



**TIPPERARY HISTORICAL JOURNAL  
1989**

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**ISSN 0791-0655**

# Whiteboy Support in Co. Tipperary: 1761-1789

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## Introduction

In 1761 the agrarian disturbances which heralded the birth of the Whiteboys began around the Ballyporeen area, when local activists, originally known as Levellers, knocked some fences in Drumlemmon.<sup>1</sup> This action introduced a secret semi-military organisation, which established and sought to maintain codes of conduct and standards of behaviour which were shielded by collective responsibility and anonymity.

In Tipperary during the period covered in this essay Whiteboyism in all its phases was completely dominated by local circumstances. It was not until the advent of the Rightboys, who were most active in the county from late 1785 to (at the latest) February 1787, that more general problems such as, for example, clerical dues and their payment, superseded local grievances for a short while.<sup>2</sup>

The evidence for the activities of Whiteboys in Tipperary indicates that economic survival, whether subsistence or otherwise, dominated the aims and activities of the movement. Accepting economic survival as the reason for the committal of outrages, the intention in this essay is to focus on those who made up the movement in the county and to analyse the support which Whiteboyism received there.

The methods employed by the Whiteboys and Rightboys had three inter-related aims; to provide a co-operative base for action, to enforce their will with regard to perceived injustice and to protect the movements from exterior threats to their survival. Between 1761 and 1789 these movements developed an alternative legal culture of their own, which was generally characterised by violence.<sup>3</sup>

What emerged was a communal legal system, the specific purpose of which was ultimately to ensure both the economic and social survival of its adherents. Guidelines were formulated on the conduct expected to remedy grievances, and both Whiteboys and Rightboys acted as legislators and enforcers of their law.

To ensure compliance they engaged in a multifirmity of activities ranging from intimidation, the sending of threatening letters, the posting of notices, and the destruction of property to physical assault and even murder. While these methods were the tactics used to enforce compliance to their demands, both movements received support freely from members of their own communities.

## Community Solidarity

Both Whiteboyism and Rightboyism operated not alone with the tacit, but most often with the enthusiastic, support of fellow peasants. Community connivance with their activities not alone strengthened the movement by providing a base for action, but such community sympathy may also have allowed for the continual existence of Whiteboy groups in certain areas of the county.

Community solidarity with the aims of the Whiteboys is evident in a number of cases which



occurred throughout the period under review. For example, a sustained campaign of intimidation was waged against the Rev. William Foulkes of Shanrahan, near Clogheen, from November 1763 through to May 1764. Attacks were made on him for the gathering of tithe on potatoes in the area of Clogheen.

By February 1764 the conduct of the 'mob' (the local populace), and the destruction by the Whiteboys of some of his property 'to convince him of their dislike', had persuaded Foulkes to give up the tithes of Daragrath parish. William Perry was later to observe that 'Dick Folks (sic) has quitted the country and gone to town'.<sup>1</sup>

This outburst of activity against Foulkes was the result of local ill-feeling against his tithe exactions. The decisive factor in causing him to give up the tithes was the intimidation levelled at him by members of the parish and local Whiteboy activists. Though the campaign against him does not seem to have been centrally directed, a certain unity of action by the community and a local band of Whiteboys seems to have existed. The attacks made on Foulkes in public appear to have been a spontaneous reaction to his demands on the local people; Whiteboy attacks on his property were certainly more calculated. This unity of action, though involving an element of spontaneity, does define the nature of Whiteboy activity: a group acting with and in the interests of their community.

Similar support for Whiteboyism can be seen in an incident which occurred in Clonmel in August 1773. Thomas Rafter, a noted Whiteboy captain, escaped from jail, and on the day of his escape it was observed that 'a great number of common persons mounted on horseback rode into town (Clonmel), as is supposed to favour the escape of said Rafter'.<sup>2</sup>

Popular support often took other forms. In September 1786 William Connor, convicted of being a Rightboy, was sentenced to be whipped through Carrickbeg. The magistrates could, however, get no one to carry out the sentence, and eventually Sir Richard Musgrave was forced to inflict the required punishment himself.<sup>6</sup>

A system of boycotting was also used. If agents or farmers refused to obey Whiteboy 'regulations', the latter promised to ensure that no labourers would work for them again. Similarly, if tradesmen or publicans refused to comply with their demands, the Whiteboys threatened 'not to deal with them for several years'.<sup>7</sup>

How effective these threats were, or even whether they were carried out, is poorly documented. Stephen Rolleston, a Tipperary landlord, was to complain, however, that by such intimidation two members of the Roscrea Blues had been subverted; 'one sold drink, the other was a shoemaker'.<sup>8</sup>

Likewise the Rev. Hare, Vicar General of Cashel, met with much community opposition when he went to the parish of Kilbragh to value his tithes. When he arrived he found 'that all the inhabitants of the parish had sworn not to fell, or give him lodging, victuals, or any sort of accommodation, or to any of the party which accompanied him'.<sup>9</sup>

Popular resentment against the families of those who attempted to prosecute Whiteboys could also be long-lived. The widow of John Dunne survived on the kindness of a Mr. Edward Collins after the murder of her husband in December 1786. By February 1790 Collins was proving neglectful, and she feared for the survival of herself and her family '... if the annuity is not continued my family and I will certainly starve as I would be afraid to go beggin (sic) ... being hated in (the) country by all the lower class for prosecuting the villains that murdered my poor husband'.<sup>10</sup>

Such fear on Mrs. Dunne's part for her welfare may not have been exaggerated. In September 1770 the executioner of Fr. Nicholas Sheehy was stoned to death by a mob at Philipstown.<sup>11</sup> The curses heaped on Mary Dunlea, one of the chief prosecution witnesses in the trial of Fr.



Sheehy, is further evidence of the dislike engendered by those who opposed the cause and community feeling, although in this case revenge would not be realised until after her death:

A Mháire Ní Dhuinnshléibhe, go n-imrí Dia ort!  
Bascadh ón Pápa is ár ó Chríost ort!  
Flaitheas na ngrás go bráth ort díolta  
Striapach choiteann a chlog na millte  
Is go scríobha an diabhal 'mittimus' go h-ifreann síos leat.<sup>12</sup>

Popular allegiance to the cause also allowed people in large numbers to come to the aid of the Whiteboys. For example, when in 1786 some Whiteboys were arrested in Carrick-on-Suir, 'the mob thought to rescue them by throwing stones at the military, which obliged them to fire and two persons were killed'.<sup>13</sup>

Within Tipperary the bulk of Whiteboy activity was concerned with the major economic grievances which affected them. However, they did become involved in other local concerns, but to a much lesser degree than the Whiteboys of other counties.

It seems that the movement's attempts to enforce communal law also sought, in some instances, to enforce communal discipline. James Buxton, a native of Kilcoran, stated in his dying declaration:

'As to the schemes of the Whiteboys, as far as I could find out in the parish of Tubrid, where I live, I most solemnly declare before Almighty God nothing more was meant than the detection of thieves and rogues, which the said parish was of late remarkable for'.<sup>14</sup>

In one instance the Whiteboys carried a man, who had threatened to inform against some local illicit distillers, on a bier for a distance of one mile, and left him tied up in the streets of Cahir where he spent the entire night unrescued.<sup>15</sup> The Whiteboys thus operated against a background of community support. Though in certain cases some support was engendered by intimidation, the Whiteboy system could not have been effective if the basic community feeling had not been sympathetic to their causes.

## Adherents of the Movement

The comments of contemporary observers and newspaper accounts of the goals of both Whiteboyism and Rightboyism provide the main basis for an analysis of the social composition of the movements. It is constantly the lower strata of the community — small tenants, rural artisans, craftsmen and labourers — who are most often represented and who provided the bulk of the membership.

Thus Viscount Taaffe described the initial Whiteboy disturbances as an 'insurrection of some of the cottagers in a few counties in Munster'.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, a wealthy Catholic from Tipperary commenting at the same time stated that 'when the dawn of day peeped upon them (the Whiteboys) and their actions, these heroes of the dark skulked and dwindled into swineherds or cowboys . . . the scum and some of the rabble of three or four baronies'.<sup>17</sup>

These observations regarding the participants of the movement remained generally consistent throughout the period under review. In 1786 John Barter Bennett declared: 'most of you (Rightboys) are day labourers, who have your holdings only from year to year'.<sup>18</sup> Dominick Trant similarly observed that outrages were committed by the 'cottier tenants, who compose the bulk of Munster parishes and their encouraging or at least acquiescing landlords'.<sup>19</sup>

By 1786 the successes of Rightboyism had led many observers to conclude that the peasants were led and organised by landed interests. Throughout the period observations were made implicating the Catholic clergy and also wealthy Catholic and Protestant gentlemen in the



movements. However, these need to be treated with some caution, particularly in relation to Tipperary.

The objectives of these two movements are the most accurate indicator of participants in them. The original opposition to enclosures, found predominantly in the first outbreak of violence, would seem to indicate the involvement of both the landless labourer and the small farmer. The levelling of ditches and fences and the digging up of pasture land would have benefited these people. Such actions were essentially an attempt to force more conacre into circulation, and both these groups depended on the preservation of tillage land to find a place to grow their potatoes and for agricultural employment.

Allied with the hostility towards enclosure, the second principal grievance to emerge in the earlier period was tithes payment, particularly the tithes on potatoes and the abuses which resulted from the farming of tithes. By early 1765 the issue of labourers' wages had also surfaced. The demands made by the Whiteboys in this period reflected most of all the interests of small farmers and labourers — the rural poor.

The area of unrest in the early part of the period was also marked by a particularly rural bias. Clogheen, Ballyporeen and Newcastle were the main centres of disturbance, though minor disturbances were reported from towns. Only Clogheen, which had a small woollen industry, had elements of more than a basic agricultural economy. The principal occupations of the inhabitants in the areas of disturbance were related to land, and it was the rural poor who felt the burden of excessive tithes and enclosures most.

The Table provides some indication of the social status of adherents, or at least those accused of being Whiteboys, between 1761 and 1789. This table is, however, grossly but unavoidably incomplete, containing information on those arrested on Whiteboy-related offences whose status is known, and accounts of specific Whiteboy incidents in which the status of participants was mentioned.

For the majority of those arrested no status was recorded, implying that they were of the 'lower orders' and not worth recording. Given that the Table excludes hundreds of people arrested as Whiteboys, it is obvious that the involvement of individuals above the level of cottiers, labourers and servants was not high.

However, one striking aspect of the Table for the earlier period is the relatively high social status of some of those arrested for alleged Whiteboy related offences. Even this may be misleading, since actual proof of membership of the movement was not established. The fact that only those of relatively high status were deemed newsworthy also distorts the picture.

**TABLE**  
**Social Composition of Whiteboyism/Rightboyism in Tipperary, 1761-1789\***

<b>Name</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Other Information</b>	<b>Source</b>
Nicholas Sheehy	Priest	Hanged for complicity in a WB murder in 1766	Burke 360-405
James Hyland	Woollen manufacturer	Probably an important WB leader. Never convicted of any crime	FDJ 10-13 Apr. 1762
John Fogarty	Schoolmaster	Executed for WB offences in 1763	FDJ 31 May - 4 June 1763
? Hayes	'a man in good circumstances'	Arrested for bribing witnesses in WB trials	FDJ 8-12 July 1766



Edmund Sheehy James Buxton James Farrell	Members of the Catholic gentry	All three convicted of the murder of John Bridge Uncertain if they had any connection with the WB	Burke 390
Bart. Ryan	rich farmer (Carrick)	Offered tacit support to the WB	LC 13 June 1771
Edmund Power	publican (Carrick)	Arrested for attack on John Grant	FLJ 20-23 Dec. 1775
John Ryan	weaver (Carrick)	Killed in attack on Grant	FLJ 28 May- 1 June 1775
John Hichey	scribbler (Carrick)	Arrested for attack on Grant	ibid.
John Walsh	labourer (near Carrick)	Arrested for attack on Grant	FLJ 10-13 May 1775
	two labourers	Arrested for being WB	FLJ 3-6 May 1775
James Mara	herdsman	Arrested for attacking a house as a WB	FLJ 2-5 Feb. 1774
Thomas Meagher	shoemaker (Fethard)	Arrested for murder of Ambrose Power	FLJ 27-30 Dec. 1775
Philip Berhagra	labourer	Arrested for stealing arms	FLJ 25-29 Nov. 1775
Richard Dooley	weaver (Carrick)	Supposed leader of WB	FLJ 3-6 Apr. 1776
Patrick Hackett	carrier	For abduction	FLJ 27-30 Dec. 1775
John Meaney	farmer	Arrested for destroying tithe corn and assault on a servant	FLJ 8-11 May 1775
Thomas Quirk	yeoman and farmer	Commander of WB	FLJ 10-14 Aug. 1776
James Cunningham	butcher (Clonmel)	Arrested for assault	FLJ 13-17 Nov. 1779
Thomas Lamb	labourer	Arrested for being a WB	FLJ 7-10 June 1780
Edmund Reilly	farmer	Arrested for being a WB	ibid.
Thomas Kelly	farmer	Arrested for being a WB	ibid.
John Manning	landowner	Rightboys attempted to force Manning to join them — failed	FLJ 9-13 Sept. 1786
James Connolly	publican	Only gave nominal adherence to Rightboys	FLJ 6-10 Oct. 1787
Patrick Walsh	'a man in very good circumstances'	Acted as leader in one 'swearing' assembly	FLJ 9-12 Aug. 1786
?	three farmers	Attempted fraud	FLJ 20-23 Dec. 1786
Samuel Middleton	held a 'pretty property'	Acted as leader of the WB	FLJ 9-13 June 1787

\*For abbreviations, see footnotes at end of article.



In the initial disturbances of the 1760s there were outcries that the whole campaign was a popish plot aimed at the overthrow of the Protestant establishment. Priests were thought to be the prime instigators of the disturbances. The Catholic hierarchy clearly opposed Whiteboyism on both doctrinal and political grounds. Bishops generally believed that Whiteboyism was a criminal conspiracy.

If individual priests were sympathetic to the Whiteboy cause, few seem to have exerted themselves by acting on their sympathies. One Catholic writing on the topic in 1762 observed that those priests who were thought to be implicated in the disturbances 'felt in the most exemplary punishment the weight of their superiors' indignation and resentment'.<sup>20</sup>

Five priests were presented by grand juries in 1762 as being 'unregistered', but no convictions followed and the incident may have been a warning to such priests to stay clear of Whiteboyism.<sup>21</sup> One of the priests, William Kennedy, parish priest of Tulla, was examined by the special commissioners Lill and Morrison. On him they found two letters from his superior 'strenuously recommending him that, if any of the Levellers should appear in his parish, he should exert himself as much as possible to suppress them'.<sup>22</sup>

Also in the 1760s Mathias O'Brien, a priest and former coadjutor to Dr. James Butler, archbishop of Cashel, swore that Butler supported the Whiteboys in order to encourage a foreign invasion and the overthrow of Protestantism in the country. The accusation, however, no doubt stemmed from the resentment felt by O'Brien when he was relieved of his responsibilities, and little (if any) weight was given by the authorities to the accusations.<sup>23</sup>

The only Catholic priest to be convicted of Whiteboy related activities was Fr. Nicholas Sheehy. Sheehy, who may have played some role in the movement in his own locality, was certainly a constant thorn in the side of the local tithe proctors by encouraging his parishioners to withhold church rates and tithes.

Eventually in March 1766 he was convicted of murder and hanged in Clonmel. The trial was a



The grave of Fr. Sheehy at Shanrahan

show of strength from the local Protestant gentry, who had in previous years been frustrated in their attempts to quell the disturbances within the county.

The extent to which the Catholic hierarchy denounced Whiteboyism was soon to lead to priests themselves being the victims of assault. With the continuance of disturbances into the 1770s and 1780s and the later attempts of Rightboys to reduce priests' dues, the Catholic clergy found themselves under siege and seem to have played no role in supporting the movement.

Not alone were priests accused of abetting Whiteboyism, but accusations were levelled also at rich Catholics within the county of complicity with the movement. The only wealthy Catholic brought to trial before 1765 was James Hyland, a woollen manufacturer from Clogheen. Hyland was certainly connected with the Whiteboys in that area, but was acquitted of all offences at his trial.

His involvement with the movement continued when he returned to Clogheen after the trial and may have been motivated by self-interest. In 1764 notices posted in Clogheen threatened a numbers of Quakers in the area 'for carrying on the woollen manufacturing, as it affected James Highland who carries (sic) on the same business'.<sup>24</sup>

## Religious Undertones

One Protestant in Tipperary stated in 1763: 'there is one of their (Whiteboy) leaders in Clonmel gaol who has offered £20,000 bail which the judge refused . . . informations have been lodged against several gentlemen of fortune . . . for being concerned with them'.<sup>25</sup> At the spring assizes in Clonmel in 1765 over thirty Catholics, many of them rich graziers and merchants, were indicted for Whiteboy offences and at the show trials of 1766-7 some were convicted of Whiteboy crimes.

The arrest and imprisonment of these wealthy Catholics on the pretence of Whiteboy involvement reveals a strongly anti-Catholic gentry bias felt amongst the Protestants. Lord Charlemont was to express the view, when referring to events in Tipperary, that

. . . the furious and bigoted zeal with which some of the protestants were activated was shocking to humanity and a disgrace to our mild religion; yet in behalf of the latter, it must be confessed that religious zeal was in many instances assumed to serve as a decent veil under which motives of a still worse nature were concealed . . .<sup>26</sup>

It seems also that under the cloak of combatting Whiteboyism some of the Protestant gentry hoped to achieve the confiscation of Catholic land held in the county. Thomas Wyse FitzFrancis, a Catholic who held land and position, fell under the suspicion of the ' . . . leader of the Protestant interest (the Rev. John Hewetson)' for being concerned with the disturbances.

Eight years later, while making his will, Wyse was to recount the difficulty in holding on to his property, and to observe that the

. . . plott (to execute Sheehy) was forged in the year 1763, commonly called Hewesons' (sic) Plott (in which he had many accomplices) . . . who wanted to advance . . . and had accordingly corrupted and suborned several infamous wretches . . . to swear away the lives of several Roman Catholic gentlemen in the province(s) of Munster and Leinster and confiscate their estates.<sup>27</sup>

Such plotting and planning for the ends described by Wyse may reflect his own paranoia rather than the truth of the situation. It was, in fact, extremely difficult to confiscate property in the late eighteenth-century. While that may not have been the express purpose of the 'plot', there





is no doubt that some campaign was waged against certain Catholic families within the county during this period.

At the 1765 Assizes particular attention was focused on Fr. Nicholas Sheehy, who (as already noted) played some role in the agitation over the payment of tithes. He, along with Edward Meehan, James Buxton, James Farrell and Edmund Sheehy, all relatively well-to-do Catholics, were convicted on perjured evidence of the murder of Thomas Bridge — a murder which probably never took place.<sup>28</sup> By May 1768 all of those convicted had been executed, to the joy of the Protestant ranks.

The purpose of the entire episode seems to have been to bolster the position of the Protestant community in the county, to place the lower Catholic gentry on their guard and to reduce any attempts they might make to usurp Protestant authority. If this was the intended lesson, it was well learned. For the remainder of the period up to 1789 no member of the Catholic gentry was accused publicly of involvement in the Whiteboy movement.

It is questionable if any of these wealthy Catholics tried in 1766-67 had any connection with the Whiteboys. They may not have been actively involved in the movement; however, they may have agreed with some of its aims. The tithe question was one which crossed the social divide; many wealthy landowners, both Catholic and Protestant, resented the imposition. James Buxton, one of those executed in 1766, stated in his dying declaration that in his own parish of Tubrid the Levellers had tried to put 'a stop to the oppressive and arbitrary valuation of tithe-jobbers and for this end agreed to deal for tithes with none but the immediate proprietors'.<sup>29</sup>

## Urban Involvement

In the 1770s the major focus of discontent shifted from the Clogheen/Ballyporeen area eastwards, and became centred around the areas of Clonmel and Carrick-on-Suir. Both were prosperous towns during this period; after Kilkenny, Clonmel was the second largest inland town in the country. Flour milling, the manufacture of tobacco, leather tanning, together with an important woollen industry aided its prosperity.

'The poor Catholicicks (sic) in the south of Ireland', Young noted, 'spin wool very generally but the purchasers of their labour and the whole worsted trade is in the hands of the Quakers at Clonmel, Carrick, etc'.<sup>30</sup> The weaving trades in towns were notorious for their strong journeymen's associations. Carrick had suffered from journeymen strikes in the 1760s. One such strike lasting five months in 1764 was quelled only by the intervention of the army.<sup>31</sup>

Many woollen workers and craftsmen hired conacre and when times were slack would have sought farm work. Land was scarce; correspondingly, rents were high. Thus craftsmen and labourers felt the impositions of tithe payments and low wages. During the 1770s they faced inflated rents and prices, with little increase in either real wages or the availability of employment. Where individual Whiteboys are noted in newspaper reports, an increase in the involvement of town dwellers and craftsmen is apparent.

Some of the Whiteboys were also designated farmers, the title suggesting they were somewhat above the 'common' level of subsistence labourers and cottiers. In other counties suffering disturbances a similar trend is evident. Two publicans, one in Kilkenny and one in Waterford, were arrested in 1770 for being involved in the Whiteboys and allowing their premises to be used as meeting-places. Some farmers were also arrested for Whiteboy offences in Kilkenny.<sup>32</sup>

Urban workers such as weavers had developed their own tradition of combinations, making use of oaths and specific acts of violence to further their cause. In essence these combinations differed little from that of Whiteboyism; both, through violence and intimidation, sought to



implement economic aims. The transition of allegiance from journeymen organisation to Whiteboyism was a logical one, since that movement also attempted to ensure the economic position of its members.

Craftworkers resented the tithes which were payable on the produce of their potato patches and the lack of agricultural employment. The campaign conducted in the 1770s against 'strangers', viz. itinerant and migrant labourers, whose competition not only lowered wages and inflated rents, but forced local workers and labourers to compete for the same limited resources, typified the level of cross social co-operation evident in the movement during this period.

In Kilkenny in 1770 two labourers were attacked by a band of Whiteboys, including labourers and craftsmen:

It seems the only crime alleged to these poor men, was their having been born in Munster, wherefore among other oaths they were obliged to swear immediately to quit this county, and never to return, also that they would distribute written notices among their friends in Munster, that if they ever came to Leinster to work, particularly to the county of Kilkenny, that they would be maimed or buried alive.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, a number of labourers were assaulted for the same 'crime' by bands of Whiteboys from Clonmel and Carrick in 1774.<sup>34</sup>

It was customary during the period to label the participants of Whiteboyism as peasants and members of the 'lower orders'. Such labelling, however, obscures the varieties of persons of different economic status within that grouping. Small farmers co-existed with others and labourers, servants and industrial workers engaged partly in weaving, and craftsmen and rural artisans.

The involvement of town and village craftsmen owed much to economic conditions, but may also have been influenced by the bonds of the community. The prevalence of joint tenancies in the areas of disruption — for example in the foothills of the Comeraghs and Knockmealdowns — and the marked increase in disturbances in areas noted for 'industrial combination' reflect the resistance to economic trends by communities whose structures of economic interdependence encouraged group action.

The involvement of such diverse groups within the movement indicated the complex pattern of social, economic and psychological relationships which existed within the community. Networks of Whiteboyism may have induced action and co-operation between differing social groupings because of kinship ties. Moreover, servants may have felt obliged to follow their master's lead, or the specific action to be undertaken may have invoked a sympathetic reaction from various individuals.

The premises of John Grant at Kilmogue, between Carrick and Waterford, were set ablaze in April 1774, '... for no other reason than the owner daring to bid for or take a farm which had been out of lease'.<sup>35</sup> The attacking band of Whiteboys included a publican, a weaver, a scribbler and a labourer; a common economic aim united these men of varying backgrounds, illustrating the complexity of the social relationship.

Though direct evidence of the social composition of the band of Whiteboys who fatally assaulted James Fannin, a carrier of Carrick in October 1770, is lacking, that band may also have crossed social divides. The circumstances of the attack and the warning to Fannin not to 'dig the tythe of a potato garden which he held from the incumbent of a neighbouring parish', together with the location of the assault, presupposes the involvement of at least some of the wool workers at Carrick.<sup>36</sup>

In the 1770s much of the Whiteboy activity was aimed at Catholic landowners, particularly the



Butlers, who controlled much of the land within Tipperary and Kilkenny.<sup>37</sup> The Whiteboy objectives of the 1770s would also have alienated much support from the wealthier farmers. The campaign against migrant labourers would have forced employers to hire local labour and to meet their demands with regard to wages. Large farmers were generally victims of attack since they often kept land in pasturage that might otherwise have been let in conacre and in the 1760s and 1770s may have enclosed traditionally common lands.

While large farmers were unlikely to actively support the Whiteboy cause, small farmers had plenty of motive to do so. The predominance of the land issue, its usage and occupation, in Tipperary must have engendered some support from small farmers because the land issue was of prime importance to them, being their means of support and security. Again, however, exact evidence of such involvement is not available.

The existence of active Protestant support for Whiteboyism in the county is negligible. In Munster William Fant, the Protestant lawyer who had instigated the destruction of fences at Kilmallock in 1762, and John Banyard, a former revenue officer and a 'gentleman of respectable family', who had played a role in the disturbances around Kilfinnane, were the only Protestant gentlemen ever named as Whiteboys.<sup>38</sup>

Though many gentlemen opposed tithes, the exemption which pasturage had experienced from such exaction since 1735 caused an economic divide between Protestant landowners and the poorer strata of society who were the adherents of Whiteboyism. Also, because of their position as landowners the property of such Protestants was subject to attack. The wideheld belief that Whiteboyism was a 'popish plot', a belief strongly held by the Tipperary gentry, would also have reduced the likelihood of any Protestant support for the movement in the county.

## Rightboy Activity

Conflicting economic interests, which divided these groups in the 1760s and 1770s, were to give way to a shared viewpoint in the 1780s. The shift back to tillage which occurred after the corn legislation of 1783-84 meant that more people were liable to tithe payment. By the 1780s the landed class was widely considered by public opinion to have given very direct countenance to the anti-tithe agitation which was a marked feature of Rightboyism.

In the 1770s agrarian unrest was still considered an ambiguous force, difficult to distinguish in the contemporary view from active disloyalty. By the 1780s some Protestants took opportunistic advantage of the agitation. In a contemporary official investigation into the disturbances of 1785-7 the author claims

that many men of landed interest knowing that grounds which are tithe free will bring two shillings an acre upon average at the least more than the grounds which are subject to tithes, have been induced to wink at the licentiousness of their tenantry in the prospect of future advancement to themselves'.<sup>39</sup>

The law remained inactive because, as Rutland stated, 'so many gentry and wealthy farmers look only to their immediate interest in reduction of tythes; if they do not encourage them, (they) decline taking any part against them'.<sup>40</sup> Protestant involvement in the Rightboy movement was expressed more by passive rather than active connivance. Until August 1786, when General Luttrell was sent with a detachment of troops into the disturbed areas, the local magistrates had been glaringly inactive in bringing order to the disturbed counties.

It was the issue of tithe payment which induced this passivity amongst the landed classes, however. Once the army had been sent in, local magistrates and the landed classes in general



began to withdraw their support. Within Tipperary landed participation was confined to only one gentleman, Samuel Middleton, who 'held a pretty property' and was arrested for administering oaths in 1786.<sup>41</sup> He was the only landed gentleman in the county to be mentioned by name as a Rightboy leader.

Gentry influence was negligible in the organisational sphere too, though some gentry sympathy for the Rightboy cause was evident, according to Viscount Clifden. He reported to Dublin Castle in August 1786 'those who have risen in the county of Tipperary, and indeed elsewhere declare they have been encouraged by people of consequence'.<sup>42</sup>

The setting out of tithing tables of 1786 was credited by John Barter Bennett to Sir John Conway Colthurst and others who had established the Farmer's Club at Blarney in the mid-1770s, and would indicate active gentry participation in the Rightboy movement. However, tithing tables showed marked differences in various localities and reflected local conditions rather than the wishes of the gentry leaders.<sup>43</sup>

The Rightboys seem generally to have attracted broader support from various social groupings. With regard to the involvement of wealthy farmers, Bennett was to warn the Rightboys in one of his public letters:

the warm scollage (sic) who pays thirty to forty pounds a year rent and has ten or a dozen milch cows coming to his bawn will never join you, nor suffer his children to do so; he will content himself, if he is wickedly inclined, with making cat's paws of you and setting you on as much as he can with safety.<sup>44</sup>

By September 1786 a Kilkenny gentleman was noting the decline of such support. 'The better sort of farmers', he stated, 'are separating themselves from those wretches who still wish to promote sedition'.<sup>45</sup> Economic pressure would have driven many of the middle strata of society into supporting the movement. However, open acts of intimidation or violence by such groups would have been too dangerous. With government reaction to the troubles they would have lost more than they could have gained by actively supporting the Rightboys.

Some degree of intimidation continued to be used by the Rightboys to gain support from the middle stratum. In Banagher in King's County at the end of July 1786, for example, the labourers of the town and district refused to work for anyone who refused to take the Rightboy oath as they had done. This tactic 'threw the place into great confusion and obliged numbers to swear rather than have their harvests or other business injured'.<sup>46</sup>

In Tipperary the Rightboys made a determined effort to force John Manning, a Catholic landed gentleman, to 'assume a title or command amongst them, and as such, to go at their head to swear other parishes'. The prestige of such a noted leader would no doubt have induced many people to join. Manning refused to comply with their demands and was shot and slightly wounded in an affray which followed.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly an innkeeper, James Connolly of Nine-Mile-House, suffered numerous attacks on his property after his enforced adherence to their regulations and oaths proved merely nominal.<sup>48</sup> Bennett claimed that Rightboys frequently sent threatening letters to 'respectable' farmers ordering them to lead swearing parties into neighbouring parishes.<sup>49</sup> Intimidation may, perhaps, have played a large role in inducing much of the support given by these classes to Rightboyism.

Some farmers in Tipperary did, however, play an active role in the movement without being forced to do so. One, Patrick Walsh, 'a man in very good circumstances', was among the leaders of a group of Rightboys who in August 1786 marched from Rathclarish in Tipperary to Owning in Kilkenny in order to swear in the inhabitants of that parish.<sup>50</sup> Also, three farmers of Killanigan were committed to Clonmel gaol in December 1786 on charges of 'counterfeiting



and uttering three receipts for money in order to defraud Rev. Thomas Shehard and Mrs. Mary Dawson of £43'.<sup>51</sup>

The arrival of troops into disturbed areas, together with the hope that some action would be taken by the government on the tithe issue, discouraged even passive gentry support for the movement. The prevalence of other traditional Whiteboy grievances alongside that of tithes in this period of disturbance would also have caused a conflict in economic interests between the majority of active adherents and the landed and large farmer interests.

In Tipperary levelling and houghing continued, with punishments being meted out to those who took over canted holdings. In an incident in Banagher in July 1786 labourers were reported and identified as being the principal activists. Priests' dues were a new addition to the Rightboy canon of grievances, but as an economic grievance it again was felt most profoundly by the lower strata of society.

The Rightboys were also concerned with the question of migrant labourers, and Fr. O'Leary condemned in November 1786 what he called their regulation that 'no labouring man is to go to another parish to save the harvest'.<sup>52</sup> Landowners would easily have taken fright at reports, such as that of the Rightboys in Clonakilty, who publicly declared

that the reduction of tythes is not their only object, having already accomplished that, but the reduction of rents and hearth money, and in consideration of their declarations, gents (gentlemen) have already been prevented from setting their lands.<sup>53</sup>

If any significance is to be given to the involvement of the gentry classes with these movements, it may be in allowing them to establish themselves with great speed over a wide area. Their refusal to implement the law fully initially enabled the movements to consolidate their support base. Within Tipperary repression of Whiteboyism came most swiftly and severely only when members of the Protestant gentry came directly under attack. Only then was sustained action taken to apprehend, prosecute and punish the offenders.<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusions

Throughout the period under review the majority of active participants were peasant farmers and labourers, craftsmen and servants, dependent primarily on land and on their ability to obtain employment away from their holdings. This was particularly true of adherents in Tipperary, where land usage and occupation remained the primary concerns of the Whiteboys.

Rural collective action was sustained without the active help of the gentry classes. Disturbance was maintained because the adherents of these movements held beliefs and accepted customs in common, which related to the use of land and the conditions which governed its occupancy.

Outrages were the expression of a particular 'class' consciousness in that respect, but cannot be seen as an example of a 'class war'. They did not want the abolition of tithes or dues but rather their reduction, and they also wished to maintain traditional practices regarding the occupation and usage of land; innovation was resisted. Economic considerations dictated not alone the role of the movement but also its membership. Cross-social alliances were forged at specific times on economic terms, but in general Whiteboyism remained a movement of the poor for the poor.



## FOOTNOTES

(Abbreviations: Burke, Clonmel = W.P. Burke, *History of Clonmel* (Waterford, 1907); CHC = *Cork Hibernian Chronicle*; FDJ = *Faulkner's Dublin Journal*; FLJ = *Finn's Leinster Journal*; GLM = *Gentleman's & London Magazine*; LC = *Limerick Chronicle*.)

1. Burke, *Clonmel*, (Waterford, 1907), pp. 368, 402.
2. The period of Rightboyism in Tipperary did not display the same aims or enthusiasm evident in other counties. It was a movement imported into the county and was not an indigenous expression of agrarian concerns, though it borrowed many of its methods from Whiteboyism. The number of incidents attributed to the Rightboys in the county totalled only 32. Whiteboyism resurfaced again after the Rightboy period with traditional concerns relating to land usage and occupation dominating once again. See Maria Luddy, *Agrarian disturbance in County Tipperary, 1761-89* (Unpublished M.A. thesis, U.C.C., 1985). For a general account of the Rightboy movement see James S. Donnelly, 'The Rightboy movement, 1785-8', *Studia Hibernica*, xvii-xviii (1977-8); M.J. Bric, 'Priests, parsons and politics: the Rightboy protests in Cork, 1785-88', *Past and Present*, no. 100 (August, 1983).
3. Oliver McDonagh, *Ireland: The Union and its aftermath*, (London, 1977).
4. See Burke, *Clonmel*, pp 364-5; *FDJ*, 29 Oct. 1 Nov. 1673. Foulkes had his tithe potatoes thrown at him on three occasions in November 1763 and continued to be harassed in the early months of 1764.
5. *FLJ*, 25-9 Aug. 1773.
6. *CHC*, 21 Sept. 1786.
7. Quoted in R.E. Burns, 'Parsons, priests and people: the rise of Irish anti-clericalism, 1785-9', *Church History*, xxxi, (June, 1962), p. 156.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Dominick Trant, *Considerations on the present disturbances in the province of Munster, their causes, extent, probable consequences, and remedies*, (Dublin, 1787), pp 71-5.
10. Rebellion Papers, 620/19/3-4 (SPO).
11. Proclamations, bundle 17 (1770-1811) 1A4458 (National Archives). See also *GLM*, xl, (Sept. 1770), p. 582. (hereafter *GLM*).
12. Daithí O hOgáin, *Duanaire Thiobraid Arann*, (Baile Atha Cliath, 1981), p. 58.
13. Bolton MS 16, 350, no. 91 (NLI).
14. Quoted in Burke, *Clonmel*, p. 404.
15. W.E.H. Lecky, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth-Century*, (abbr. ed. Chicago, 1972), p. 124.
16. Viscount Taaffe, *Observations on affairs in Ireland from the settlement in 1691 to the present time*, (3rd ed., Dublin, 1767), p. 19.
17. Quoted in James S. Donnelly, 'The Whiteboy movement, 1761-5', *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. xxi, no. 81 (1978), p. 38.
18. *CHC*, 23 Jan., 1786.
19. Trant, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
20. Anon. *An alarm to the unprejudiced and well minded Protestants of Ireland, or seasonal enquiries upon the rise, danger and tendency of the Whiteboys* (Cork, 1762), p. 18.
21. *FDJ*, 4-8 May, 12-15, 22-26 June, 1762. *GLM* xxxi, (June, 1762), pp. 370-1. John Brady, *Catholics and Catholicism in the Eighteenth-Century Press* (Maynooth, 1965), pp. 105-6.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Hutchinson Ms 8, 912 (NLI).
24. Burke, *Clonmel*, p. 365.
25. *FDJ*, 16-19 Apr. 1763.
26. Quoted in Burke, *Clonmel*, p. 367.
27. Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 393-4.
28. For the trials of these Catholics see *FDJ*, 25-29 Mar., 29 Mar.-1 Apr., 5-8, 8-12, 12-15, 15-19, 19-22 Apr. 1766. 24-28, 28-31 Mar. 1767. *GLM*, xxxvi (Apr. 1766), pp 244-7; (May 1766), p. 310, (June, 1766), pp 370-6 and Burke, *Clonmel*, pp. 378-87.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 404.
30. Quoted in *ibid.*, pp 131-2.
31. *FDJ*, 17-21 Jan., 13-17 Mar., 9 May-2 June 1764. For other combinations and riots see *FDJ*, 13-16 Aug., 18-22 Oct., 1763, 2-5 Nov. 1765, 25-28 Oct. 1766.
32. *FLJ*, 28-28 Mar., 4-7 Apr. 1770.
33. *FLJ*, 12-15 Dec. 1770.
34. *FLJ*, 22-26 Oct., 9 12 Nov. 1774.
35. For the attack see *FLJ*, 9-13, 27-30 apr. 1774, 3-6 May 1775. For those arrested in connection with the assault see *FLJ*, 28 May-1 June, 8-11 June, 1774. 3-6, 10-13, 20-24, 24-27 May, 20-23 Dec. 1775.
36. *FLJ*, 3-7, 17-21 Nov. 1770. *GLM*, xl (Nov. 1770), p. 715.
37. The famous incident at Ballyragget in county Kilkenny in 1775 involved Whiteboy attacks on the Catholic Butlers. See *FLJ* 22:25 Feb. 1775, and also 'Particulars of the attack on Ballyragget and the doings of the Whiteboys in 1775 and 1776', Prim MSS, Box 9, (Department of Irish Folklore, University College, Dublin).



38. *FDJ*, 5-8, 22-26 June 1762; *GLM*, xxxi (June, 1762) pp. 369-70.
39. Bolton Ms 15, 959 (NLI).
40. Quoted in Burns, art. cit., p. 156.
41. Middleton was also accused of 'being a ringleader and commander of the Whiteboys', *FLJ*, 11-15 Nov. 1786, 9-13 June 1787.
42. *Historical Manuscripts Commission, fourteenth report, the manuscripts of his grace the duke of Rutland, K.C., preserved at Belvoir Castle*, (London, 1894), 330.
43. See Luddy, op. cit. pp. 187-90.
44. *CHC*, 23 Jan. 1786.
45. *FLJ*, 18-23 Aug. 1786, 3 Sept. 1786.
47. *FLJ*, 26-29 July 1786. *CHC*, 14 Sept. 1786.
47. *FLJ*, 6-10 Oct. 1787.
49. 'Some account of the proceedings of the White Boys and of the conduct of some of their abettors from the year 1785 to 1786 inclusive, in three parts, (by) John Barter Bennett, author of the Dublin shopkeeper's letters', Ms 4, 161, pt. 2, p. 25. (NLI).
50. *FLJ*, 9-12 Aug. 1786; *CHC*, 18 Sept. 1786.
51. *CHC*, 18 Sept. 1786. *FLJ*, 9-12 Aug., 20-23 Dec. 1786.
52. *CHC*, 20 Nov. 1786. *FLJ*, 29 Nov.-2 Dec. 1786.
53. *Dublin Evening Post*, 16 Nov. 1786.
54. Luddy, op. cit., pp. 215-242.

