and escorted the auditor from the premises while

²⁶⁴ Kevin O’Higgins, ‘Debate on Reports, Department of Local Government’. 11 March 1921. Dáil Éireann Debate Vol:F No:20

²⁶⁵ NAI DELG 14/1. ‘RE: Callan Union’, Letter to Dáil LGB from J. Henderson, 13 October 1921.

²⁶⁶ NAI DELG 14/1. Letter to the Clerk Callan Union from Dáil LGB, 20 September 1921.

²⁶⁷ NA CO 904/113 November 1920

²⁶⁸ NAI DELG 14/5. Letter from Minister of Local Government to Denis O’Carroll, 9 September 1920

also taking the ‘accounting books’ with them.²⁶⁹ O’Carroll also soured relations with the board of Thomastown Union when he used the absence of these account books as a reason not to pay the Union for a number of children they had boarded there.²⁷⁰

A meeting of Castlecomer District Council was again raided in February 1921, this time by British Crown Forces, where documents sent from Dáil Éireann were removed.²⁷¹ The Crown Forces again raided the council meeting the following month, with board members complaining of intimidation by the military as one of the soldiers feigned throwing grenades.²⁷² It later transpired that O’Carroll had been informing the Crown Forces of the time and location of the meetings. The Authorities hoped that two council members who were ‘on the run’ at the time would be present at these meetings so they could arrest them. The Dáil LGB sent an Inspector to investigate the Castlecomer district and his report stated that ‘O’Carroll must be dismissed’.²⁷³ The council did not follow these instructions and allowed O’Carroll to instead resign his position earning a strong rebuke from Kevin O’Higgins. O’Higgins was indignant that the ‘Board professedly loyal to the Republic did not even dismiss him [O’Carroll] but accepted his resignation thereby acknowledging his rights to a pension’. He finished by saying that ‘the failure of the Board to form any conception of the man’s offence gives one a very poor idea of the political convictions of the members’.²⁷⁴ A week after the Truce, the new clerk of the Council, George O’Dwyer who had previously been on the run, ‘had the great pleasure’ in signing the resolution which dismissed O’Carroll.²⁷⁵ Some months later an order was sent from the British LGB awarding O’Carroll a pension of £145 per annum which the Council duly directed to be ‘burned’.²⁷⁶

The Kilkenny Union and the Rural District Council were still sending their minutes to the British LGB in November 1920. The Dáil LGB then wrote looking for a ‘plain statement’ as to whether the council were going to ‘act in common with all the Local Authorities outside North East Ulster’ and adhere to instructions by only submitting to the Dáil LGB.²⁷⁷ They

²⁶⁹ NAI DELG 14/5. Minutes of Castlecomer Board of Guardians, 3 November 1920

²⁷⁰ NAI DELG 14/9. Minutes of Thomastown Board of Guardians, 13 November 1920

²⁷¹ NAI DELG 14/5. Minutes of Castlecomer Rural District Council, 7 February 1921

²⁷² *Kilkenny Journal*, 26 March 1921

²⁷³ NAI DELG 14/4. Chief of Inspection, Castlecomer Report, 27 April 1921

²⁷⁴ NAI DELG 14/4. Letter from Kevin O’Higgins to Chief of Inspection, 8 April 1921

²⁷⁵ NAI DELG 14/4. Minutes of a joint meeting of Castlecomer Board of Guardians and Rural District Council held on 18/7/1921, 22 July 1921

²⁷⁶ NAI DELG 14/4. Minutes of Castlecomer Rural District Council held on 5 December 1921

²⁷⁷ NAI DELG 14/6. Letter from Dáil Éireann Local Government Board to Kilkenny PLU, 6 December 1920

eventually acceded to ‘severing all relations’ with the British LGB in May 1921, with two Independent councillors dissenting.²⁷⁸

Urlingford Rural District and Union Council decided to allow the British LGB to audit its accounts in January 1921. They justified this action by pointing to the example of Kilkenny County Council which had its books audited, and also to the fact that ‘a considerable part of the expenditure’ had occurred under ‘the term of the old board’.²⁷⁹ The following month its offices were accordingly raided by the IRA and its record books taken. To perhaps demonstrate the ambiguity that existed at the time, the Council reported the matter to the RIC,²⁸⁰ even though there were seven Sinn Féin members on the local council.²⁸¹

Work of Local Government - Priorities

The social and economic realities of daily life dominated the correspondence between Kilkenny local authorities and the Department of Local Government. In April 1921 for instance, just as the military campaign was reaching its epoch in Kilkenny, the clerk of Thomastown Union was writing to the Dáil LGB requesting permission for the master of the workhouse to keep a pony on site. In further correspondence in June 1921 a map of the purposed location of the stable was sent.²⁸² The war was having a negative effect on the Thomastown Union Workhouse and Hospital in a number of ways. In December 1920 parts of the complex, including the Fever Hospital, were taken over by the military.²⁸³ In January 1921 the Auxiliaries based in Thomastown ‘commandeered the provision store and took away 50lbs of bread’ without payment. In the same month, two Auxiliaries were admitted to the hospital but their subsequent bill of £6 also remained unpaid.²⁸⁴

One exception to the various degrees of disagreement in the various councils was the order by the Dáil LGB to establish ‘Belfast Boycott’ Committees.²⁸⁵ This was a ban on the selling of Belfast produced goods in support of Catholics and Nationalist Protestants who had been expelled from their employment there. The sectarian element was a major factor in the widespread support from the Councils with many denouncing the ‘Belfast pogrom’ and the

²⁷⁸ NAI DELG 14/6. Minutes of Kilkenny PLU Meeting, 3 May 1921

²⁷⁹ NAI DELG 14/11. Minutes of Urlingford PLU Meeting, 15 January 1921

²⁸⁰ NAI DELG 14/11. Minutes of Urlingford PLU Meeting, 12 February 1921

²⁸¹ *Freemans Journal*, 10 June 1920

²⁸² NAI DELG 14/9. Letter to from Clerk of Thomastown Union to Minister of Local Government, 13 June 1921

²⁸³ NAI DELG 14/9. Minutes of Thomastown PLU Meeting, 17 December 1920

²⁸⁴ NAI DELG 14/9. Minutes of Thomastown PLU Meeting, 5 February 1921

²⁸⁵ NAI DELG 14/13. Minutes of Waterford Rural District Meeting, 30 October 1920

‘imposition of religious and political tests as a condition of industrial employment’.²⁸⁶ In Thomastown, the whole Belfast Boycott committee was arrested, including the chairman who was the local curate. They were charged on grounds of being ‘the authors of a conspiracy for the destruction of Belfast goods’, in reference to an attack on a storage depot in the local railway station.²⁸⁷ The local media gave widespread attention to the problems occurring in Belfast, and in October 1920, Kilkenny City Hall held a public meeting to discuss the unrest there.²⁸⁸ The IRA played its part also which mainly involved raiding trains or rail stores, as occurred in south Kilkenny where a consignment of goods from Belfast ‘were burned at Ballyhale railway station’.²⁸⁹ Some self-interest was also evident however. Richard Smithwick whose family owned the Smithwick’s Brewery in Kilkenny City wrote to the Council to insist on the addition of ‘Bass Ale’ to the list of boycotted products.²⁹⁰

The most noticeable aspect of Local Government in Kilkenny was the sheer volume of the correspondence and wide range of subject matters that the local authorities dealt with. Members concerned themselves with topics including rent collection and arrears, healthcare needs of children, ‘illegitimate’ babies in the workhouses and farm inspections. Ironically, a lot of time was taken over by claims for compensation that were as a direct effect of the parallel war that was taking place, such as personal injury claims, damaged telegraph wires and roadways that were dug up.

Although all Kilkenny councils were technically Sinn Féin majority councils, this allegiance varied greatly from district to district, and sympathy of the councils to these acts of destruction were often superseded by a desire to save money. The records also clearly highlight that during this time of military struggle, ordinary life continued unabated in many respects. For example, on the same week that the first successful IRA ambush took place in the south of the county near Mooncoin, the local sanitary officer informed the council that the local pump was out of order in that village and would require ‘immediate attention’.²⁹¹

Kilkenny Rural District Council No 2, which came under the remit of Waterford City, highlighted its priorities in June 1921 when it requested sanction for the payment of bonuses to its staff, which elicited the following response from the Dáil Éireann LGB:

²⁸⁶ NAI DELG 14/13. Minutes of Waterford Rural District Council No 2 (Co Kilkenny), 25 September 1920

²⁸⁷ NA CO 904/115, May 1921

²⁸⁸ *Kilkenny Journal*, 20 October 1920

²⁸⁹ Marilyn Silverman and P.H. Gulliver, *In the Valley of the Nore* (Dublin, 1986), p. 187

²⁹⁰ NAI DELG 14/15. Letter from Minister of Local Government to R.H. Smithwick, 10 November 1921

²⁹¹ NAI DELG 14/13. Minutes of Waterford Rural District Meeting, 25 June 1921

*In regard to the proposal of the Council to grant bonuses to the Clerk and two sanitary sub-officers...in view of the present financial difficulties of Local Authorities they feel compelled to defer giving a decision in this matter until conditions become normal.*²⁹²

²⁹² NAI DELG 14/13. Letter from the Minister for Local Government to the Clerk of Waterford No2 Rural District Council, 9 July 1921

Chapter 4: Life for the Ordinary People

*'There is a virgin page in the book of life before us today, and what story 1919 will see written on that page no man can in the least foretell...The one thing absolutely beyond doubt is that the New Year will mark one of the most momentous...of periods in human happenings'*²⁹³ -Kilkenny Journal Editorial January 1919



*View from Patrick Street towards Rose Inn Street Kilkenny City in the early twentieth century.*²⁹⁴

Although focus on the War of Independence era has generally centred on the political and military spheres, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the period it is important to recognise the experiences of the general populace in County Kilkenny. It is difficult to believe that anyone escaped the conflict completely unscathed. This chapter will look at the lives of the non-combatants to attempt to understand what life was like for them during these defining years.

²⁹³ *Kilkenny Journal*, 4 January 1919

²⁹⁴ *National Library of Ireland*, Lawrence Photographic Collection, *Bank of Ireland and Parade, Kilkenny City, Co. Kilkenny*. Ref: 18651914.

1919-1920

During the month of the ‘official’ beginning of the War of Independence in January 1919, County Kilkenny was still experiencing the euphoria of the general election just a few weeks previously, when Sinn Féin candidates were elected to represent the two Kilkenny constituencies.²⁹⁵ Large meetings were held on the Parade in Kilkenny City to celebrate the victory of the candidates, while also demanding the release of ‘the men and women of Ireland who were kidnapped out of the country’, in reference to the German Plot arrests of the previous May.²⁹⁶ The air of confidence continued into May 1919, when William T. Cosgrave, the recently elected TD for North Kilkenny and ‘true-souled patriot’,²⁹⁷ received the Freedom of Kilkenny City in front of a large crowd.²⁹⁸ When four members of the Thomastown Sinn Féin club were arrested for collecting money for the republican cause before Sunday mass, large crowds turned out to protest at the local RIC station.²⁹⁹ During the ensuing court case, a baton charge was launched by the RIC against the crowds, which caused widespread anger locally.³⁰⁰ The direct result of this action was an increase in support for Sinn Féin in terms of the membership in Thomastown, and subscriptions to Dáil Loan Fund.³⁰¹

Labour ‘strife’ affected many parts of Ireland during 1919, and Kilkenny was no exception, although strikes were not as pronounced as in other parts of Ireland.³⁰² The ITGWU was the largest union in the county with an estimated 4,200 members.³⁰³ In March, the pro-labour *Kilkenny Journal* newspaper reported that the largest labour demonstration ‘in the past 30 years’ assembled on the Parade in the City. The owner of the *Kilkenny Journal*, James Upton, was a Labour councillor and devoted many of his editorials to the labour cause. The protest, which included ‘Corporation employees, Printers and Transport Union workers’, gathered in support of the clerical workers of Mr Statham & Co Motor Dealers, who would not recognise the Clerical Workers Union.³⁰⁴ In May, the employees of the Kilkenny Woodworkers Factory followed suit when they went on strike, demanding higher wages.³⁰⁵ Some of the criminal

²⁹⁵ *Kilkenny Journal*, 4 January 1919

²⁹⁶ *Irish Independent*, 7 January 1919

²⁹⁷ *Kilkenny Journal*, 15 March 1919

²⁹⁸ *Irish Independent*, 27 May 1919

²⁹⁹ *Freemans Journal*, 11 June 1919

³⁰⁰ *Kilkenny Journal*, 5 July 1919.

³⁰¹ Maher, *In the Shade of Slievenamon* (Dublin, 2015), pp 58-9

³⁰² Arthur Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government in Ireland: Dáil Éireann, 1919-22* (Dublin, 1995), p.44

³⁰³ NA CO 904/110, Sep 1919

³⁰⁴ *Kilkenny Journal*, 29 March 1919

³⁰⁵ *Kilkenny Journal*, 14 May 1919

offences that occurred during the year were attributed to strikes, including the burning of 60 tons of hay in Loughbrack which was blamed on the Agricultural Labourers strike.³⁰⁶

According to the local Catholic clergy, the military were making a nuisance of themselves in an unusual way during the summer months of 1919. 'In all the city churches' attention was drawn to the 'degrading practice of mixed bathing' in the local river, with the chief culprits being the 'contemptible snobs' of the 'Army of Occupation'.³⁰⁷

Attention of the general public also turned to matters non-political during the summer months of 1919 following the horrific death of an eleven-year-old girl named Bridie O'Brien from Kilkenny City. What at first seemed like a death from natural causes was soon upgraded to a murder investigation following an autopsy which suggested she died from 'shock and injuries due to violation'.³⁰⁸ A 66-year-old man, who was a neighbour of the deceased, was found guilty of her manslaughter with the court case making for grim headlines, both locally and nationally.³⁰⁹

Highlighting the lack of up-to-date police intelligence, in September 1919 the Kilkenny RIC once again arrested those they considered to be the chief protagonists in Sinn Féin circles, namely James Nowlan, President of the GAA, and E.T. Keane editor of the *Kilkenny People*. For the second time in two years the *Kilkenny People* was shutdown, with its printing press being confiscated.³¹⁰ The charges against the men were for the unauthorised possession of fire arms, with both stating that they had them for legitimate purposes. Underlining their lack of militant credentials, both men recognised the court and Nowlan actually called on a Military Corporal acquaintance as a witness.³¹¹ The fact they recognised the court was a good result for the District Inspector who stated in November that these two men were now the 'object of public ridicule' and 'fallen angels', for going against the principles they had preached.³¹² In reality Nowlan and Keane had no direct involvement in militant circles at the time, although Keane's *Kilkenny People* was entirely supportive of the Sinn Féin cause.

Amateur dramatics did not escape the upheaval. A production of the play 'The Parnellite' by the Kilkenny City branch of the Gaelic League on Saint Patrick's night 1920 was prohibited.

³⁰⁶ NA CO 904/110, Nov 1919

³⁰⁷ *Kilkenny Journal*, 27 August 1919

³⁰⁸ *Kilkenny Journal*, 14 May 1919

³⁰⁹ *Cork Examiner*, 24 July 1919

³¹⁰ *Cork Examiner*, 13 August 1919

³¹¹ *Freemans Journal*, 9 October 1919

³¹² NA CO 904/110, Nov 1919

The orders were signed by Major General Strickland and stated that the holding of the play would give ‘rise to grave disorder’.³¹³ The military gained possession of the Empire Theatre before the stated time of the performance. Subsequently, a baton charge was ordered and shots were fired to disperse the crowd, resulting in a number of people being injured in the rush and ‘trampled on’.³¹⁴

A large Feis was held in Kilkenny in June 1920 where the Lord Mayor of Cork, Terence MacSwiney, made a speech,³¹⁵ in front of an estimated crowd of 10,000 people.³¹⁶ When he died, just four months later, there were memorial masses held in many Kilkenny churches. The local newspapers dedicated entire front pages to his life and passing, and encased all the headings and columns in black lines for mourning.³¹⁷ Even in the early stages of the hunger strike, Thomastown District Council suspended its monthly meeting in support of MacSwiney and passed a resolution condemning ‘the barbarous treatment meted out to our distinguished fellow countryman’.³¹⁸

The Archbishop of Adelaide, Dr Robert Spence, was presented with the Freedom of Kilkenny City in August 1920. In a provocative speech he declared that ‘Ireland had found her soul in 1916’. In reference to the turmoil and hunger strikes that were ongoing at the time, he referred to Lloyd George as the ‘little Welsh Prime Minister’ and using Australian slang accused him of having ‘gone completely off his nut’.³¹⁹ The attitude of the local Catholic Church hierarchy in Kilkenny was very different. In particular the 85-year-old Catholic Bishop of Ossory Rev Abraham Brownrigg who was strongly against the IRA and the Sinn Féin movement in general. Bishop Brownrigg had supported enlistment in the British Army at the beginning of the Great War,³²⁰ and during the 1918 general election campaign wrote an open letter to the national newspapers declaring his support for ‘constitutionalism’ and endorsing the IPP candidates in Kilkenny.³²¹ In a strongly worded letter read at masses on Christmas Day 1920, he gave thanks for ‘the forbearance under provocation which the people of this city [Kilkenny] and, indeed of the diocese generally, have shown’. He leaves little

³¹³ *Kilkenny People*, 20 March 1920

³¹⁴ *Irish Independent*, 19 March 1920

³¹⁵ *Kilkenny Journal*, 30 June 1920

³¹⁶ NA CO 904/112, June 1920

³¹⁷ *Kilkenny Journal*, 30 October 1920

³¹⁸ NAI DELG 14/10. Minutes of Thomastown District Council Meeting, 27 August 1920

³¹⁹ *Irish Independent*, 20 August 1920

³²⁰ C. J. Woods, ‘Abraham Brownrigg’ in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, eds James McGuire, James Quinn. (Cambridge, 2009)

³²¹ *Freemans Journal*, 28 November 1918

doubt as to his opinion of events enveloping the country; ‘let us pray also for the cruel men, who direct their present regime of death and destruction on our county, asking God to open their eyes to the wrong they do our people’.³²²

Similar to the rest of Ireland, there were many stories of the distress and damage caused to ordinary families by military raids. One of the more unusual raids was on the largest secondary school in the County, St Kieran’s College in Kilkenny City. The ‘sleeping rooms and private apartments’ of the students and priests were ‘thoroughly searched’, although the motivation behind the raid is unclear.³²³

John O’Carroll, an engineer in Thomastown District Council, suffered an immense upheaval in December 1920, when the house he and his family were renting was ‘commandeered by Major General Strickland for the use of a policeman’s wife’. O’Carroll was subsequently arrested for protesting against this and detained for over a month in Auxiliary headquarters and he was also used as a hostage on their patrols. His wife and two children, aged three and six months, had to live with her parents in another village. A year later O’Carroll was still between homes as he could not secure his previous home or afford an increase in rent.³²⁴

Lawless Law Enforcers

The arrival of Military Regiments, Auxiliaries and Black and Tans into Kilkenny in the summer of 1920 was supposed to benefit the people of the county with the restoration of law and order. District Inspector Whyte had high hopes for the new recruits:

*‘An Auxiliary force of 100 men formed a post at Inistioge. It is hoped good will come from them. In any case it will give Independent and loyal people a chance of freedom.’*³²⁵

The opposite of what DI Whyte had hoped actually occurred. In one of the earliest histories of this period, an infamous event that happened in Kilkenny was recounted. In Frank Pakenham’s *Peace by Ordeal*, originally published in 1935, he states the following:

*‘But they [the Auxiliaries] did not always operate in uniform, and sometimes, as when they visited Kilkenny post-office, they blacked their faces and put on masks and afterwards called Heaven to witness the sneaking vileness of Sinn Féin.’*³²⁶

³²² *Kilkenny People*, 1 January 1921

³²³ *Irish Independent*, 12 October 1920

³²⁴ NAI DELG 14/15. Letter from John O’Carroll to W.T. Cosgrave, 19 December 1921

³²⁵ NA CO 904/112, Aug 1920

Pakenham was referring to an incident that occurred on 11 September 1920, when a number of Auxiliaries, dressed to resemble IRA Volunteers, stole 11 bags of mail at gun point from the Kilkenny Post Office yard.³²⁷ The mail was brought to Auxiliary headquarters in Woodstock, Inistioge where an unknown quantity of money was taken from the letters. The identity of the perpetrators only became public knowledge after the Commander of the Auxiliaries in Ireland, Brigadier-General Frank Crozier, reported the matter after his resignation in February 1921.³²⁸ The Auxiliaries had only arrived in County Kilkenny a few weeks before the robbery.

What was even more unusual about the incident was the fact that the main instigator was an army Major, Ewen Cameron Bruce, who was surreptitiously dismissed after the Kilkenny raid. There was a strange follow up however. On 11 October 1920 Major Bruce, along with his nephew and an RIC Constable, committed another larceny. Their target on this occasion was the home of the creamery manager in the village of Kells, 10 miles south of Kilkenny City.³²⁹ In the subsequent court case, the creamery manager said he was awoken at 2am with shouts of; ‘Come down and open the door immediately. We are the Black and Tans’. Upon opening the door, he was ordered to put out the lights, presumably as not to identify their faces and also Major Bruce’s distinctive characteristic of a missing arm, which he had lost in World War I. The keys of the safe were demanded with the result that £75 was stolen.³³⁰ The incident was later discussed in the House of Commons, with the supposed ‘cover-up’ being the main talking point. Belfast MP Joe Devlin challenged the Chief Secretary for Ireland, Sir Hamar Greenwood, on the matter. An Intelligence Officer based in Kilkenny military barracks had ordered the local Press not to report on the evidence given at the initial trial. Greenwood defended the press censorship, stating it was the correct procedure at the time.³³¹

Members of the British Crown Forces were on trial again a few months later, this time as a result of a looting spree on the night of 27 February 1921. Five Black and Tans, who ‘had drink taken’, captured three local men at gun point whom they held as hostages. They used the local knowledge of the men to point out certain homes on Kings Street in Kilkenny City.

³²⁶ Frank Pakenham Earl of Longford, *Peace by Ordeal: The Negotiation of the Anglo-Irish Treaty 1921* (London, 1992), p.54

³²⁷ *Sunday Independent*, 12 September 1920

³²⁸ House of Commons Debates, 2 June 1921, ‘General Crozier’. Sir Hamar Greenwood in response to a question from Mr Frank Briant MP. vol:142 cc:1214-8

³²⁹ BMH WS 1,614(Timothy Hennessey)

³³⁰ *Irish Independent*, 23 December 1920

³³¹ House of Commons Debates, 18 November 1920, ‘Larceny Charge Kilkenny’. Sir Hamar Greenwood in response to a question from Mr Joe Devlin MP. 1920, vol:134 cc:2063-4

They subsequently went to one of the men's boarding houses and stole money from his landlady.³³² There were problems also within the confines of their barracks. In April 1921 the Black and Tan constable who was in charge of a canteen in the station absconded with £100, although he was arrested trying to board a ferry to Holyhead the following day.³³³

Civilian Deaths in Kilkenny

From the analysis of all available evidence, the total number of civilian fatalities that occurred in Kilkenny during the War of Independence was four. The civilian deaths occurred between December 1920 and April 1921. The only woman to die in Kilkenny during the troubles was the first civilian fatality. Her killing was connected to the death of Constable Thomas Walsh in the aftermath of the Ninemilehouse Ambush, discussed in chapter two. Constable Walsh's funeral was due to pass through Callan on 21 December 1920, the day following his death.³³⁴ All businesses were told to close and civilians to stay indoors during the funeral procession. Margaret Ryan, who ran a grocery store and public house with her husband Michael, had allowed a customer in 'for a jug of milk'. When she opened the door to leave the customer out, the cortege was passing and a shot was fired from a Crossly Tender of Black and Tans. Mrs Ryan was badly wounded and taken to the Callan Workhouse, which also acted as a hospital. She died there a few days later on Christmas Eve.³³⁵ She was 36 years old. Her death certificate stated she died from an infection 'following perforation of [the] bowel by a bullet wound'.³³⁶ Family sources afterward also stated that Margaret Ryan was pregnant at the time of her death.³³⁷ The Ryan's were not Sinn Féin sympathisers, and the Crown Forces had frequented their public house on a number of occasions. The subsequent military inquiry could not identify the person who fired the bullet that killed Mrs Ryan but the 'RIC and Military called on the relatives and sent tokens of sympathy'.³³⁸

Thomas Dollard was caught in the crossfire of the botched Friary Street Ambush of 21 February 1921. He had gone to the Friary church on his morning break from his employment in the Corporation. Upon leaving the church he saw the two IRA men, Thomas Hennessy and Michael Dermody, attacking two military officers at the rear of a convoy and he ran.³³⁹ Two

³³² *Freemans Journal*, 24 March 1921. *Irish Independent*, 24 March 1921

³³³ NA CO 904/115, April 1921

³³⁴ *Cork Examiner*, 28 December 1920

³³⁵ *Kilkenny Journal*, 29 December 1920

³³⁶ General Register Office. Index Reference: Margaret Ryan, Oct-Dec 1920, Callan, Volume:4, Page: 276

³³⁷ Maher, *The Flying Column*, (Dublin, 1987), p.61

³³⁸ NA CO 904/113, Dec 1920

³³⁹ *Freemans Journal*, 22 February 1921

other British soldiers opened fire on the IRA men and it was one of these bullets that is said to have hit Thomas Dollard, having ricocheted off the wall.³⁴⁰ The British at first suspected Dollard of being an IRA member until one of the Capuchin Friars informed them differently when giving Dollard the last rites. Thomas Dollard was 36-years-old when he died, leaving a family of five children, ranging in age from fifteen years to six months.³⁴¹ This failed ambush earned a strong reaction from Bishop Brownrigg. In a letter read at ‘all the masses’ the following Sunday, he declared that he was ‘mainly concerned with the moral aspects of the case’, and stated that he could not ‘find words strong enough to condemn the folly and the crime’.³⁴²

It was a similar case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time for 23-year-old James Hoban, from Mullinavat. He was not a member of Sinn Féin or the local IRA Company. On the 19 April 1921 he was in the village of Mullinavat selling pigs. A large military presence was positioned outside Mullinavat RIC Barracks as General Strickland, who was in charge of the military in Munster, Kilkenny and Wexford, was visiting the Barracks. Around 12 noon, bullets were fired from the turret of a Rolls Royce armoured car. Hoban, who was 70 yards down the street, fell wounded. He died later that evening. In a subsequent court martial the soldier in charge of the weapon was found not guilty of his death, as the ‘fuse spring was too light’ on the gun, and it was therefore considered an accidental killing.³⁴³

Just two days later, another unfortunate incident occurred, this time in the far north of the county near the village of Ballyragget. Thomas Phelan, who was 17 years old, had left his house in the townland of Oldtown to buy a newspaper. Upon his return he saw a number of Black and Tans on the roadway near his home. He ran through the fields at which point he was ordered to halt.³⁴⁴ He failed to stop and was subsequently fired upon by the soldiers, dying from this wounds a few minutes later.³⁴⁵ He was the youngest of four children, and his father had died when he was only a few years old.³⁴⁶ A military inquiry was held after his death, with the findings recorded in his death certificate which stated that he died from ‘shock and haemorrhage caused by [a] gunshot wound fired by the military in the execution of their

³⁴⁰ *Kilkenny People*, 26 February 1921

³⁴¹ Maher, *In the Shade of Slievenamon* (Dublin, 2015), pp 301-02

³⁴² *Irish Times*, 28 February 1921

³⁴³ *Cork Examiner*, 28 April 1921

³⁴⁴ NA CO 904/115, April 1921

³⁴⁵ *Kilkenny People*, 30 April 1921

³⁴⁶ NAI, 1901/1911 Census. District: Ballyragget, Barony: Fassadinin, Townland: Oldtown.

duty'.³⁴⁷ (Appendix A lists all deaths, both civilian and combatant, attributed to War of Independence activities in Kilkenny)

1921 – Martial Law for Kilkenny Inhabitants

Aside from the civilian tragedies and military indiscipline, when martial law was introduced at the beginning of 1921 everyday life for the inhabitants of the county was being affected in a myriad of ways, ranging in scale from the irritating to the traumatic. Curfews were implemented in many towns and districts. Military raids became even more commonplace throughout the county. It was the immediate, as well as the extended family of IRA members who bore the brunt of these raids. Even owning a prayer book written in the Irish language could cause unwanted attention.³⁴⁸ The weekly excursion to Sunday mass could be interrupted, as occurred in Piltown, where the entire congregation 'including women', were searched upon leaving.³⁴⁹ Many roads in the county became impassable due to constant trenching by the IRA to impede the progress of the Crown Forces, and also by the destruction of bridges for the same purpose.³⁵⁰ Many law-abiding business people were caught in an unenviable position. If they offered their services to members of the Crown Forces they received threatening letters from the local IRA and if they did not serve the Forces they were liable to unwanted attention from them also.³⁵¹ In some instances there was nothing businesses could do to protect themselves, such as a number of public houses in Kilmanagh where Black and Tans arrived and drank 'till they were satisfied' before turning their 'attention to the tills which they emptied'.³⁵² The local magistrates, under the British administration, heard numerous cases and complaints relating to the behaviour of the Crown Forces. Kilkenny magistrate P.D. O'Sullivan complained to Dublin Castle about the 'behaviour of the soldiers in Kilmaganny',³⁵³ while also criticising the 'conduct of DI White (sic) at Freshford police station'.³⁵⁴

The playing of GAA matches were severely curtailed during the period. Hurling was extremely popular in all parts of the county. The Kilkenny senior hurling team had recently

³⁴⁷ General Register Office. Index Reference: Thomas Phelan, Apr-Jun 1921, Castlecomer, Volume:3, Page: 297

³⁴⁸ NLI, MS 22,116, J.J. O'Connell Papers. 'Typescript Statement concerning activities in Glenmore, Co Kilkenny during the War of Independence and the Civil War'. Statement by Michael Heffernan

³⁴⁹ *Cork Examiner*, 11 May 1921

³⁵⁰ NA CO 904/115, April 1921

³⁵¹ NA CO 904/112, July and August 1921

³⁵² *Kilkenny Journal*, 2 October 1920

³⁵³ CSORP, January 1921, CSORP/CR/331/21661. 'Kilmaganny PS, falling through of licensing sessions, behaviour of soldiers'.

³⁵⁴ CSORP, CR/331/22128 January 1921. 'Conduct of D.I. White at Freshford police station'.

completed their first ‘golden era’ winning seven All-Irelands between 1904 and 1913.³⁵⁵ Matches were banned under martial law in 1921; however disruption occurred over a number of years due to the political climate. The most significant consequence was that no hurling or football championships were played in the county between 1920 and 1922.³⁵⁶

The funerals of known IRA victims came in for particular attention from Authorities. The Republican tricolour flags placed on the coffins of Nicholas Mullins and Pat Walsh, who died in Coolbawn and Knocknagress respectively, were unceremoniously stripped from the coffin by the military.³⁵⁷ At Pat Walsh’s funeral in Dunnamaggin, ‘no more than 40 people were allowed to follow the funeral to the graveyard’ on the orders of the Military officer present.³⁵⁸ Crown Forces also turned out in large numbers in Glenmore for the funeral of Seán Hartley, who was killed in the Coolbawn Ambush on the 18 June 1921. One local woman, who was present at the funeral, described the events of that day:

*I was searched at the Chapel gate as I went in [by the Auxiliaries and Black and Tans]. One man...ordered me to put up my hands and to open my shawl...The Black and Tans were in the porch [of the chapel] as I entered. They stood around the coffin in the chapel. They did not take off their caps...they were using violent language. Their conduct during the service was not becoming...There was a glass panel at the side of the coffin. As the people tried to look in at the corpse, the Black and Tans made remarks such as, ‘Who do you want to see?’ and pushed the slide back’.*³⁵⁹

In April 1921, Glenmore, Glenpipe and Mullinavat creameries, along with satellite creameries, were compulsorily closed down by the RIC. This decision had huge implications for the primarily agricultural economy of the whole southeast area of the county. The Chief Secretary, Sir Hamar Greenwood, had to defend the closures in the House of Commons. He highlighted his ignorance of the situation by comparing the area to Bansha in County Tipperary, around 80kms away, where a constable had been killed ‘prior to the closing of the creamery’.³⁶⁰ It is difficult to understand the logic behind the closures as no ambushes or fatalities had taken place up to that point in this area, and moreover it did not affect the IRA directly. The same action was taken with Tullaroan and Kilmanagh creameries following the

³⁵⁵ Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan and Paul Rouse, *The GAA – A Peoples History* (Cork, 2009), p.43

³⁵⁶ Dermot Kavanagh, *A History, Kilkenny Senior Hurling County Finals 1887-2003* (Kilkenny, 2004), p.103

³⁵⁷ *Kilkenny Journal*, 28 May 1921

³⁵⁸ *Kilkenny People*, 28 May 1921

³⁵⁹ NLI, MS 22,116, J.J. O’Connell Papers. ‘Activities in Glenmore...’, Statement by Mrs Ellen Cassin.

³⁶⁰ House of Commons Debates, 1 June 1921, ‘*Military Operations*’. Sir Hamar Greenwood in response to a question from Lieutenant-Commander Kenworthy MP. vol:142 cc:1042-5

execution of two informers by the IRA in that area in May 1921.³⁶¹ DI Whyte had a different opinion however, stating that ‘the closing of these creameries will, I believe, have an excellent effect...They affect very much the farmers who are the backbone of the IRA’.³⁶² This was not an accurate reflection of the situation. As historian Peter Hart noted in his study of IRA members; ‘it was farmers, and large farmers in particular, who held aloof from the struggle or at best were only fair-weather republicans’.³⁶³ From the available evidence, this would also apply to Kilkenny. A large number of middling to small farmers’ sons were members of IRA. However, the strong farmers were, for the most part, not IRA members.³⁶⁴ In any case, the creamery closures would have little effect of the activities of the IRA Battalions, and no direct effect on the Kilkenny ASU’s.

Also in April 1921, a community hall in Kilkenny City, which was owned by the Catholic diocese of Ossory, was destroyed under orders of the Military. The hall had been used as the focal point of an attack on a nearby RIC barracks and this was the pretext given for its destruction.³⁶⁵ However, the hall had been used for Sinn Féin meetings on many occasions, and this was most likely the chief reason for its destruction.³⁶⁶

The parents of Cumann na mBan and IRA Volunteers suffered greatly also. They endured physical punishment, such as the father and brother of Hugginstown IRA member Ned Halloran, who were beaten and shot.³⁶⁷ They also suffered psychologically as in many cases they had very little knowledge of their sons and daughters’ activities and often could not understand their reasons for participating in such dangerous work. In turn they did not know on any given day if their children were going to return home safely. Ellen Cassin, a mother of a Kilkenny IRA member, eloquently described the anguish she suffered during this tumultuous period:

‘I was always worrying about Jimmy – as I was always afraid that these activities would lead to some trouble. The real trouble did not come until the Black and Tans came...During that bad time there were days and nights when I envied the cows and

³⁶¹ *Kilkenny People*, 25 June 1921

³⁶² NA CO 904/115, May 1921

³⁶³ Hart, *The I.R.A. & Its Enemies* (Oxford, 1999), p.143

³⁶⁴ BMH WS 1,093 (Thomas Tracey), BMH WS 980 (Edward J. Aylward), BMH WS 1,335 (James Leahy)

³⁶⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 20 April 1921

³⁶⁶ BMH WS 1,032 (James Lalor)

³⁶⁷ BMH WS 1,705 (Nicholas Carroll)

*horses and chickens and other animals that have none of the worries that were a burden to myself.*³⁶⁸

³⁶⁸ NLI, MS 22,116, J.J. O'Connell Papers. 'Activities in Glenmore...', Statement by Mrs Ellen Cassin

Conclusion



Sinnott's Cross Monument, located near Mooncoin at the site of an ambush which occurred there on the 18 June 1921.³⁶⁹

To return to the initial question: ‘was Kilkenny slack’ when it came to commitment to the republican campaign during the War of Independence? The answer is almost certainly no, but neither was it an especially successful county in terms of its contribution to the political and military conflicts. What is clear, however, is that very few parts of the county escaped untouched by the War of Independence. From Mooncoin in the far south of the county, to Castlecomer in the far north, all lives were affected in some way or other.

With regard to the military aspect, the evidence suggests that there was no shortage of volunteers willing to lay down their lives for a cause that they truly believed in. It could be argued that the IRA in the county lacked a domineering and ruthless leader, in the guise of a Tom Barry (Cork) or Seán MacEoin (Longford), however, it could equally be argued that if Ernie O’Malley’s notebook had not been discovered in December 1920, and key leaders had been allowed to operate unhindered, Kilkenny’s contribution may have been far greater. The

³⁶⁹ Photograph taken by current writer. Sinnott’s Cross is located in Tubrid, near Clogga, Mooncoin, Co Kilkenny.

leaders of the military campaign in Kilkenny also took on a multitude of roles, from IRA commandants, to court judges, to councillors. Although this was not uncommon throughout the country,³⁷⁰ concentration solely on the military campaign would have been beneficial. Some of the military failures came down simply to luck. If the two major planned ambushes by the Kilkenny ASU's, at Ninemilehouse and Coolbawn, had been successful, it is possible that Kilkenny's name in the pantheon of War of Independence histories would have resonated more strongly.

Ironically, the fact that the Kilkenny IRA had an early victory, with the third successful attack/capture of an RIC Barracks in the country, almost certainly had a negative effect on their contribution to the remainder of the War. The immediate consequence was the arrest of the main Brigade leaders, but the subsequent placing of the very first Auxiliary Company in Inistioge in August 1920 placed massive pressure on the IRA campaign.³⁷¹ This prioritisation by the British Authorities in locating the Auxiliaries and a number of military regiments in Kilkenny also had traumatic repercussions for the local populace. This in turn meant that many people would naturally not want to invite trouble to their door, and so not aid the IRA.

As historian Eunan O'Halpin has noted, establishing an accurate figure for fatalities during the revolutionary period 'is a very crude index of the intensity of disruption experienced by people and communities'.³⁷² It also does not take cognisance of the physical and psychological scars that were endured. Although a grim barometer, it does at least highlight to some degree the suffering of the families and extended families that lost loved ones. The available evidence suggests that a total of 22 people were killed in the Kilkenny Brigade area as a direct result of the War of Independence activities. How deaths are defined and attributed has also been an area of debate but the scope used here is fatalities caused as a direct result of shooting by either the IRA or Crown Forces. The deaths include seven Irish combatants, three RIC, two Black and Tans, one Auxiliary, one soldier, four informers and four civilians. This is slightly higher than O'Halpin's own estimate, over a longer period of time, of 19 deaths.³⁷³ All, bar two, of the 22 deaths occurred in the violent seven month period between December 1920 and June 1921. Contradicting the national trend,³⁷⁴ the number of IRA fatalities in Kilkenny was equal to the number of Crown Forces fatalities in the county (the number of

³⁷⁰ Hart, *The I.R.A. & Its Enemies* (Oxford, 1999), p.229

³⁷¹ McKenna, *Guerrilla Warfare* (Jefferson, 2011), p.155

³⁷² Eunan O'Halpin, 'Counting Terror, Bloody Sunday and the Dead of the Irish Revolution' in *Terror in Ireland 1916-1923*, ed. David Fitzpatrick (Dublin, 2012), p.152

³⁷³ O'Halpin, 'Counting Terror' in *Terror in Ireland 1916-1923*, ed. David Fitzpatrick (Dublin, 2012), p.152

³⁷⁴ Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare* (Dublin, 1996), p.180

IRA fatalities in Kilkenny was proportionally higher than the national average - see Appendix A). Nationally the IRA fatalities were substantially lower than the Crown Forces fatalities, highlighting perhaps, some success on the part of the British Authorities in County Kilkenny.

An area that merits further investigation, to gain a more comprehensive understanding, is analysis that would contrast Kilkenny with the other 'weaker' counties that border it, such as Waterford, Wexford, Carlow and Laois. This would give a broader overview of the experiences of neighbouring areas and how Kilkenny fits with regard to these. The fact that there is no overarching publication on the War of Independence in County Kilkenny demonstrates that there are still opportunities for the examination of this period at county level. Historian Peter Hart has ranked the IRA members in Cork in terms of 'Nominal', 'Reliable' and 'Active' Volunteers.³⁷⁵ The prospect of a comparative study regarding County Kilkenny will arise in the very near future with the digital publication of the files of the Military Service Pension Collection. These will give an even more nuanced and clearer understanding of Kilkenny's experiences during this period.

One theme that emerges repeatedly in the witness statement from the Kilkenny combatants is a fundamental belief in the justness and nobility of the republican cause. They were prepared to sacrifice, and did sacrifice much for their beliefs, but they were not one dimensional; nor were their opponents. Evidence of that can be gleaned from the case of Ned Aylward, the leader of the 7th Battalion IRA and corresponding ASU at the time of the Truce. Although he was 'within a week of ordination' to the priesthood before he joined the IRA,³⁷⁶ he was arguably the most ruthless member of the most aggressive Battalion, and certainly participated in the most attacks. During the Truce, however, he actually became friendly with the British Commander of the Crown Forces in Callan over a shared passion for fowling. This was a man who, a few months previously, Aylward had been trying to kill. They stayed in mutual contact until their deaths in the 1970s.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁵ Hart, *The I.R.A. & Its Enemies* (Oxford, 1999), p.228

³⁷⁶ Maher, *In the Shade of Slievenamon* (Dublin, 2015), p.99

³⁷⁷ Maher, *In the Shade of Slievenamon* (Dublin, 2015), p.280

Appendices

Appendix A: List of Fatalities in the Kilkenny Brigade Area

Details of the 22 people that died as a direct result of War of Independence activities in the Kilkenny Brigade (included two Mullinahone deaths):

IRA Fatalities			
Date	Name	Battalion	Details
21 Feb 1921	Thomas Hennessey	1st Battalion	Shot by the Military while attempting to disarm a soldier in Friary Street Kilkenny. The ambush was planned by Hennessey's brother Tim.
	Michael Dermody	1st Battalion	Shot by the Military while attempting to disarm a soldier in Friary Street Kilkenny.
06 Apr 1921	Jackie Brett	7th Battalion	Shot accidentally by a teenager in whose house he was billeting in near Windgap.
13 May 1921	Patrick Walsh	8th Battalion	Fatally wounded in Knocknagress, near Tullaroan while trying to escape from the military. He died some days later.
	Seán Quinn	7th Battalion	Shot dead in Knocknagress, near Tullaroan while trying to escape from the military.
18 Jun 1921	Nicholas Mullins	5th Battalion	Shot dead during an attempted ambush in Coolbawn near Castlecomer.
	Seán Hartley	6th Battalion	Shot dead during an attempted ambush in Coolbawn near Castlecomer.
Total Fatalities = 7			

Civilian Fatalities			
Date	Name	Age	Details
24 Dec 1920	Margaret Ryan	36	Died from wounds suffered two days previously in Callan, following firing from a lorry of Black and Tans.
21 Feb 1921	Thomas Dollard	36	Killed from ricochet bullet fired by the military during the Friary Street ambush.
19 Apr 1921	James Hoban	23	James Hoban was shot accidentally by Crown Forces on the main street in Mullinavat.
21 Apr 1921	Thomas Phelan	17	Shot by the Crown Forces near his home in Oldtown, Ballyragget.
Total Fatalities = 4			

Informer Fatalities			
Date	Name	Age	Details
30 Aug 1920	William Kenny	36	Ex British soldier, executed by drowning in the River Barrow near Graiguenamanagh by the 5th Battalion IRA for informing the military during raids.
05 Jan 1921	Michael Cassidy	35	Shot dead near Castlecomer, most likely by the IRA after he was found guilty of informing. Placard with 'Spies beware' left.
16 May 1921	Martin Dermody	45	Two former soldiers were executed by the IRA near Tullaroan for informing the Crown Forces on the position of a Flying Column, which led to the deaths of Pat Walsh and Seán Quinn.
16 May 1921	Michael O'Keeffe	56	
Total Fatalities = 4			

Crown Forces Fatalities			
Date	Name	Division	Details
10 Mar 1920	Thomas Ryan	RIC	Died following wounds sustained in an attack on Hugginstown RIC Barracks.
20 Dec 1920	Thomas Walsh	RIC	Accidentally shot by a soldier from the Devonshire Regiment, during a search of the area near Callan following an IRA ambush in Ninemilehouse.
12 Mar 1921	Ernest Riley	Black and Tan	Shot by the IRA at Garryricken House, west Kilkenny, during escape of 7th Battalion ASU.
20 Mar 1921	William Campbell	RIC	Shot in Mullinahone by the 7th Battalion ASU.
10 Jun 1921	Leonard James French	Auxiliary	Captured by the 5th Battalion IRA when dressed in civilian clothes on reconnaissance mission at The Rower. Shot dead when trying to escape.
18 Jun 1921	Albert Bradford	Black and Tan	Shot by members of the 9th Battalion IRA during an ambush at Sinnott's Cross, Tubrid, Mooncoin.
10 Jul 1921	Sergt. John W. Reynolds	Military (1st Lincolnshire Regiment)	Shot while on patrol in the village of Mullinahone, Co Tipperary by members the 7th Kilkenny Battalion on the evening before the Truce.
Total Fatalities = 7			

Kilkenny Brigade Vs National Deaths					
	Kilkenny	%	National	%	% Difference
Total Deaths	22	100%	2141	100%	
<i>Civilian (incl informers)</i>	8	36%	898	42%	-6%
<i>IRA</i>	7	32%	467	22%	+10%
<i>RIC/Aux/Black&Tans</i>	6	27%	514	24%	+3%
<i>Military</i>	1	5%	262	12%	-8%

Appendix B: Timeline of Important Events in County Kilkenny during the War of Independence

Timeline		
1919	Feb	Irish Volunteers block hunting parties in east Kilkenny following a decree by Dáil Éireann.
	10 Mar	Peter DeLoughry, new mayor of Kilkenny City, is released from prison along with other 'German Plot' prisoners. 'Jubilant scenes' on their return
	26 May	Local TD William T. Cosgrave receives the Freedom of Kilkenny City
	12 Sep	E.T. Keane, editor of the <i>Kilkenny People</i> , and Alderman James Nowlan, President of the GAA, are arrested on charges of possession of firearms. <i>Kilkenny People</i> newspaper is forced to close for a number of weeks.
1920	15 Jan	Local Urban Elections. Sinn Féin have the majority in Kilkenny with the support of Labour councillors
	09 Mar	Hugginstown RIC Barracks attack. First successful barracks attack in Leinster. Constable Ryan is killed.
	Apr	Burning of over 20 evacuated barracks and courthouses throughout the county.
	May	Republican Courts are established throughout the county. Majority of cases involve larceny of some kind. Republican Police, made up of IRA volunteers, are also set up to aid in the work of the courts.
	06 Jun	Local Rural and County Council Elections. Sinn Féin gain control of all councils, but support for the Dáil Éireann Department of Local Government is sporadic and varies throughout the county.
	25 Aug	'A' Company, Auxiliaries, move into Woodstock House, Inistioge. Auxiliary Headquarters for the south east region.
	30 Aug	William Kenny, an ex-British soldier, is executed by drowning in the River Barrow south of Graiguenamanagh by the 5th Battalion IRA for informing the military during their raids.
	10 Oct	Major Bruce, an Auxiliary platoon Commander, raids the home of the Creamery manager in Kells and steals money. In the previous month Bruce had stolen an 'unknown quantity' of money from Kilkenny Post office and is subsequently dismissed from his position.
	26 Nov	Brigade Commandant Thomas Treacy and Vice Commandant James Lalor are arrested and incarcerated for the remainder of the war.
	08 Dec	IRA leader Ernie O'Malley is captured in Inistioge.
	10 Dec	Large number of arrests following information supplied by O'Malley's notebooks. New Brigade Commandant Peter DeLoughry and a number of Battalion leaders are captured.
	20 Dec	Ninemilehouse Ambush. RIC Constable Thomas Walsh is killed by shots from a party of the Devonshire Regiment.
21 Dec	Margaret Ryan is fatally wounded in Callan during the funeral of Constable Walsh, following firing from a lorry of Black and Tans.	

1921	Jan	George O'Dwyer is elected Kilkenny Brigade Commandant.
	05 Jan	35-year-old Michael Cassidy is taken from his work place and shot dead, most likely by members of the Crown Forces. Placard with 'Spies beware' is attached to his body.
	11 Jan	Martial Law comes into effect throughout County Kilkenny.
	21 Feb	Botched Friary Street Ambush in Kilkenny City. IRA members Michael Dermody and Thomas Hennessy are fatally wounded, while civilian Thomas Dollard is killed in the crossfire.
	12 Mar	Four members of the 7th Battalion ASU manage to shoot their way out of Garryricken House which was surrounded by Crown Forces. Black and Tan Constable Riley is killed.
	20 Mar	Attempt to assassinate the 'Foxy haired Officer', who is in charge of Crown Forces in Mullinahone, by members of the 7th Battalion ASU. Constable Campbell is killed in the resulting altercation.
	06 Apr	7th Battalion IRA member, Jackie Brett, who had played in the infamous Bloody Sunday football match for Tipperary just six months earlier, is accidentally killed.
	13 Apr	Moonarch Ambush by the 7th Battalion ASU, a number of the Crown Forces are wounded.
	19 Apr	23-year-old civilian James Hoban is shot accidentally by Crown Forces on the main street in Mullinavat.
	21 Apr	17-year-old civilian Thomas Phelan is shot by Crown Forces near his home in Oldtown, Ballyragget.
	23 Apr	Joint forces of 7th Battalion ASU and 8th Battalion IRA attempt to ambush a Black and Tan patrol near Piltown. The planned attack is discovered by Authorities and the IRA retreat under heavy fire.
	09 May	Seán Treacy's 3rd Brigade Tipperary ASU joins forces with 7th Battalion ASU in the village of Dunnamaggin making a force of approx 70 men.
	12 May	Combined ASU's take over the village of Kilmanagh, declaring it a 'Military Zone'.
	13 May	7th Battalion ASU members Pat Walsh and Seán Quinn are killed by Crown Forces in Knocknagress, near Tullaroan following the retreat for Kilmanagh. Uskerty Wood Ambush near Castlecomer by the 1st Kilkenny ASU. No serious injuries on either side.
	16 May	Two ex-British Soldiers from Kilmanagh, Martin Dermody and Michael O'Keeffe, are executed by the local IRA for informing the Crown Forces on the position of the IRA a few days previously which lead to deaths of Walsh and Quinn.
	10 Jun	Auxiliary officer French is killed by members of the 5th Battalion IRA, homes and businesses in The Rower are burnt in reprisal.
	18 Jun	1st Kilkenny ASU and 3rd Battalion IRA attempt an ambush at Coolbawn, near Castlecomer. Planned attack is discovered and two IRA members Nicholas Mullins and Seán Hartley are killed by the Crown Forces. 9th Battalion Kilkenny IRA successfully attack a Black and Tan patrol at Sinnott's Cross near Mooncoin. One Black and Tan, Albert Bradford, is killed with the IRA suffering no casualties.

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